

LECTURE ON DESCARTES'
METAPHYSICAL MEDITATIONS

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English translation

by

Donald JOHNSON

Professor at Santa Monica College

NOTE

The pages which follow aim to do no more than furnish Propédeutique¹ students with a study tool. They are class notes, hardly reworked. If the object of this course is to introduce philosophy, and its method to comment on Descartes' *Meditations*, one would not be able to find here an interpretation in due and proper form of Cartesian thought or the very essence of philosophy. But it appeared that the students' individual class notes – whether because of the difficulty of the questions, or for diverse material reasons—were by themselves incomplete, sometimes uncertain, and that it was necessary, in order to make of them a study tool that would be reliable, to complete them with each other, correct them in certain places, and at last to clarify them as needed with some new developments. That is what was done here.

It must be added that the work done on Fridays –exercises in textual explication—forms a whole with Wednesday's class. We have therefore undertaken as well to publish the text of these exercises.

Gérard GRANEL

¹ “Propédeutique” was in 1961-1962 the name of the first year of university study in letters. (Ed.)

FIRST LESSON

DESCARTES' *MEDITATIONS* ARE "METAPHYSICAL"

It is natural that the teaching dispensed in Propédeutique – that is to say during a year in which choices are not set, and to the contrary are brewing – aims to *present* for the main part each discipline. This is why I do not see this course as being able to legitimately have an end other than to help each one of you to respond to this question: "What is philosophy?" I know well that the question is considerable, and that the idea of giving an answer to it can only appear pretentious. Consequently, it is not about this. For to *respond* to a question when it is philosophical does not mean "to give an answer to it" (as to a scientific problem), but rather: to respond to that which the question expects of us. Now, what philosophical questions expect above all, and among them what the question "What is philosophy?" expects first and foremost, is that thought be capable of *posing* them. The goal of our lessons this year will be, therefore, to respond enough to this question so that we might learn to pose it as it asks to be posed.

The road we will follow for this is the road of reading, of textual commentary. And the text will be Descartes' *Meditations*.

There is no hidden reason for this choice, which does not claim in any case to make "Cartesians" of you. It happens that Descartes' text appeared to me, for two reasons, particularly apt to help us in our enterprise. On the one hand, it is – in the translation of the Duc de Luynes – in an admirable language which includes almost no "jargon." It is quite simply French, and not an *already* philosophical French. The only meditation where Descartes uses the language of the schools is the third, where we find, for example, the distinction between formal reality and objective reality, the ontological definition of perfection as a maximum of reality, etc. The reason for this sudden borrowing from the vocabulary of the scholastic tradition, moreover, we will have to look for when we get there. But still, if one considers the whole, it remains true that Descartes uses a non-technical

language. You will not therefore meet with in reading him some of those false difficulties that rebuff the beginner.

On the other hand, and this is the second reason for the choice of the *Meditations*, the limpid quality of their language only allows the *strangeness of what is said* to better appear. Thus, will you understand little by little that the difficulty of philosophical speech does not result essentially from the technical nature of a vocabulary, but from the philosophical enterprise itself. For if there is hardly a text more accessible in its form than that of Descartes, neither is there a more "closed" one nor one in more need of interpretation. This strangeness of wholly bare philosophy is what one must first *recognize*, that is to say, both *acknowledge* as a scandal for common consciousness, without being burdened by a false respect for a "famous" text, and at the same time *explore* in the light of what philosophy is in its essence. Thus will we recognize as we make our way that despite the simplicity of his vocabulary, far from Descartes permitting one to "present" philosophy in a language come from out of nowhere, it is to the contrary a return to the essence of philosophy in the tradition that alone allows one to present the text of the *Meditations* in its true unity, forcing it out from the transparency in which it hides.

Moreover, we will attach ourselves from the beginning to the title of the *Meditations* as to that which indicates to us at what level the whole of the text must be situated in order to be read profitably.

One calls the *Meditations* generally: "The Meditations," nothing more. This way of doing it translates only the opinion that we have that the philosopher is a philosopher because he "meditates," while others, for example, are distracted, to speak like Pascal, or still others act. "To meditate" appears to us thus as an attitude defined in itself and which would characterize the philosopher. Furthermore, the idea wouldn't occur to us of asking why the philosophical work that inaugurates Modern Times is titled "Meditations." But the old man approaching death, he meditates too, and not as a philosopher, but as an old man. The religious man meditates upon the divine word, not that of the philosophers. Descartes' *Meditations*, then, are not philosophical only because they are meditations, without a doubt, they even are *not* meditative, and the term, borrowed from Christian interiority, is one of those cultural misinterpretations that we no longer even perceive; they are philosophical because they bear on "first philosophy," or again because they are "metaphysical." The title should therefore always be cited thus:

- *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (1st edition, 1641), or

- *Les Méditations métaphysiques touchant la première philosophie* (1647, the Duc de Luynes' translation).

The adjective “metaphysical” is not, as one sees, in the Latin original. It is in the 1647² translation that Descartes reviewed and approved, where it plays the role of an equivalent to the Latin expression *de prima philosophia*, so that the French title says the same thing twice: “The *Metaphysical* Meditations Touching on *First Philosophy*.” Maybe it is in order to avoid confusion with the religious resonance of the term “Meditations” that Luynes and Descartes specify their nature right away with the adjective “metaphysical.” Maybe too, the addition is one of those liberties the Duke took in his French with the Latin of the philosopher, which the loyal Clerselier lamented, and which Descartes for his part made do with quite well. There is in Descartes an attitude of freedom that approaches insolence, a kind of *de minimus non curat praetor*.³

Whatever it may be, this identity of “first philosophy” and “metaphysics” deserves to be raised. It is not an identity that interests all thinkers at all times: on the one hand, in fact, it is put into question again in contemporary German thought since Husserl⁴; on the other hand, it only becomes acquired knowledge since Aristotle, or more exactly from the epoch when the writings of Aristotle posed problems of classification for his disciples which couldn't be resolved with the help of the rubrics recognized in the schools. The Ancients, in fact, divided philosophy into *Logic, Physics, and Ethics*. But the texts of the “*corpus aristotelicum*” cannot be entirely divided under these three rubrics; certain ones among them *were therefore placed, without any particular title, “after the writings in physics”*: *meta ta phusika*. However, this disposition on the library shelf became little by little a title: *The Metaphysics*, and thus designates the content itself of these unclassifiable texts. Now, this content is defined by Aristotle himself as *prote philosophia, prima philosophia*, first philosophy.

The translation of the Greek expression is generally the one we just gave; it is this, for example, in the title of the Meditations: *prima philosophia*, first philosophy. In spite of a vague idea of preeminence that the term “first” implies, this *first philosophy* leaves one thus to believe that there would exist something like a second philosophy and that metaphysics is not all of philosophy. It would therefore be a sort of

² Compare Adam and Tannery, volume VII, p. XIX and volume IX, p. XI.

³ A magistrate does not concern himself with trifles. (Tr.)

⁴ Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie*, in *Husserliana Band VII*, p. XVI sq. and p. 3, Martinus Nijhoff, Haag, 1956.

preliminary discipline, necessary (without one really knowing why) but not sufficient and a bit formal. It would leave to be built outside of itself all the riches of a natural or concrete philosophy such as epistemology, moral philosophy, political philosophy, sociology, pedagogy etc. However, everything that could be thought in each of these disciplines can only be thought from within, and based upon, the “first philosophy”: the rest is done either by a wisdom without principles or by science.

In order, therefore, to avoid confusion with the cultural concept of philosophy that the title “first philosophy” fosters, I propose to you to translate *prima philosophia* as one translates *summa arbor*, not “the first philosophy,” but “that which is primarily philosophy,” philosophy in its primary sense, in its proper sense.

From what now is this proper or primary sense of philosophy made? In the texts in question Aristotle speaks of “the knowledge of being as being.”⁵ This expression has no clarity for us; it even surprises us with its non-natural character. Who, then, speaks of “being?” The non-knowing consciousness, the simple perception, perceives the tree, the waterfront, the sun emerging from the clouds, but not “being,” and still less “such as it is.” Science, all the sciences, establish objective systems of representation to which the confused and apparent universe of perception is reduced, in which they treat things according to *determinations* and not according to that aspect that they all have in common, but which in each one is the absolutely undetermined, which is that they *are*. Moral philosophy itself has for its object the good and the bad not “that which is” as “it is.” One could continue this enumeration for a long time.

Philosophy, therefore, begins badly. It begins in a quite strange and obscure fashion which is not manifested in any natural human attitudes nor in any of the known languages. One must cling, externally, to historical knowledge – to the fact that philosophy, too, actually exists as an attitude of humanity towards the real, and even as a fundamental language since the Greeks – in order to resist the temptation of concerning oneself with something other than that discipline that only concerns itself with things to the extent that they are not this or that, consequently to the extent that they are not *anything*, but simply “in so much as they are.”

This feeling is insurmountable as long as all “concrete” knowledge and domains will not have been reduced by philosophy to the *on hê on* as to this very possibility and shown to be abstract (or rather to be “nothing” in their turn) outside of it.

⁵ *Metaphysics*, Gamma, 1003 a 20-25: *to on hê on*.

It is certainly not a question of realizing this project in an hour nor even in a year, but only of fleshing it out more and more. In the present case, and in order to stay true to our beginning, I will constantly try to show you in what sense Descartes' Meditations are incomprehensible – scandalous in the whole, obscure in the details – if the commentary doesn't clarify them in light of the complete title, which is to say as *metaphysical* meditations. Two more reflections as severe as the preceding ones (and apparently as formal) are still necessary in this beginning.

In the first place, the term “metaphysics,” after having been a way to classify, then a simple title to designate first philosophy, has come to constitute its definition. Thus Kant writes, for example:

In that which concerns the name of metaphysics, there are no grounds for believing it was born by chance since it corresponds so exactly to the contents of the science: if one calls *phusis* nature, and if we can only arrive at concepts of nature by experience, then the science that follows this one is called metaphysics (from *meta*, trans, and *phusika*). It is a science that finds itself somewhat outside, that is to say, beyond the domain of physics.⁶

By the "domain of physics," one must not understand physics itself, but really its domain, that is, nature as it shows itself, as appearance, as the simple perceived: *to phusikon*, in brief, what philosophy calls in general the sensible. If the library designation *meta ta phusika* could become the *definition* of the *prôtè philosophia*, it is because there is a strict relation between the thought of “being as it is” and the crossing (*meta*, trans) of this same real as it is at first given: *phusikon*, sensible. Thus, would philosophy be, by itself, an exceeding of the sensible? Let us retain this designation so as to be guided by it in our interpretation of the text and also so as to attempt to understand it itself.

A second designation of first philosophy as metaphysics consists in its subdivision into *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. The first, also called *ontology*, is the thought, already encountered, of "being such as it is." But the second specifies being as the soul of man (*psuchè*), as world (*kosmos*), and as God (*theos*). Thence come the three divisions of special metaphysics: psychology, cosmology, and theology. If, from this traditional structure⁷ of metaphysics, we return to the title of the *Meditations*, we affirm that they treat of the "existence of God and of the immortality of the soul" (according to the

⁶ M. Heinze, *Vorlesungen Kants über aus drei Semestern*, Abhdlg., Der K. Sächsich. Ges. Der Wissenschaften, Bd. XIV, phil. Hist. K1 1894, p. 666.

⁷ Already present in Kant. Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, architectonic of pure reason: "Thus the whole system of metaphysics contains four central parts: 1) Ontology. 2) Rational psychology. 3) Rational cosmology. 4) Rational theology."

Latin title of 1641), or again of "the existence of God and of the real distinction between the soul and the body of man" (according to the French title of 1647). These are therefore "metaphysical meditations" in this sense that they treat the questions of *metaphysica specialis*. Still, one of these questions, the cosmological question, has disappeared. As for ontology, or general metaphysics, it does not appear in the title. Is this to say that "being such as it is" does not guide these meditations of first philosophy? And has the world simply been forgotten by Descartes to the advantage of the other two objects of special metaphysics? Let us not be in a hurry to believe this; let us only remember that the *metaphysical* Meditations do not respond *thematically* to the entire concept of metaphysics, and that we have here an obscurity to clear up if indeed it can be done.

But more obscure still is the reason that metaphysics in the first place, as "*metaphysica specialis*," specifies being as *psuchè*, *kosmos* and *theos*. Is it simply that special metaphysics is responding to the Christian vision of the world which indeed sees in the creation, the soul, and God the three regions of "that which is?" Thus does Heidegger explain⁸ this Christian division of the contents of metaphysics:

According to this [Christian faith], all that is not divine is created--the totality of creatures defining the universe. Among created things man has a special place inasmuch as everything is centered on the welfare of his soul and his own eternal existence. In keeping with the Christian belief concerning the world and existence, being in totality is divided into God, nature, and man, each of these realms having a particular discipline devoted to its study. These disciplines are theology, the object of which is the *summum ens*, cosmology, and psychology. Together they form the discipline called *metaphysica specialis*. In distinction from this, *metaphysica generalis* (ontology) has as its object being "in general" (*ens commune*).⁹

In what respect then, would this religious specification of being still have a relation with the *on hè on*, with general metaphysics? Is it a simple superimposition of the Christian upon the Greek, and in reality a confusion due to history, a sort of cultural swirl? Or indeed is ontology itself constrained to develop as an analysis of the subject

⁸ In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 1st section § 1: "The Traditional Concept of Metaphysics," a paragraph from which this first lesson essentially borrows.

⁹ *Op. cit.* Translation James S. Churchill, Bloomington, Indiana 1962, p. 13. Translation slightly modified (Tr.)

("psychology"), of the object in totality ("cosmology"), and of the union of the two in Being itself, that is to say in God as *Ens entium* ("theology").

These questions go well beyond us. They are of the first importance of those that need to be *posed*, and they have in no way been posed by their simply having just been raised here. For the present we expect nothing other from them than that they remind us of what order of difficulties Descartes' *Meditations* engage us in as "Metaphysical Meditations touching on first philosophy, in which the existence of God and the real distinction between man's soul and body are demonstrated." For it is a matter for us of penetrating these questions with the help of Descartes' text as well as of penetrating Descartes' text by always situating it at the level of these questions.

SECOND LESSON
OF THE NATURE OF DOUBT
(1) SLEEP

“Things that one can cast into doubt:” such is the title of the first Meditation, and as *order* is essential for Descartes, we are forced to admit that doubt is not simply *de facto* the start, but that it is *de jure* the beginning of philosophy.

Why? This is what we don't understand right away. The understanding of the *role* of doubt (as beginning) depends on the understanding of the *nature* of Cartesian doubt.

“[...] I will apply myself seriously and liberally to the destruction of all my old opinions. Now, it will not be necessary in order to arrive at this design to prove that they are all false, something perhaps that I will never finish with [...] but because the ruining of the foundations necessarily entails the destruction of all the rest of the building, I will attack first the principles upon which all my old opinions were supported.”

The first trait by which Descartes' doubt reveals its nature is its *non-psychological character*. Doubt is an enterprise, it is deliberate, seriously pursued. It is not a matter, therefore, of a state of mind, of a sort of malaise that grabs hold of me. It is not a doubt in which I find myself, nor even a doubt in which I place myself (for it is "too painful and laborious," as the end of the Meditation will say, to ever become a natural disposition of consciousness): it is what I *construct*, except that this strange construction consists in *destroying*. It is a *design*, at last, in which we find Descartes occupied from the start.

Since we are put in the school of Descartes, and since at school one must obey if one wants to learn, let us therefore accept the lesson: it signifies that the beginning of philosophy is not the same thing as the doubt which produces itself as an event inside me. It is not the same thing as the deceptions, or the revolts, or the worries that experience in its complexity may engender. One can be quite tormented: he works. He works at constructing a demolition. What is the meaning of this work? The law of this undertaking?

Its form in any case is indicated from the start: doubt is a *systematic* enterprise. Not, here again, in the psychological sense where "deny systematically" means that every system consists in denying and denying in unsystematically saying no to everything. Descartes does not say no to everything he believed before beginning the work he is doing; he does not reject in bulk nor painstakingly one by one all his opinions, but he neglects them all, except those that are the "foundations" or "principles."

In what does the character of a foundation or principle consist? The text says nothing explicitly of this. But the first example it takes, and in a general fashion the successive steps of doubt, must indicate to us the nature of that which doubt pursues as foundation or principle, and through this at last the nature of doubt itself.

“All that I have received up to the present as the most true and assured I have learned from the senses or by means of the senses.”

This declaration is surprising. For we know (one always knows too many things) that Descartes above all "learned" mathematics. Why does he say that all he has received up to the present as the most true and assured he has learned from the senses or through the senses? What we risk having happen to us here is not being surprised by this start, not seeing any question here. For we also know that philosophy always has it in for the "senses," that it wants to elevate man from his animality to his rationality. But this is only an opinion we have about philosophy; for it remains to be known why access to reason demands this sort of breaking through of the sensible (metaphysics). Also, let us note that Descartes does not haphazardly blame the sensible but the sensible that gives itself as "true" and includes a certain "assurance." What this truth and this assurance are is something we will learn only in learning what the "trickery" [*tromperie*] is into which doubt transforms them. Before that, let us confirm in passing our first determination of doubt, that is to say its non-psychological character: for from the first step, one sees that doubt bears on a certitude, not on the "doubtful."

“[...] I have sometimes felt that these senses were deceitful [*trompeurs*], and it is prudent to never entirely trust those that have once deceived us.

But although the senses sometimes deceive us concerning barely sensible and far off things, we encounter perhaps many others which one cannot reasonably doubt: for example, that I am here sitting by the fire [...] unless I compare myself to those who have lost their senses [...] But what? Those are

madmen, and I would be no less insane if I measured my self by their examples.”

Essential passage, and true start for us, based upon which we are going to be able to respond to our question about the nature of doubt. For it shows that the "deceptive" character of the sensory must not be confused with the absolutely secondary problem of "the errors of the senses." It is not at all a matter of troubling our minds based on ordinary experiences of the defectiveness of perception (mistaking a tree at night by the side of the road for a man; the blue skirt for the green skirt etc.); it is not a matter for philosophy of claiming to extend to all sensory content these moments of error. Descartes dismisses all this as "madness". Philosophy is not an enterprise for maddening simple and ordinary consciousness; it is not looking to frighten me by threatening me with a psychological invasion of my consciousness by erroneous content. The doubt about the sensory is not psychological. What is it then? *It is ontological*. This is, in fact, the meaning of the next hypothesis, which without this would be still more insane than the "mad" extension of the errors of the senses: the hypothesis of sleep.

“All the same, I have to consider that I am a man, and, consequently, that I am accustomed to sleep and to imagine in my dreams the same things, or sometimes things less probable, as these madmen when they are awake [...] It seems to me at present that it is not at all with sleeping eyes that I am looking at this paper [...] But in rethinking it carefully I remember having often been deceived while sleeping by similar illusions [...] there are no conclusive indications nor certain enough marks by which one can neatly distinguish waking from sleeping.”

The difference between waking and sleeping is nothing *from the point of view of representation*; but it is very real for every consciousness that is awake, and Descartes does not doubt this more than anyone else. If doubt, in a moment, is going to *choose* sleep ("Let us suppose therefore now that we are asleep [...]") it is a deliberate choice, a moment in the serious enterprise of doubt, not at all a conviction of consciousness itself (and Descartes, when he speaks of conviction, puts in an "almost:" "And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of convincing me that I am sleeping.")

In what does the difference between waking and sleeping consist? Not in the content of the representation, nor in the certitude, inherent to this representation, of having to do with what it represents, but in an *other* certitude which is this: that the things I represent in my imagination when awake *are*, while in dreams they are only represented

(and represented as things which are), but they *are* not. Thus the certainty of reality is what constitutes the "truth" and produces the "assurance" proper to the sensory, of which we were wondering earlier what the nature was. And if this doubt attacks here, it is because it is the road of a metaphysical enterprise, which is to say an investigation of what is such as it is.

What Descartes discovers with astonishment is that the certainty of reality which makes up the very stuff of perceiving consciousness, as soon as one pursues it through the contents of perception, escapes and is not absolutely graspable. It is not absolutely anything for representation: no *index*, no *mark*. It is, therefore, not at all thought.

Doubt, once again, changes nothing in simple consciousness: it is not a matter of making waking consciousness so foggy to the point where it can no longer distinguish itself from sleeping consciousness; it is a matter of realizing that *I do not think* the very thing of which I am most certain. Thus the assurance proper to perception, and that, for perception, is itself unperceived, becomes a *question*.

The hidden idea of the paragraph is that the real in its very reality is not a given, but that, to the contrary, for thought it is fleeing, and it will flee even in the Cogito, even in the piece of wax, even in God. But we are only at the beginning of it and must remain there. The sheet of paper that I see, therefore, flees for thought even there where it gives its assurance to simple perception: such as it *is*. One does not sense [*ressent*] existence. The real is not felt [*s'éprouve*] as a content. Or again, reality is not a level of experience. To the extent that it doesn't cease being the very form of perceiving consciousness, the very form of the first relation that man and every thing hold [*entretiennent*], to that extent it escapes from thought which wants to seize it, to represent it. It is thus that I learn that *my thought sleeps*. The more my consciousness as simple consciousness is awakened to a difference that is nothing for reflection (no *index*...) the more reflection sees that it sleeps.

"Therefore, let us now suppose we are asleep [...]" This supposition makes us laugh: it's not a bad reaction. What I want to make you sensitive to is the strange aspect of the philosophical move. In any case, in its Cartesian form. But it is no less strange in its Socratic form in Plato. In relation to the realm of good sense, the great philosophical texts are always surprising. So we must always consider them as a sort of Platonic myth and interpret. This situation itself would be quite worth pursuing in its necessity, that is to say, in its origin. But we must do things in order. Let us, therefore, go back to sleep.

The hypothesis of sleep is a sort of metaphor. Philosophers are not "madmen," as Descartes says, that is to say, people who don't really believe in the existence of the exterior world; these are rather people who say to themselves that it's not enough to *believe*, but who would like to really *think* what otherwise only palpitates in daily consciousness as a reassuring certitude – or rather not: not even reassuring, but as an assurance so fundamental that it isn't formulated. It is precisely because it follows the inclination of this assurance that thought believes and wants to grasp this beautiful solidity of things; but the reality of the real has just as soon fled from every thing, fled before the will to representation. It is in this sense that our thought sleeps as regards the reality of the real. It is in order to awaken it that Descartes leads us into these strange hypotheses: "Let us suppose ...":

“Let us suppose, therefore, that we are sleeping and that all these particularities [...] are only false illusions; and let us think that perhaps our hands, and our entire body are not such as we see them.”

What does it mean: "are not such as we see them"? Is it to pretend that the red dress is blue? "But what? They are madmen." Philosophy is not a series of extravagant propositions or an "as if." However, it seems in Descartes' text, which in spite of its limpid language is, as you see, quite obscure, that philosophy begins with a series of aberrant propositions, as: "our hands, and all our body are not such as we see them."

"Such...as" is, if you will, a misstatement. If this means the objective determination of content, it's absurd: hands of glass? "They are madmen [...]" But it is not a question of the quality, of the "such ... as," except in a more original sense than the determination of contents.

The passage could mean to say this: our hands, our bodies, and sensory objects seem, precisely, to be there *as they are*, quite simply given and encountered, without there being any question to be posed about their very existence, their being. And if philosophy always finds fault with the sensory [*le sensible*], it is precisely because the universe of the simple (perceiving) consciousness is a universe without question: the perceiving consciousness, the empirical, quotidian consciousness, does not contain for itself any of the questions of thought. Thus it does not *seem* that there may be a question of the reality of the real; the real *appears* in such a way that it doesn't *seem* to include such a question. Now, if it's true, as we have begun to understand it with Kant, that the real only appears because the sensible has an ontological sense, then one understands that appearance, which is at the origin, but which includes no allusion to this origin, is, from this point of view, "deceiving," or is not such as we see it.

So philosophy, defined primarily by the question of the *on hè on*, appears in its turn as it isn't, that is to say abstract. It is so true for simple consciousness that the real is, that it is not even a (thematic) proposition for it: being appears to us then as the most hollow concept, the most abstract. But it is the supreme concept of thought.

Thus it is quite necessary, in fact, to mistrust the sensory, as it is necessary to mistrust the non-thought character of obvious facts. Not so much their content: I do not cease, as much of a philosopher as I may be, and neither does Descartes, I do not cease to be in the world, even when I feign to not believe in it (the "feint" is in the verb "to believe," which makes as if philosophy became an adventure of natural consciousness; while it is necessary to understand that I continue always to "believe" in the world, but that I discover that the object of this natural certitude, namely the real *such as it is*, is not at all thought.) Philosophical questions are never therefore immediately natural questions in a sense. Although there may be a spontaneous, natural start of reflection, this start is always a reflexive start: that is to say, it flows out from simple consciousness.

Questions are always bizarre. Not only children's questions: the mind's questions are always bizarre. Even in the sciences, where the way of questioning appears nevertheless reassuring, where the general attitude is known; but it is only reassuring after the fact. All knowledge that really advances, advances within the strange.

We are at the height of the strange here: philosophy advances towards its own beginning by supposing we are sleeping. The sort of non-formulated certitude which makes up the very stuff of perception, namely that there is a world of numerous things; this certitude is so fundamental that it doesn't emerge into consciousness; it is so original that I cannot delimit it in its content. For example, we have seen Descartes trying to seize upon the certitude that he is not in the process of dreaming and discover that this has no sense. For the proper domain of philosophy *is not a proper domain*: it is something that withdraws. The certitude of the reality of the real, which philosophy tries to express, cannot be held like paper, it cannot be crumpled like paper; it is rather absolute sand that I cannot take hold of because it has already poured through my fingers...

Now, in fact, the world does not show itself as its being is fleeting and so difficult to think. We conceive of it so much as a world of things that are, that we run headlong into the trap: we plunge in to seize it, but it reveals at that precise moment that it is empty, that it has nothing to do with things. And at the same time we believe too much as well that, as a consequence, there's nothing to do but "throw the baby out with the bath water," abandon the reality of the real as "abstract" and leave it to philosophy, which likes, bizarrely, to

devour abstractions. And we forget that the question of being such as it is constitutes the unique question of philosophy, in any case, the fundamental question, the only one from out of which something like a hierarchy of thoughts can be constructed, a hierarchy which will deliver us from only having opinions on such and such a point and from living in cultural anarchy. For doubt, the accomplishment and even the resolution of doubting, is linked to the correct usage of the question of being.

When we read, therefore, “that perhaps our hands, and our whole body, *are* not as we see them,” we underline the verb to be, and understand that in fact they are originally although they don’t show themselves as such. When, for example, Kant tries to show that everything, to the extent that it is spatial, is not simply juxtaposed by chance with others but maintained by that form of being which is space, which precedes all its parts which are rather its limits; which is to say nothing is given in the world itself which is consequently not something abstract but is the original form of the way in which the real is concrete, that is to say *concrescit*, increases, grows, rises within appearance in unity with itself: *this* is, in fact, not *given within* the real. Space as Kant reveals it, as an *a priori* form of perceiving consciousness, which is really also to say of appearance itself, is not in fact given as it is: it is in it that all is given, it is the very form of the gift, it is the way, the origin from out of which all is delimited. All appearance is delimited based on its spatial form or on its objective form. But in fact this form, this *a priori* is nothing in things. These seem to be “such as they are,” to be without origin, and in fact they *are* not. There is therefore an authentic sense in saying that the sensory is deception, but this sense is entirely ontological.

Still, what follows is going to show us that it’s not enough to take doubt in a non-psychological way, but that on the contrary, we should take it in a metaphysical way so that it no longer sets difficulties before us, the apprentice readers.

THIRD LESSON
OF THE NATURE OF DOUBT
(2) SUBSTANCE AND THE EVIL GENIUS

“Still, it is at least necessary to admit that the things which are represented to us in sleep are like painted scenes and portraits which can only be formed in resemblance to something real and true [...] certainly, at the very least, the colors of which they are composed must be true.”

We were constrained last time to take an example from Kant to illustrate the “deceit” of the senses as ontological wandering [*errance*] (and not as an error of the senses.) Still, Descartes isn’t Kant. And if it is true that Descartes doesn’t pay too much attention to the error of the senses, if it is true that doubt for him has an ontological significance, he does not distinguish the ontological (either *a priori* or original) form of appearance, from any content. But rather he unceasingly pursues being within contents, where the reality of the real always recedes, ever changing in appearance. The passage that we just read is thus a realist pursuit of substance which leads Descartes from sensible particularity to the generality of the object of perception in the same way that the following passage from this generality of the object of perception to the series of the most simple ideas that I cannot not have concerning the real: the categories (although Descartes does not call them thus.) The Evil Genius symbolizes the vanity of this ontological quest *within* experience; or again, it signifies that the opposition of certitude and truth holds, not only for “vulgar” consciousness, but also for rational or philosophical consciousness. Let us follow this road in all its detours: 1) "Still we must admit ..." that pure appearance, appearance as such, appearance that would be only appearance is untenable. A "something" that appears is necessary. This necessity of imputing appearance to a real thing is the motivation of the whole paragraph and of the following one.

The first step of this movement consists in distinguishing the sensible aspect of perceived things, which can vary and be "nothing" but itself, from the things themselves which conserve a certain solidity under these different aspects, and in relation to the particularities of these aspects, a certain "generality." Thus, my hands under one light may appear another color than under another etc. One could not therefore say that they are of such and such a color; their color is only ever a way of being, or rather a way of showing itself; by itself it is nothing. Thus every sensory qualification is declared "subjective." But under whatever lighting there may be, the hand is always the hand; the generality of the object of perception subsists under the contingent particularity of its aspects. It is noteworthy that this generality is still a generality of perception; that is to say that one recognizes oneself in it, that one well sees that they are hands. Thus one recognizes the form of the man and that of the horse in the centaur; such is also the sense of the examples given by Descartes: the siren, the satyr. But there is:

2) *a new retreat of reality and a new gain for appearance* in the last sentence of the paragraph. The comparison with a painting that no longer refers to anything known, that no longer represents anything with a familiar form, signifies that that substance, which previously was at the level of the perceived in opposition to simple sensory aspects now retreats to beneath the perceived, wholly delivered to appearance. This moment is the one that we will name the moment of the physical object's transcendence in relation to perception. Do not retreat here before this vocabulary; the thing is simple. Earlier we were saying: the dress is not perhaps red, that is perhaps only its aspect in such and such condition, but in the end *it is* a dress. Now it *will* no longer *even be* a dress. For all that is, in what I perceive as a dress, is no more than the material from which it is composed: not even the thread which I can still recognize, but the fiber of the thread, the cells of the fiber, and finally, a whole physical organization which no longer has anything to do with a dress, nor even with a cloth, nor even with a thread. The familiar coherence at the level of the perceived has ceased to define "what is," at whatever level it may be. "What is" is always what stands beneath (substance), that is to say now, beneath the level of the perceived as such; it is the object in the sense of physics. The same also goes for the red of this dress: to the extent that it shows itself red, it is only appearance; for the reality of red is a certain vibration defined by the length of its wave and its period, which *is not* red. After having led us from sensory particularities to the generality of the object of perception, the search for "what is" has led us from the generality of perception to the generality of the object of science. It is now going to lead us to the generality of the object of metaphysics, that is to

say to the abstract universality of the categories. For this whole movement of doubt takes place “for the same reason”--that is to say, the pursuit of being in the content of experience.

“And for the same reason, even though these general things, that is, the eyes, head, hands, and the like, could be imaginary, it is always necessary to admit that there are things still more simple and more universal that are true and existing.”

Note this “true and existing” which we must understand as a pleonasm: true, that is to say, existing. In the tradition, truth and reality are reciprocal. Further on, the same: “true and real.” More anciently than as the quality of a judgment, or as the *adequatio rei et intellectus*, the truth is defined as being. And the derived significations are to be understood based on the most ancient. This remark will soon serve us to clarify the meaning of the Evil Genius.

“[...] that are true and existing, from the mixture of which, neither more nor less than that of some veritable colors [...] Of this kind of things is corporeal nature in general and its extension [...] their number [...] and time [...] and other similar things.”

These are the categories according to Descartes. The categories in Aristotle and in Kant are the most general traits that bring out the figure of the real, whatever may elsewhere be its other determinations, which one no longer worries about here and that have all become appearance [*passées a l'apparence*].

When one regresses within the the content of experience, one does not in fact stop at the generality of the object of science. For this latter, taken in its turn as an object of perception, ceases then to be the ultimate term and refers us to an objective subjacent system that will explain it as appearance. Sub-stance is an idea that does not hold to any level of the real, and traverses them all. *It is in the nature of an idea to be a limit idea.*

Descartes sees evidence of simplicity in the categories. Of what “simplicity” is it a question? Of the one of a reality which is in the end no longer subjected in itself to its splitting into appearance and reality. The game by which every determined content is divided into an appearance, which is the level of this content, but which *is* not, and a reality which persists beneath (*quod substat*: substance) and which as such does not appear, this game ceases. Simple natures according to Descartes, this is the moment of ontological unity: it is the primitive stock of “what there is,” which remains “what there is” and is no longer decomposed into appearance and substance. It is the idea of a final *texture* of the

real that no longer includes what the *chain* of apparent determinations always includes, the complicated design determined in a thousand ways of the compound real, that is to say, its decomposition into appearance and reality. This *relativity* of any content in its claim to be such as it appears, an always thwarted claim, disappears. The categories therefore are identically the *simple* and the *absolute*. Has Descartes therefore found his beginning? We would believe it in reading, for example, the *Regulae*:

“I call absolute all that contains in itself the pure and simple nature of which it is a question: thus all that is considered as independent, cause, simple, universal, one, equal, similar, right or other things of this kind; and I call it the most simple and the easiest, so that we use it to resolve questions. (Rule VI)”

Thus doubt wouldn't be the *beginning* itself as the ontological decomposition of any content in appearance and substance, that is to say, the *debut*: a negative ontology of content that would lead to a veritable beginning, to reality posited at last without decomposition, simple and absolute.

Only doubt is not finished. It only ends in the Cogito a first time in order to end a second time in God alone. We will try to explain later this strange formula of a doubt that “ends” a first time and a second time. For the instant, what we know of the *Meditations* prevents us from ending doubt in the simple natures which are the Cartesian categories. And to stay with our current text, the Evil Genius himself is nothing other than doubt's persistence beyond simplicity and categorial absoluteness.

The reason is that Descartes pursues his negative ontology not only within the generality of the object of science, but even within metaphysical generality. He will pursue the search for “what is” up to the direct confrontation of the “I think” itself, without any other determination, and of Being itself, without any other determination. He will pursue it, consequently, beyond the “categories” where we are now, whether one takes them for categories or for pure forms of representation, without “taking pains” to know if they define what is, or only what is absolutely representable. Descartes willingly treats as only concerning knowledge, as only concerning epistemology, what the tradition treats in an ontological way. Thus the beginning of Rule VI:

“[...] things can be arranged in different series, not doubtlessly as they are related to some genre of being as the philosophers have divided them following the categories, but such that knowledge of some can follow from

knowledge of the others in such a way that each time some difficulty is presented we may see right away [...]"

To this text from the *Regulae* precisely responds the following paragraph from the first Meditation.

"[...] This is perhaps why from there we will not conclude badly if we say [...] that arithmetic, geometry [...] which treat only of very simple and very general things, without taking a lot of pains to know if they are or if they are not in nature, contain something certain and indubitable."

Thus all appears to become obscure for us. For up to this point we have followed a Descartes who busied himself, in conformance with the "metaphysical" nature of his *Meditations*, pursuing "what is such as it is." Then, at the moment when we're reaching the end by arriving at the simple and the absolute, that is to say, at the reality which no longer dissolves into appearance, here is Descartes not even consenting to "taking the pains" to know if this is or is not in nature.

What does "in nature" mean? Certainly, we understand that mathematics are not "in nature." A chalk circle is not a circle. Mathematical definitions (and according to Kant, only mathematics has definitions) totally contain their object which is only an object as an object of thought. The mathematical object in no way exceeds the mathematical statement, that is to say, that which I represent of it. To the contrary, it is the representation that defines the object.

The categories, following this mathematical model, would be a sort of pure axiomatics of "what is." But then the moment of ontological unity is also that of absolute difference. For between "the simple and universal things true and existing," on the one hand, and on the other hand, the things of nature, the things that one can actually see, which, however, would be a mixture of the first, there would be no conceivable relation. The whole order of appearing would therefore be composed in itself, but not for me, from a series of simple and absolute determinations, and from an "appearance" that would only be valid for me, and that, although it were only in itself a composition of the simple, would never be for me what it is in itself. So that by stopping there, Descartes would set man once and for all in radical falsehood; he would set him, like Pascal, within an absolute *disproportion* between being and nothingness. For we only ever deal with appearance.

And at the same time (and, however, apparently, conversely) this man who is blind to being to the extent that he is in the world, this blind man would determine what is by the

pure form of its representation only. He would know as much as God about being, but he would be, as if for punishment, thrust into appearance as concerns his actual empirical reality. Here disappears, therefore, the hypothesis of sleep, in the sense that we have recognized it, and it is significant that it reappears here in order to disappear: for in any case, I am sleeping as regard the Being of the world. In which sense appearance for me is or is not the same thing as “what is” ? That “proportion” is not, nor will it ever be for me, only for God. On the other hand:

“[...] whether I wake or sleep, two and three joined together will always form the number five, and the square will never have more than four sides; and it does not seem that such apparent truths can be suspected of any falsity or incertitude.”

But in knowing as much as God about being itself, I throw God himself into the disproportion that is mine. For if being in no way goes beyond the representation that I have of it in simple natures, as mathematical objects in no way go beyond their definition, then God himself cannot think it insofar as it is in its very simplicity that from which (however) appearance is “composed.” For that is not given in simple natures. The difference of reality and appearance traverses in this way the very nature of being and it is superadded in a way incommensurable with their identity: *it's the absurd absolute ontological.*

Based on this we can try to determine the meaning of the famous and so disconcerting initially (and even subsequently...) hypothesis of the *Evil Genius*.

The Evil Genius is the proper usage of the notion of God in the sense that it pulls God out of the ontological absurdity we had come to. It thus returns to one of Descartes' most anchored convictions (cf. the correspondence with Marseenne), that God is the creator of eternal truths instead of being subject to them.

The Evil Genius is not there to slip doubt into the interior of the axiomatic certitudes themselves, whether they be mathematical or categorical, that is to say, logical. It is psychological doubt that *slips itself in*, that changes one's state of mind; it is a question, to the contrary, of rendering the mind itself master of its states. The Evil Genius is not there to scare me but to show me, as the text says very clearly, that I can be mistaken in my certitudes, that is to say, that certitude is not truth. By “certitude” we must understand not any kind of intimate conviction whatsoever, but really (following the examples of mathematics and logic) the fact that the object rests entirely within and upon representation.

The Evil Genius therefore signifies that truth is not necessarily the same thing as absolute representability, and even that I am mistaken in believing it. In what sense, even, this mistaking is absolute falsity, the ontological absurd, is what we have tried to show. We must therefore leave it behind and return to sleep, and suppose that my thoughts of the reality of the real slumber still more at the heart of metaphysics than in perceiving consciousness. The Evil Genius contains in itself the radical critique of metaphysical proof. It is, in the form of a myth, that of which Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will be the thematic development.

This deceiver God is the way of rendering to the idea of God its truth, that is to say, of refusing to force it to sanction the thoughts of being (simple natures) that, as necessary as they may be as the *bent* of my thought, as the subjective form of rationality, certain of itself from inside itself, are not for this any less the height of uncertainty and even the idea of the false since they would render useless all the trouble one could give oneself in order to know if "they are in nature" or if "they are not there." As they suppose a thought of being traversed by the opposition of appearance and reality, they are and are not "in nature," they are the ontological contradiction in its pure form. One must remove God, that is to say being itself, from this venture. The indifference to considering simple natures ontologically or epistemologically, this indifference does not mean the *Meditations* have ceased to be metaphysical in order to become epistemological; it signifies a new progression of doubt as ontological doubt.

This movement is also the last effort to separate appearance from "what is." This separation takes place this time in the heart of metaphysics or first philosophy itself. The Evil Genius is the first suspicion (for the Moderns; we are not speaking here of the Greeks) that there is a realm of appearance for reason itself. Thus doubt, invading the intelligible after the sensory, has invaded everything. The demolition is built.

Why then must doubt be at the beginning? This role is explained by its nature. The nature of doubt is to be ontological. The nature of the *on (ontos)* is to draw back before the will to representation. It is this retreat of being which draws in thought as representation within doubt, that is to say within salutary negation.

FOURTH LESSON

“THESE ANCIENT AND ORDINARY OPINIONS...”

We have, therefore, cast doubt upon the entire extent of certitudes, more exactly, all the way to the root of all these certitudes, to the very form of certitude as such, that is to say, all the way to the moment at which the object lies in representation, a moment whose concrete example is mathematics, against which doubt arises in the figure of a deceitful God, in order to show the ancient nature of the truth about certitude, which is to say about representation.

Now it remains to finish with this through a sort of return by Descartes to the strangeness of his approach and to the nature of doubt:

“But it is not enough to have made these remarks; it is still necessary that I take care to remember.”

For everything happens as if the beginning of philosophy was something which one never managed to remember; not only in Descartes but in Plato also, and in some way in Kant, too. This way of overturning the sensory (and Descartes goes further still, for he overturns not only the sensory but any form of certitude), this way is so contrary to the natural inclination of the mind that it can hardly occur; in any case, it cannot persist as a natural disposition of the mind. It is not necessary to believe that there is a philosophical brilliance. There isn't any philosophical temperament. Philosophy is unnatural, in any case, in the sense in which by “natural” one understands a natural *inclination*.

There isn't any inclination to be a philosopher.

“For those ancient and ordinary opinions still often return to me in thought.”

See how Plato's language reemerges by itself. All that I believed, I continue to believe it. Only this, I no longer take it for thought, as, for example, the certitude of the world; to have diminished it as false, this is not to change the content of perceptive certitude. Likewise, to speak of a deceptive God, this is not to change the contents of mathematical operations, of their proper, intrinsic, internal clarity. But I know that these are not, all the same, thoughts that I have in these certitudes, that perhaps I am quite simply there *in* the truth but without

knowing how. I am not *truly* in the truth. Doubt attains its universality because it does not pass through the enumeration of contents or through the destruction of contents. In some way it changes nothing in common consciousness, be it as simple consciousness or as cultural consciousness. But it distinguishes all these contents or all these attitudes of consciousness from the demands of thought, which does not mean that all that is false, absolutely speaking, but that I don't know if it is true or false, and that what is false, absolutely speaking, would be my tendency to content myself with it.

“For these ancient and ordinary opinions” do not therefore cease to be *ordinary*.

The ordinary course of consciousness is that against which philosophy can do nothing, and moreover undertakes nothing. Neither is philosophy a polemic, an attitude that would have decided to be paradoxical. However, it is thus that it presents itself, but that is still only its appearance. This is simply because, *it too*, is in some way only an opinion of itself.

The pursuit of truth is also for a long time only an opinion of itself, and consequently, it is not capable of being deployed itself in its purity, and it shows itself often as it is not. Essentially, here it is necessary to doubt doubt itself, at least insofar as it itself has a content, a concrete standpoint that is only a myth of its true sense.

To say *there is not* heaven or earth, as Descartes will say, this is deranged, this is hyperbolic, this is exaggerated (*huperballein*), this is to shoot the ball beyond the goal; it is therefore to miss the goal; it is to doubt poorly.

Through a poor and rough doubt Descartes is simply trying to free the demands of the thought of certitude from the content of consciousness, from what we content ourselves with, not generally suspecting that there is another instance, another jurisdiction that is thought itself. Thought itself is not generally suspected.

“These ancient opinions still often return to me in thought, the long and familiar use they have had with me giving them the right to occupy my mind against my will and to make themselves almost mistresses of my credence, and I will never get out of the habit of deferring to them and of having confidence in them [...]”

You see that Descartes knows in advance that there is nothing to be done against the habits of the mind. In every domain and concerning every problem there is a sort of

customary standpoint or customary right of which it is vain to hope to rid us by a *metanoia*. Philosophy is not a *conversion* that changes concrete attitudes.

Conversion belongs to the religious domain, the *metanoia* where truly the attitude of thought itself changes, certitudes change face, some vanish, others appear; they all change: conversion. It is impossible that doubt implement the conversion of consciousness. There is no concretion, no psychological dimension at all; it is evident since, by choice, it is intended for certitudes. The general sense of doubt is that it is a critique of certitude as non-identical to truth; it is to be the acknowledgement of the failure of the search for being within content.

A failure of being, or rather a failure of a naive conception of reality in all its forms: sensible, then in the substantial organization of the real transcending perception, then in mathematics, then in simple natures, then in God himself. Now it is self evident that one doesn't change certitude; so much so that one never loses the habit of acquiescing to what one knows to be no more than opinion.

“And to become confident in them such that I will consider them such as they in fact are, that is to say, in some way doubtful, as I just showed, and, however, quite probable.”

This shows not only how doubt in spite of its exaggerated character still has not gone far, and how it is difficult to go further; not only, then, does one not change the natural fabric of certitudes, but what's more, one believes they are, in fact, those opinions, “in some way doubtful, and, however, *quite probable*.” There is a presumption of truth that continues to affect every attitude of certitude in its noncritical form, even in the very form where they are inferior to thought:

“so that one has many more reasons to believe them than to deny them”

and also so that the philosophical enterprise appears insane. Since it goes not only against the very fabric of my certitudes or so to speak against the very form of the mind (for it itself is intended), but moreover because one no longer believes in it because doubt has not really attained its goal, and that I have in vain deliberately treated as false all that was perhaps true but which wasn't given in truth, of which I knew neither how nor where it was true, I have done this in vain, this “false” does not encroach upon my opinions of the real. This means, once again, that the philosophical enterprise is not a natural inclination, not only for my brilliance, as remarked earlier, but not even for thought. It is not even the natural inclination of thought insofar as it is thought. Which is to suppose *a contrario* that there is

a sort of naturally doubtful metaphysics which is born in everyone. And it's true. Thought is perhaps essentially idolatrous--not only in its passion, but as thought itself.

This is why one must strive to start doubting again. Do not believe that doubt is finished with Meditation I; it starts again under another form with Meditation II and still more strongly with Meditation III under another form again.

“This is why I think I will not do badly if, taking a contrary sentiment to to a deliberated judgement, I deceive myself [...]”

You see that the philosophical enterprise is so contrary to the natural inclination of thought that it appears as deceit, and Descartes deceives himself. He calls this “to deceive oneself.” Of course, all this is metaphorical.

But the enormity itself of these expressions: to say “deceive oneself,” to explain that the road of the search for truth is not a natural road and that consequently, from the point of view of my opinions, from the natural road of thought, they appear as illusory, false, and deceitful, is really to give to metaphysics, to philosophy, its proper place, its difficulty and even its own incredibility. I employ all my attention to deceive myself.

“Feigning that all my thoughts are false and imaginary.”

Feigning: it's a feint. Everything happens as if man couldn't truly think without shame, as if thought were only bearable in its way of being by essence the placing into question of certitude, of being un-rest, if it is presented as a “feint.” This “fiction” in fact, is the only serious business there is, but man feigns that he is playing, he feigns that he is feigning, he pretends he is pretending.

You will find again, in Plato, the same modesty for man, and above all for the completed man, the adult man, regarding philosophy's remoteness within its own problematic and in the pursuit of its existence or its beginning. When the old Parmenides, who at the time of the dialogue that bears his name is supposed to be 70 or 80 years old, is begged by Zenon, and above all by the young Socrates, to take up again his discourse, his favorite theme on the unity of being, he declares that to ask this of him at his age is a sort of humiliation comparable to the one he would undergo if one asked him to go naked in the gymnasium.

There is something like an obscenity in philosophy, something exorbitant whose impact moreover we feel very naively. One doesn't need to be very learned in fact to feel

the strangeness of the Cartesian beginning, and as this beginning doesn't cease starting, the strangeness doesn't go away either, and everyone has the modesty to say: "I am a philosopher," whether to follow seriously on this road, or if he does it seriously it will be in secret. A secret, perhaps, not only from his family, but from his best friends and almost from himself.

The unnatural character of the philosophical question, in any case its character of not being a natural inclination, makes it in a certain way almost repulsive and shameful like all great experiences: all are in some way feared by the mind as if they were shameful.

That is why "I feign." In reality, Descartes feigns feigning.

"[...] to the point finally that having weighed my old and new prejudices in such a way that they can sway my opinion no more to one side than to the other, my judgment is no longer mastered from now on by poor usage and turned from the straight road that can conduct it to knowledge of the truth."

For it happens, too, that the exercise of philosophy may end by this, that the series of questions and the order of philosophical questions in fact weighs certitudes in the mind. But that is philosophical maturity.

From the straight road. This straight road: it is the shortest; that is its definition. But above all it cuts short any certitude and any good sense. Philosophy is not at all an enterprise of good sense and I dare say it in commenting on Descartes, of whom all the world knows, to the contrary, that he said that good sense is the most common thing in the world. But philosophical sense is not good sense; that sort of quotidian common sense [*jugeote*], that popular form that would like to tame the true.

"All you need is good sense" [*il n'y a qu'à être de bon sens.*]

– this is a thought that really comes from French people – and the man of good sense would favorably replace in many cases several others who are supposed to be learned, and again, especially more philosophical. Well, no, not really. It is not up to good sense to be able to adapt the truth to that sort of grouchy middle ground that characterizes it and which is deep down cowardice before the extremity of the questions.

The true questions are the extreme questions.

The true questions (as Descartes says, “the true and existing questions”) are questions that ignite the powder keg and that manifestly escape the insulation [*calfeutrage*] of good sense. One cannot lead one’s life according to good sense.

Which doesn’t mean either that it is necessary to act crazily and tale behavior to disordered extremes. But it means that it is of the nature of the true to be extreme. One does not get out of it so easily, and when “things work themselves out,” it’s generally because one has given up or insulated oneself [*se calfeutrer*]. Or it’s grace. Every man experiences the solution to his real problems as grace. Which proves that the true questions are of such a nature that one doesn’t even believe that they can be resolved. That one does not expect it. Astonishing daily humility of the man who *does not expect* that things be resolved although he works and waits [*attende*] only for that. But he doesn’t believe it; and he experiences as grace the mind’s true progress; the true displays, or the true progressions of feeling or of the mind or of knowledge, always appear as purely miraculous. So this narrow way is a ridge road. It is not the discounted sinusoid of good sense.

“For I am sure that there can be neither peril nor error in that way, and that I could not today give too much to distrust [*défiance*] [...]”

Very beautiful word, *dis-trust*; it’s the opposite of trust: the way in which the mind trusts in itself as pursuit of the truth, as dedicated to the truth, is a “distrust”--that’s to say one has no trust in the ground – the truth is not a terrain that would hold us up.

What justifies Cartesian extremity is this: one does not rest on the truth, but it is necessary that in some way thought should hold on to it; not that it produces truth but that it must at least say it and rise up to it.

One can never give up oneself in the truth. So much so that the form of the truth is never the altar of repose [*le reposoir*], be it systematic or not; the truth is not something upon which one is going to land gently. Let us not look for it thus. The more we find it, the more, to the contrary, it augments in us both faith and distrust, true faith, which is to say distrust regarding a substitute for the truth that is always its falling back under the form of a certitude.

“for I am sure there can be no peril nor error in this way, and that I could not today give too much to my distrust since it is not now a question of acting, but only of meditating and knowing.”

It seems here that philosophy is closing itself off by itself through the mouth of Descartes in this too famous distinction of thought from action. And that as a consequence it is in this very way devalued or chased out of the concrete world.

The question is of such enormity that I cannot claim to clear it up here before you or to “deal” with it now, but simply, at least I can say this: that at first, in a certain way (which is the Kantian way) the act arises from a practical categorical imperative, which therefore isn’t theoretical – that in a certain way everyone knows what a jerk [*salaud*] is and it is not necessary that there be a self-justification of moral conscience; I would rather rely for moral authenticity upon indignation as such, on that wild side that makes one pounce; maintaining this on the condition that one must also not make for oneself a universe from the justification of ethical spontaneity. “I don’t need to do philosophy, and I’m going to change the world, and you’re going to see how.” Always a chivalrous attitude: to right all wrongs; because one must know at what level what is wrong is actually wrong, that is to say twisted; which doesn’t happen without meditating and knowing. Therefore, complementarity is the first idea: the complementarity of acting and knowing. Namely, that if I want to make social justice reign, it is necessary at the least that I have something other than good intentions, and that I have more than vague tinctures of political economy (that’s the difference between *ouvrierism* and a serious workers’ movement for example; or between a vague liberalism and a true conquest or pursuit of real freedom that supposes instruments of study; therefore, “to act” rapidly becomes to dither in moral romanticism if it is not knowing). But there isn’t only knowing; there is something else that is “to meditate.”

One must know *at what level* an action can be paralyzed and rendered equal to inaction. It is in this sense that Marx’s analysis shows us – it’s an example – that action symbolized by the French Revolution, for the bourgeois sectors to acquire their liberty through the abolition of privileges, this action only obtained formal liberty although it was conceived of as “Liberty” (“liberty or death”) and that it only took its meaning as an action from the fact that it really had moved the object, moved the historical or real social content.

Now what *is* a real content always depends on the reality of the real – which is the point of first philosophy. It is in this sense that there is no objective action as such and that it is necessary to add “meditation” to knowing. For not only is action without knowledge solely unrest, but action that is only founded on a knowledge that itself does not care about its own foundation in the truth as such (here called meditation) is still, although to a lesser degree perhaps (at least apparently), mere agitation. You see, for example, the way in

which liberty flees from the men who in history overturn contents and revolutionize their relations and even their relations of production; for that was the new development, and that development in Marx's work occurred at the level of knowledge (although in fact there may also be, through Hegel's legacy, the level of meditation itself turned back into knowledge, as philosophy turned back into political economy for Marx). Despite then this development at the level of knowledge, one still wonders if there is any *action* there, and if the problem is not *entire* and *new* before the men who have attempted this step that they believed to be decisive, and if it is not necessary to meditate on the nature of the social as the social of technical societies (not only the societies of great industrial production of the 19th century, but as industrial society of the 20th) and to question technology essentially enough to see *if* action – and in what sense – action itself has a sense, to what depths must one go so that it may have a sense and so that it should not unceasingly be the flux that calls for the reflux and the disalienation that calls for new forms of alienation. I take a brutal (and poorly sketched, moreover) example to show that one must not put too much faith in what Descartes says about the distinction of acting and meditating and knowing. First, because it is probable that veritable action, the most active action, is thought itself, it alone being in some way capable of augmenting the effective liberty of knowledge that objectively guides action.

If then, there is a foundation for action, as execution, in the knowledge of the structures of the object; and if the structures of the object, for example, socioeconomic structures (it can also be the structure of familial relations etc.) if the structures of the object are themselves determined by the being of being, that is to say, if the real is effectively metaphysical, then meditation is the horizon, the liberty of acting itself and its real beginning.

FIFTH LESSON

THE COGITO

(2) THE ARCHIMEDIAN POINT

“Of the nature of the human mind, and that it is easier to know than the body.”

The title of the second meditation surprises insofar as it would have us believe that the human mind is a certain domain (the domain of interiority) that would have its own knowledge (proper to it) that it would be necessary to inventory, that would contain riches of a particular type: which would have the effect of giving philosophy an object, one which would simply have the particularity of being a subject, ensuring that philosophy becomes a knowing.

But philosopher is not a specialist of the interior for the reason that thought is not a new domain superadded to the objective domains already existing. Certainly there is no other place for philosophy than the analysis of thought; but this place is precisely not a new domain of knowledge. Philosophy does not take a place among various knowledges: it is *thought*, it is not *knowledge*. This is because its proper place is not an object, an objective region, nor consequently a subjective region. It is in fact to take the subject as an object, to take it as interiority, as subjectivity. It is to believe that there would be some way there of “returning to oneself;” but the expression only has sense as a moral metaphor.

Thus before approaching the banks of philosophical certitude, before gaining a foothold in the Cogito, we must remind ourselves of a certain sobriety of thought to which Kant has already brought us and renounce the belief that we have intimate profuseness. However, this representation of the intimate is naively found everywhere, for example, in Bergson: *The Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Who does not imagine that philosophers are explorers of subjectivity, that they dive into that other “world of silence” which would have other dimensions: consciousness. Now Descartes’ title seems to push us in the same direction: “The human mind [...] is easier *to know* than the body.” We must understand that

we only ever know the body, the object, the world, but that thought can make certain of itself precisely by making certain of *the possibility of the object* (which is not already a knowledge in the sense of the determination of contents), of its own possibility in itself, of its taking root in the origin, in the truth in the transcendental sense. But thought's proper place is not a domain to know. But enough on the title; we'll find all these problems quite soon enough again in the text.

“The meditation I performed yesterday filled my mind with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power from this point on to forget them.”

A warning that has nothing of the literary about it, and which is addressed, for example, to each one among you; that is, once one is engaged on the road of philosophy, one cannot pull back so easily. This adventure of the mind, which was born in Greece, and which continues to drive us even today, is not among those that one can avoid, is not at least among those one can escape from once one has got mixed up in it. It is true that the strange character of Cartesian doubt can ceaselessly renew in us a sort of irritation regarding philosophy: there is something forced about it; it is a “feint” as Descartes doesn't stop saying. But at the same time – and this is what we have tried to show by always placing the text back under the meaning of the title: “Meditations of First Philosophy” – it corresponds to a questioning such that once it has arisen in man it never quits him and no longer leaves him in peace. There is always culturally a way to shrug off philosophy, but if the questions that it poses really touches us, then it is no longer in our power to forget them.

“And however, I do not see in what way I will be able to resolve them [...] nor swim to keep myself above.”

Here is Descartes drowned, drowned in doubt. Which means that the rigor with which doubt is pursued has nothing to do with any sort of logical clarity that would satisfy the mind by ceaselessly divulging its why and how. Philosophy is not necessarily, and never even primarily, transparent to itself. We are first taken up in its movement because it itself is first taken up in its own movement. As with all real things, it begins first and understands after. It is not now that Descartes understands what call he obeys when he undertakes this astonishing revocation of everything into doubt. And for ourselves this road only appears practicable and as having a sense if we ceaselessly put it in the perspective of the title where it gets revealed as negative ontology.

It is true that a certain courage is required to bear what is in fact philosophy at literary heights. But one cannot have this courage as a “determination” that itself is

undetermined; one can only have it if that which is beyond the formulations of such and such philosopher has directly reached us; if the face that is outlined through them has been, at least at times, completely shown.

“I will try nevertheless [...] and I will continue always down this road [...] that there is nothing certain in this world.”

Everything in Descartes is freedom and will. It's what one generally admires and sometimes, at the height of obfuscation, what one makes into a principle of explanation: Descartes the voluntarist, the truth must be willed, etc. But we do not see at all why everything should begin with the will. Why wouldn't this also really be an obstinacy without object? It would be better to understand why “the order of the reasons” not only is not the same as the “order of the matters” but is the *inverse* of the order of the matters. The sort of void that doubt deliberately produces in order to have a place to move, a place to follow *its own* road would be better explained in this way than by a wholly undetermined “will.” We will try to produce this explanation. But for the instant it remains certain that doubt is the contrary of an education. Descartes follows the *straight* road (as in the famous example of the forest), that is to say, the shortest road. Doubt cuts short: there where it finds the doubtful, it puts the false. It doesn't *expect* (it's the opposite of a wisdom) it does not expect from the maturing of experience that the true and the false should end up changing into one another, and that they are no longer differentiated except in the judgment of an informed consciousness that, disappointed by all concepts and all principles, would believe in recuperating their truth beyond their theoretical collapse, in the ineffable unity of a wisdom. Descartes does not believe that truth is acquired but rather that it is conquered. *Caesar maximis itineribus Galliam petiit*: same movement in Descartes. But if this movement is imperious, it is not through any trait of Descartes' nature; or rather this trait, if it exists, would be totally without interest if it weren't justified by the very nature of what *calls* for doubt. It is because the question of “what is such as it is,” and of what thought is in itself, this unique question is exclusive of a pure and simple ripening, of a pure and simple meditation on experience. It is not a matter of becoming a good man. There is no *optimates*, and there is no education in philosophy. Why? To what does this rhythm of Descartes hold: “and I will always continue down this road”? This is incomprehensible for us if we have not understood, at least through anticipation, that there is no consolation for thought at the level of the certitudes of content. The question of truth itself is not abstract, that is to say, is not withdrawn from any content, from any experience. There is no philosophical experience. This difference of Truth as regards all truths (improperly named, consequently): moral, political, scientific, philosophical, too (and that is not the least

troubling), this difference remains to be understood. It remains to be understood why the true is not something gleaned from the universe, nor from consciousness. For the moment, the true shows itself to Descartes in such a way that it recoils before him. This is not Descartes' decision: Descartes *follows* the road. He persists because there only is one road. But the result is soon going to astonish us: if we must exit the set of contents we must exit the World. Such is the sense of the comparison with Archimedes:

“Archimedes, in order to pull the terrestrial globe from its place and transport it to another, asked for nothing more than a point that was fixed and secure.”

Through doubt, and through the truth that will have enough weight to counterbalance doubt (it will be the Cogito), it is a matter of pulling each one of our attitudes from the place where it is lived by simple consciousness, which in a certain way cannot help it, in order to situate them in a place where they are not in themselves, in any case where they are not *for* themselves: to situate them in truth. It is always the same pattern: it is not a matter of changing the content but of ceasing to be a man whose certitudes are adjacent to one another (those of perception, those of objective knowledge, those of affectivity, of moral will, of sentiment etc.), but are not conscious of each other, always scattering, and whose incertitudes perhaps do not have more sense than his certitudes. It is a matter of *transporting* (intact in some way, consequently) all of this world in which I *have* ideas, I *have* doubts, highs and lows, beliefs and non-beliefs into a place where the true, the false, and their mixture cease to happen to me. But this necessity [*il faut*] is itself for the instant, and perhaps for a long time, belief for us. It is the need for the one, systematic form, the fundamental need of the mind. For us it is only an idea.

What will be the Archimedean point on which I can support myself?

“Thus I will have the right to conceive of some just hopes if I am happy enough to find only one thing which is certain and indubitable.”

Again, it is necessary that this “thing” (Cogito) be the principle for all the rest. As an isolated truth it would be of no importance. Doubt does not consist in sifting through the universe in order to find thought in it like a nugget. But the content of doubt must become the field of truth.

“I suppose, therefore, that all the things I see are false [...] that my memory filled with lies represents to me.”

What does “lie” mean? It means that the verb “to be” (“I am persuaded that nothing ever *was* [...]”) is much more hidden than I believe on the faith of simple consciousness that *lives* within the real. It is not a matter of pretending I wasn’t there when I remember that I was there and doubting my memory [*memoire*] through the details of remembering [*souvenir*]. But it is a matter of understanding that to be present in the world, whether it be through present perception or through memory is perhaps something other than a fortuitous circumstance. Something other than an obvious fact that one would only have to dig into.

“I think I have no sense [...]” But what about sight? hearing? smell? taste? touch? And perhaps some others: a specific sense for cold and hot etc. It is not a matter for Descartes, and in philosophy it is never a matter, of denying the body, but of denying that which we substitute for the evidence of the body, and that is a metaphysical language, not the naive language it appears to be, namely: the senses conceived as a certain faculty of apprehension that would put me in the real, as if I were in the real by representation, as if the subject inhabited a body and groped about in the real in order to make a place for itself. But the given does not relate to a subjectivity, and for this reason neither does it *relate* to the senses. Rather it is necessary to find out how the universe itself, as the *a priori* form of the sensory according to Kant, makes the body possible and through this is opposed to a “representation.” The idea of a *relation* to the world; this is what is false. The senses are not the subjective’s supply lines.

Descartes’ doubt is a constant critique of the obvious; that is why Descartes seems absurd: “I think I have no senses.” Translation: I realize that I think nothing when I say: “I have senses,” and that the problem of the nature of the sensory, and of the ontological status of the body completely escapes me, and that there is a lot of falsity in the evidence that leads me into a representational schema, and notably in those false problems that one finds in the manuals: “the psycho-physiological parallelism,” etc. False problems and exceedingly dull ones, moreover. One must take up thought in thinkers and not in manuals.

“I believe that body, figure, extension, movement and place are only fictions of my mind.”

And in fact, extension, that is to say the primary qualities posited as reality subjacent to secondary qualities which would only be its appearance, supposes that appearance *is* not but would be, *for* a consciousness bogged down in the senses, the deceptive aspect that the real takes on. But appearance *is* – Kant’s lesson. Appearance cannot even be appearance if it doesn’t have an ontological scope [*portee*]. Therefore it is true that extension is a “fiction of my mind”--understand not a hallucination of

psychological consciousness, but a dialectical notion of reason. Thus to criticize the Cartesian notion of extension in the name of the Kantian notion of space is to understand the Cartesian negation with which we are dealing here. Extension is the (abstract) *representation* (but that's a pleonasm) of the spatial as such. But we must recognize that this explanation is not in Descartes. What is in Descartes, truly not "educational" enough, is that he never explains in what way "fictions" could really be "fictions." So much so that if one does not have at one's disposal a general principle of interpretation, which is that the sense of the word "to be" shrinks back in relation to the facts of simple consciousness, whether as sensible consciousness or as intelligible consciousness, then Descartes' doubt becomes exorbitant.

It is important to note here that this principle of interpretation could not be just any one; and particularly, it is not enough to have an erudite knowledge of Descartes' work in order to find it. Such a knowledge is even what can most induce us to error. For the first thing it notes is the predominance of the mathematical example in the Cartesian conception of the search for the true. It is tempting, therefore, to explain the approach of doubt, and all the "hyperbolic" or "methodical" characteristics we know it to have, based on the difference that there is *through the relation to a world that is already that of science*, between mathematics, science of the simple and the absolute, science of the representable as such, and all the other sciences whose object is more compound, or again is "in nature." From this point of view ontology denies itself in the sense that it is reduced to the *epistemological* order: "what is" is such that it is absolutely representable; and as the epistemological has here the weight of the ontological, the object contained in geometry is posited as reality: it is extension.

To this object, which is the representable posited as reality, and as the only reality (as the reality of any other "real" of a more compound degree, that is therefore not real but appearance of extension, and "deceptive" in this sense that it passes itself off *at its level* for real, while it is only real at the level of extension) links up the chain, the order of reasons. One even believes then they understand that the order of reasons may itself be in the inverse order of the order of matters – in other words, that the order of *what has being* is in the inverse order of the order of *what shows itself*. The representable posited as reality is in fact at the same time posited as the absolute nonappearing. The nature of all that appears, in fact, is to contain a unity that is never exhausted by the aspects through which it shows itself and of which it is, however, the reason, to the extent that all are "its" aspects; any object that shows itself is thus the inexhaustible for representation. The thing, distinguished as a "that which" (shows itself) by all the ways it shows itself, makes of all

this appearing an appearance of itself, but that *is* not itself, and that, absolutely speaking, *is* not; for all that is in that which shows itself is *that which* shows itself. As, if I now descend to this level of substance, I will find it again as a thing that shows itself, the same essentially deceitful structure is repeated at all levels of content. The order of matters is therefore an ontological appearance, that is to say, the absolute figure of the false, and this is why doubt must deny it. In briskly carrying out this negation, doubt would do no more than gain the point of departure for the order of reasons by turning back the order of matters.

But if such was in fact the reason for the movement of doubt, it would terminate with simple natures. It would not then need the Evil Genius, nor the Cogito (if not as a pure form of representation), nor God. These three major articulations of the *Meditations* must prohibit us from explaining Descartes through another text, the *Regulae* for example, based upon which they could no longer be understood.

Concerning the Evil Genius, perhaps we said enough the other day. Concerning the Cogito, we must show that it is not simply the pure form of representation at its reflexive *summum*, that it is not the heart of the act that the *Regulae* call “intuition.” Not only isn’t it a clear and distinct idea (even if after the fact it must be taken as the type for these by Descartes himself) in the sense of the category of substance (on this subject, see the critiques of Maine de Biran), but neither is it the present proof [*evidence actuel*] of representation announcing its object which does not exceed it in any way. For this pure, reflexive way of conceiving the Cogito completely neglects the enigma posed by the expression: “I am.”

But this question demands its own development.

What I wanted to sketch out is that doubt is not a method of exposition for an already existing ontology which would consist in “positing” the object of mathematics as reality, but purely intelligible and unapparent, while at the other end of the chain perceiving consciousness would deal with absolute appearance. Doubt, on the contrary, is *really* the beginning for Descartes and not the exposition of an existing ontological conception. And if it is developed as negation, it is not in the sense that the intelligible circle negates the circularity of “round things” I trace in chalk; it is not because the nature of being consists in absolute representability that negates what appears as ontological appearance. But doubt encompasses *even* the rational certitudes that this schema supposes. Its movement can therefore be explained only because being retreats *even* outside of simple natures, or outside of natural rationality. We must leave to doubt its form and its space. *It is* the beginning, the simple and the absolute.

SIXTH LESSON

THE COGITO

(2) THE SENSE OF THE “I AM”

How does Descartes verify himself? At first, in the absence of the world; not that it has abruptly disappeared for Descartes' quotidian or ordinary consciousness, but “absence” in the sense that thought is going to take hold of itself in its sense of being (“I am”) without the original connection of thought and the real having been considered as necessary to this seizure of thought by itself. The Cogito is going to take hold of itself at the moment when the world is still placed in doubt; consequently, “this assured and fixed point” is found outside the world as the fulcrum of the lever is found outside the moving system. This is one of the senses of that rich comparison with Archimedes that opens the movement towards the Cogito in the second Meditation.

“Am I so dependent on the body and the senses that I cannot be without them? But I convinced myself that there was nothing at all in the world [...]”

The world is to such a point the form of all thought, that when he tries to think nothing [*le rien*], Descartes again says:

“nothing at all in the world” “[...] that there wasn't any sky, any earth, any mind, nor any body; didn't I also therefore convince myself that I was not?”

It seems that this sort of evacuation of beings towards nothingness, to which doubt does not cease to systematically proceed, must reach man in his turn and his place in the universe such as he is when one defines him as the rational animal. It seems then that he is carried off by the movement of negation, for nothing tells us, for the instant, that man may be thought otherwise than as one being among others, in his own place in the whole of reality. But doubt stumbles against the Cogito as against that which one can in no way move or lift by oneself.

“No certainly, I was without doubt, if I convinced myself [...] and taking for constant only this proposition: ‘I am, I exist’ is necessarily true every time I pronounce it [...]”

The question here is entirely in the weight of the verb “to be.” You will note, for the rest, that the first formulation of the Cogito we meet with is not exactly “Cogito,” it’s: “I am, I exist.” In what sense does Descartes attain in himself the being that he looks for from the beginning of the *Méditations* and that the world cannot give him?

In the first Meditation what obliges Descartes to throw the world into doubt is the fact that reality is unceasingly changing its appearance before the will of thought to attain the real in its reality, from the most immediate level, that of sensory evidence, through to simple natures and to the Evil Genius which signifies that the intelligible itself can be the place [*lieu*] of an appearance (metaphysical appearance.) How does it happen that the Cogito resists such a magnitude of doubt? We must admit that we are not quite convinced by the text whose formal character is difficult not to perceive: if “I” am mistaken, even in my fundamental (rational) logical certitudes and not only in my sensory certitudes, there remains anyways at least the subject of thought. If, therefore, doubt can attain all the contents of thought, it can (only) attain this latter one to the extent that, through doubt itself, precisely, it withdraws from that which it is itself as a simple certitude of content. But then, what remains? *A sort of pure will of thought.*

Can thought, willing itself to be itself in its deed and in its form, express itself with the weight of reality? Can it express itself as an “I am,” that is to say, in opposition to the dissolution of all reality in appearance (1st Meditation), constantly verifying itself *as* real, ceaselessly grasping itself in truth. Descartes invokes the moment when I *pronounce* the Cogito. This proposition: “I am, I exist,” is not abstractly true, that is to say, it is not the product of logical reasoning; to be mistaken there must be a subject that is mistaken [*pour se tromper, il faut qu’il y ait un sujet qui se trompe*]. Purely categorial reasoning could be worth as much for the world: so that all things appear as they are not, there must be something that may be. But that is the category of substance that falls with all the others from the blows of the Evil Genius.

It seems, then, that rather than a reasoning of a categorial type, in the Cogito it is a matter of an intuition such as it is defined in the *Regulae*, that is to say such that the object consists entirely of its representation, that it is born and produced by representation. It seems to be an intuition of the same type that we are dealing with here: “I am, I exist” is necessarily true every time I pronounce it. Thus, I “am” to the extent that I pronounce myself. This way of crying into the void an “I” that is reflected in itself (and, in fact, in this void left by doubt, the world is only any longer a great shell that resonates, the possibility

of an echo, and all is ready so that the “I” pronouncing itself hears itself say that it *is*), does this situation suit us well?

What is, therefore, the sense of the verb “be” in “I am” ? Thought is attained as being, but without any determination and in the poorest way possible, it clings to its pure form; *but all this takes place outside the world*; the “fixed and sure point” is outside of the world since the world itself is denied. The question is one of knowing if the Cogito can be sure of itself [*s’assurer de lui-meme*] precisely *outside* of the profession of what constitutes its nature, its most profound definition, which is *to be primitively in the real*. The question is that of knowing if thought can be sure of itself as *self-consciousness*, reflecting its interiority in the void of a refused, unquestioned world, or if, on the contrary, no discourse, and not even that sort of cry of solitary thought – “I am” – can convince the mind of its primacy, of its reality, without the unity of this thought having been seized in relation to the position of the real itself. Can the point remain sure and fixed if it remains outside the world? If yes, that supposes that thought is a sort of domain set apart, an absolute instance that is not essentially linked to the real, and that consequently, the world is never for man (man fittingly being defined by thought) but a setting, a contingent place that could not in any way be the place of his definition, of his vocation. We must admit that in the Greek tradition, as in the Christian tradition, many memories compete in us in order to make us precipitately accept that thought is not of this world, and that this world is consequently a “lower world.” It is this idea, and it alone, that makes the second Meditation possible, and makes it so one doesn’t question Descartes too harshly about his “I am.” For the whole tradition wills that thought become sure of itself independently of the senses, and thereby of the world. Thus thought would be assured of itself as interiority, as subjectivity; and it would be *posited* without this position being by the same token [*du même coup*] what puts it into the world and what puts the world itself “in publication” (what makes it initially appear). But we will see in following Descartes that we must not transform the steps of thought into ontological affirmations, and we will see in following Kant that it is not possible that thought should take hold of itself and proclaim its being, hold itself up within being simply as interiority and self-consciousness in a total rupture from any connection regarding the real, such that these connections would only be contingent and secondary, but to the contrary, thought must be born in transcendent truth, and the analysis of what I always take for a subjectivity must show that the fundamental function of the subject is to not be subjective, and that it is borne by the same possibility as the object.

Let us see how Descartes, who does not now consider the connection of thought to the world and thus seems to have fallen upon the *I think* as an *I am* like a resistant part that

one could not remove without that solidity of thought that permits it to proclaim itself *as being* needing to be understood as a function of the real, let us see how Descartes proceeds. Descartes is quite conscious of the fact that he has fallen upon the truth in the middle of the night, that he does not yet know this “I think” simply proclaimed as an “I am.” And so he continues, saying: “But I still don’t know clearly enough what I am, I that am certain that I am [...]” I know it with so little clarity that it isn’t only a question here of the determinations of what I am but even the sense according to which “I am.” There is such a leap between “I think” and “I am” that at the moment of the hypothesis of God (3rd Meditation), this leap will be recognized as such in a very short passage where God threatens even the Cogito. But, to return to our text: therefore “I do not know clearly enough what I am, I who am certain that I am.” I am not even certain what one must understand by “I am”; I am only formally certain, but there is nothing determined, no thought of thought is yet sketched out here,

“so that from now on I must carefully guard against impudently mistaking something else for me, and thus mistaking myself in this knowledge that I maintain to be more certain and more self-evident than all that I had before.”

A stunning passage, where one sees that the most self-evident and certain knowledge is that which one must mistrust the most: one must not “be mistaken” here. [*il ne faut pas s’y méprendre*] Which goes to show that Descartes is always surprising. We have already said that the nature of doubt is to attack certitudes and is not the doubtful in the psychological sense. Here one again sees the same relation between what is certain and doubt: what I am most certain of is the moment at which doubt attains its maximum. Thus doubt is not finished because one has encountered the Cogito, but in reality it continues as a questioning about the sense of this encounter: *in what way* can thought say of itself that it “is”? *In what way* is it the road of inquiry that characterizes first philosophy, the seeking of being such as it is? *In what way* is man, among all beings, the one who in “meeting” himself encounters his sense of being (“I am”), while all things were encountered in their apparent sense [*sens d’apparence*]? Not to be mistaken here, to raise doubt to the level of the certitude of the Cogito: this matters supremely, for here it concerns quite simply the possibility of first philosophy.

The Cogito, in one sense, simply signifies the necessity that the truth be possible, and in that case it is a sort of practical Cogito, a fundamental axiomatic decision. If thought must be possible, the unity of thought and being must be accessible. But this here is rather a faith than a discovery that one can describe. The Cogito is not an “adventure” that only

happens to Descartes. He presents it in this way, for the whole presentation of the *Méditations* is crafted [*artisinale*]: as if in encountering himself man encounters what resists, and this in the form of thought, that is to say, as what of itself affirms being (starting with its own), is of itself access to being itself. But it cannot be a question of an adventure here, nor of a psychological moment of consciousness – this is why it is vain to want to convince oneself of the Cogito – but rather of the possibility of thought in the allegorical form of an encounter. Thus one understands that doubt grows at the same time as certitude.

What has one gained in all this? Is it not worrisome to see thought affirmed as the will to thought, metaphysics repeat its possibility by repeating its definition, and man repeat his fundamental claim. Aren't we stuck turning in circles and floundering in beginnings? But doubt isn't finished, nor are the *Méditations*. The circuit of doubt only concludes in God. For the instant it is like the *trace* of a truth, the Cogito, totally obscure: "not to be mistaken." For: "I do not yet sufficiently know what I am [...]." In the end the Cogito is without any content. It has taken place, but it only understands itself as the allegory of the possibility of thought. In itself, it is already not at all true, already not at all a source of truth: one must begin again. *Once more* is the master word of the *Méditations* because at every instant Descartes strives to restart doubt and to lead it further along: "This is why I will once more consider what I believed to be [...]"

Thus, we are far from compiling results; this is because the road of thought is, to the contrary, one of *posing* questions.

SEVENTH LESSON

THE COGITO

(3) THE REASONABLE ANIMAL

Thus the questions set off again, after the Cogito, identical in degree to those that were before it.

“What then did I believe I was before? Without difficulty, I thought that I was a man. But what is a man? Would I say he’s a reasonable animal? Certainly not: for it would be afterwards necessary to seek out what an animal is and what is reasonable [...]”

The definition of man as *reasonable animal*, as classic as it may be, is rejected by Descartes as non-primitive. Descartes’ tone, disdain, severity, are worth noting here; for the “reasonable animal” definition of man belongs to Aristotle and to all of scholasticism, and it’s also, in the end, that of Plato and the whole tradition. Why does he call an “abusive subtlety” the most venerable definition of man in the whole tradition? *Why refuse to determine man in his complexity*, such that, on the one hand, he manifestly belongs to the animal kingdom, as scientific evidence shows me, and on the other hand, such that, to this fundamental animality is added something essentially different which makes, in spite of this difference, a unity with the rest, that is: reason.

It seems, on the contrary, that the duality that there is between the terms “animal” and “reason” may be a sort of dialectical spring already sprung [*deja tendu*] that is going to give an account of all the richness of human behaviors. One can thus supply many words of wisdom showing that it is always necessary to take into account human weakness [*On peut ainsi alimenter bien des sagesses...*], that is to say, its rootedness in animality, but also its vocation for thought, and try to account for this “disproportion” in a Pascalian style: “What monster, therefore, is man?”

But Descartes refuses. Descartes is the most abstinent philosopher there is: he refuses to use all the resources that such a formula holds within it [*porte en elle-même*]. And if he refuses, it is because he thinks the road of thought is *wholly other*. How is that? What allows him to say that? It is not a question, however, of denying what it is customary to call in philosophy, “the union of the soul and the body,” and for Descartes less than for

anyone (cf. the famous passage on the soul which is not lodged in its body like a pilot in his ship). Descartes has too strong a sense of the concrete to deny the union of soul and body; for him such a union is lived, but it is not the road of thought. Descartes sees in these terms a world of questions, he sees here a non-primitive language; he does not think that one can think by following the language of incarnation, of incarnated minds.

This supposes that there is another language that must account for the language of the union of soul and body and that, itself, would be first: always *order*, which is essential for Descartes. But what does he understand by “order”? It is to start out from what is simple and absolute in order to go to what is more composed, which would suppose a theory that sees truth or being itself as “simple” and as “absolute,” but such a theory is missing in Descartes and is replaced by the evidence regarding the object of representation in mathematics. But what’s missing matters little. We have learned that for Descartes (and we will have to understand in what sense *this* is the road of philosophy) there is an order, and that this order does not consist of a knowing about man, of a wisdom about man that would consider him in his complexity as a union of soul and body, that on the contrary, in this way one gets it right by chance, gets it wrong other times, and always gets caught in an *antimony*. This is what we must show if we want to avoid a critique of the notion of the soul and the body that would simply consist in saying that this union is not simple “because it is composed,” which is a truism. Let us take, therefore, the example of the antimony of responsibility and non-responsibility in the state of anger, and to begin, let us consider the very possibility of anger.

In a state of anger am I carried away? Is reason carried away by a carnal violence? But then, if it is truly carried away, as the tree is carried away by the flood, then there isn’t even any anger but a natural event, a “storm.” Now anger is not exactly a storm, that is what allows it to be criminal, it’s what makes it leave man in remorse and shame.

Is it therefore that what was uprooted could have not been uprooted? If, according to the tradition, to the animal we add reason, the speech [*discours*] of reason will be the following: “Yes, it’s understood, you are an animal, *but* you also have reason; and you could have not got *carried away*.”

“I got carried away.” It’s hypocrisy. Worse, it’s poorly said. And so one never says it. It’s the trees in the floods of the Indies that “got carried away.” Now, I really would like to have got carried away, but I have the decency to disguise what *was* actually this anger. I say: “I let myself get carried away,” as if to say: there was an event, a storm, a flood in which I was able to do nothing. I wasn’t there; I was on the waters, carried away.

Nobody makes excuses for himself in this way; he would bring upon himself a greater affront than the one he suffered in his own anger.

But neither does anyone speak as reason would like him to speak: “I carried myself away,” it is I who produced this anger, who decided to carry myself away. One only speaks thus when one is pressed to apologize, and in order to rid oneself of the burden of the apology, one admits one’s guilt: “I carried myself away; let’s not speak of it any more.” Anger still secretly inhabits the apology, and it triumphs by confessing in this ridiculous way: “I carried myself away.” Reason speaks the same abstract language when it says: “One must not carry oneself away,” as if man picks himself up and carries himself away on his own in anger.

Now, neither did I get carried away, nor did I carry myself away on my own. But really, in precise words: “I let myself get carried away.” There is really something from myself in an anger expressed in this way, something that I *let*...I did not “put” myself in an angry state; I let myself go there. Everything begins with this sort of void where something that is me detaches itself in me and goes drifting off. When I see it, it has already begun. Nothing in this void and this “thing” that is already born recalls the abstract language of reason, the language of the act, which has been *decided* upon, *then* accomplished. Which does not mean that I can do nothing here. But which does mean that the language of duty is also not that which reason, abstractly conceived of as freedom regarding the determination of animality, can account for. Duty is not refusing to get carried away, by gaining a foothold upon the bank of the reasonable from where I would watch the river flow. But this anger that is born in me, in order to stop it, *it is necessary to go there*, it is necessary to descend into this river and recover myself there.¹⁰ What is already born in me as anger, it is not a matter of my abstaining from it; there is no longer time: one must kill it.

The language of the reasonable animal does not account for this lived anger. Moreover, it falls into antinomy. For either I am carried away, and it’s a storm, not anger, or if I am free not to carry myself away, why do I give in? If reason is a fundamental determination, if it is autonomous, why does it give in to the animal? That supposes a fundamental perversity and a “choice” of anger. Now, even if there is a sort of freedom that enjoys losing itself in passion’s extremes, it does not concern a decision made by cold reason that would choose to be carried away. What is disturbing in evil is precisely that it

¹⁰ *M’y reprendre*: recover, or interrupt, or correct oneself. (Tr.)

does not consist in a radical perversity of freedom whose very absurdity would excuse once more.

Thus anger, this sort of loss of all measure in which I breathe comfortably, or rather in which something breathes comfortably which is and is not me (as in dreams), it is a moment infinitely more primitive than the poor language into which the philosophy of the reasonable animal tries to translate it. It is vain to try to find in it the borders of the animal and those of reason. Besides, there isn't even an animal in me: it is as much the mind that allows anger, that *incites* the animal, and is the source for any passion: all the passions are passions of the mind. Animals have precisely no passions, not even desires: they are reduced to needs. Which means that my body is not an animal body; it is first and foremost human flesh. It has not remained without a fundamental change from its supposed union with the soul, but on the contrary, this union defines it as *other*: the body of man is not the body of the animal but other. Also, it is with this body that he can desire or be passionate or be wise. It is never animality to which reason would be added in. Not one of the phenomena that characterizes man is ever thinkable in terms of the union of the soul and the body, where one is only ever dealing with pure paradox or with pure contradiction as such, to the point that the last word of this language is: "What monster then is man?" But it would perhaps be better to say: what monster is this language that insists on cutting me in two parts from which one cannot piece me together again?

But what Language must one, therefore, use? The true language, for Descartes, is that of the radical distinction of extension and thought. We must admit that for us it isn't clear. It will remain to interpret this distinction of extension and of thought in Descartes in order to see in what aspect this language is primitive and not "composite."

The situation is still that the Cogito, seeking what it is, refuses in six lines and with disdain to stop at the steadfast definition of the entire tradition: man is a reasonable animal.

EIGHTH LESSON

THE COGITO

(4) OF THE INFERIORITY OF THE SOUL

“Now, I am a true thing and truly existing, but what thing? I said it: a thing that thinks. And what else? I will excite my imagination to find out if I am not something more. I am not that grouping of members that one calls the human body; I am not a nimble and penetrating air, spread out into all these members; I am not a wind, a breath, a vapor, nor anything at all that I can feign or imagine[...].”

Amazing litany and amazing poem. The mind, what, precisely, is in the world, multiplying negations around itself, and being surprised to not be this or that, a wind, a breath, a vapor nor anything that I can feign or imagine. Why is this? Because anything that I can feign or imagine is always borrowed from the simply given thing: my imagination is objective. It is, consequently, objective, for example, in the philosophical vocabulary of the *substance*, all appearances being appearances of... (what appears). But myself, I do not appear; the mind does not appear. It is originally linked to appearance, but it is not this wind, this breath, this vapor, nor anything. It is perhaps the purest philosophy, this passage in its simplicity, this negative ontology of the “I am,” that immediately protects [*se défend*, forbids itself?] in its truth, that is from being this or that. Let us not believe, then, that we know what is involved in the nature of thought. For the instant, all our knowledge of it is negative.

“But also, it can happen that these same things [...].”

This coming passage shows you that one must not rush, as I however did last time, to criticize Descartes. We must leave him time to say things. I criticized him last time like everyone has pretty much since the *Méditations* were published, and still more since Kant and Husserl, concerning that solitude of the Cogito, which claims to be sure of its sense of being without admitting that the definition of man is to be in the world and not to reside in itself as self-consciousness. But this is a point that Descartes, in spite of the appearance of the texts, has yet to decide upon. For doubt is truly doubt; I mean when doubt denies the world, it rather denies my certitudes regarding the existence of the world, to the extent that

they are not thoughts. It simply denies certitude to the extent that it is not bound to the general problematic of the true. But it does not touch simple consciousness and effectively leaves the problems open. And so Descartes can pose the question that he now poses:

“But also it can happen that these same things [...] these benches, these windows, these lights [...] that I suppose not to be [...]

Understand: that escape from me when I directly pursue them in their sense of being, put otherwise, that I suppose not to be “[...] because they are unknown to me [...]”]: this is in fact said in Descartes. I suppose them not to be. Not that I would say that they are not. I “suppose,” that is to say, I withdraw from my thought, or I withdraw to my thought from what certitude would lead me to pose without ceasing, that is: “this is,” because what I aim for with this little word (“is”) shrinks away ceaselessly in all instances of the real and threatens to only be appearance. Therefore, at what level, in what sense, in what way the real *is*, that is *unknown* to me, and thereby all that I believe about it is considered false.

“But also it may happen that these same things, that I suppose not to be because they are unknown to me, are not indeed different from myself, which I know. I know nothing of them [...]

Which supposes that Descartes has not decided that the Cogito is a subject of representation, which primarily deals only with itself and which would be necessary to take in its radical difference from every thing, as self-consciousness, that would not essentially be concerned with the world, that would only be concerned as a matter of fact (because as a matter of fact it is quite necessary to go eat lunch, and if it is cold outside, I will be cold) but that wouldn't be originally linked to the world in its rationality, or rather in the reason of its rationality, in its ontological truth. Despite appearances, Descartes has not yet professed anything upon this. All that Descartes proposes whether as affirmation or negation are in fact *steps* of doubt, steps towards the beginning of questions. When he was saying earlier: “I am, I exist,” although the world is denied, this does not signify what one mediocly and pompously calls the “solipsism” of consciousness. The Cogito does not signify philosophy's shutting itself up within some domain or other [*je ne sais quel domaine*], chewing over an empty meditation, as Kant says: “The self [*le moi*] by itself is empty.”

And at first, there is no self [*moi*]. For not only am I not “a wind” and “a breath,” but neither am I a consciousness, if one understands by this an interior domain. It is also necessary to focus negative litanies on the subjective. There is no subjective. There is the

real, that is to say, appearance, and there is thought seeking its original bond with the real, itself thought in its origin. But there is not a philosophical domain, an interiority.

Therefore it is false to think that Descartes settles into the Cogito as into thought subsisting alone by itself; this is false despite the appearances of the text. For the text is naive, or more exactly, primitive, archaic; but we know in the arts that primitive works are far from being approximations of classical or renaissance works, but that the primitive arts (we know it, we Modern, at least) that the archaic or primitive arts are actually the *archè* of art, its type, its origin and not simply its naive beginning. In the same way, Descartes doubts and affirms, doubts and denies archaically, primitively. He says: “There is no world,” and makes as if the Cogito was what I found that really wanted not to go away like a soap bubble, as if thought grasped itself. But one does not *grasp hold* of oneself! Thought grasps itself as pure judgment, as pure withdrawal, not as a domain; as a beginning place, not as an object, domain, interiority, a richness to exploit. There is nothing in the Cogito ... if not all that is in doubt. And there is nothing more, while I am speaking to you, in simple consciousness, than the facing pane of glass [*la vitre en face*]. And the “I” as such is not explored.

It is explored in psychology, but it is no longer the “I.” It’s the myth, the rational object that I call consciousness, that the psychologist calls consciousness, and with which it tries to give an account of a certain number of disorders within appearance in order to apply a therapy there. That, if one wants to see a thought there instead of a scientific knowledge, that is to say a mythical knowledge whose object is always a false object, that then is to believe that man has a marionette inside him. And it is true that when I reduce myself to the psychological I have an inner marionette. But that’s not my definition.

So no domain: one always over stuffs the mind. One is afraid of losing it, and one gives it a substance. This homage is in fact an insult. The mind needs no other position than: “I am not this or that.” It does not “face up” to things, and it is not itself a facing domain [*un domaine en-face*], but it is taken up in the same possibility as appearance, and it attends *to* everything, not as a spectator (who simply attends...) but as a co-servant of a single transcendental truth. All the preachers of subjectivity, never believe them. It is not necessary to shut oneself up in a pseudo-self. This is really what Descartes says: I am not even assured that I am not the same thing as things. Herewith every possibility of the *Critique of Pure Reason* remains open. The whole refutation of idealism (of precisely “Cartesian” idealism) that you find explicitly in Kant, is found in seed form in Descartes when he says: “But also may it happen that these same things [...] are not different from me

[...]” I don’t know therefore even what the difference between thought and the real is, nor what their identity is. I am therefore far from saying: this is a subject that has objects, that it imagines them [*se les représente*] and so forth ...I know nothing about all that. So much so that doubt, by dint of being radical, ends up leaving the fundamental metaphysical questions open [*disponibles*]; and that is no small thing, for they are always walled in by rational evidence.

“I do not dispute it *now* [...]”

Again order. The beginning that doubt allows to be attained, or rather the actual departure that doubt as a beginning allows me to attain, the start of an actual realisation of the philosophical work, is thought, is the “I think.” But thereby, and thanks to doubt’s radicality, we posit nothing that is already definitive, in a language in fact borrowed from things. When one thinks man as “subject,” one thinks him in fact as object. Michel Alexandre said that what is shameful in spiritualism is that it is a hidden materialism. Example: to believe that I am a “*spiritus*.” *Spiritus*, it’s a wooden doll. Every language is at first figurative; every language is the puppet show of something true. Thus man says: “I am.” He *figures* himself, as is well said, to be a mind. But thought is really something other than *psuche*, *spiritus* or breath, or domain, or interiority. The possibility that its place may be its original bond to the real remains explicitly open in Descartes. There is not the shadow of a solipsism; there is only the order of the questions:

- (1) the “I think”;
- (2) what is its nature, its links to things.

Thus, provided that you distribute the different affirmations and negations of Descartes as so many *steps* in the search for the true, or of the deepening of doubt, you avoid being blocked in each one and being scandalized because all of a sudden the world disappears, or because the Genius of the False comes to play the devil in a paragraph or two, or because one “traps” the subject, all of which are only allegorical figures of a doubt whose sense resides elsewhere.

“I recognized that I was, and I am looking for what I am, me that I recognized to be [...]”: therefore, no nature of the mind, for the instant, nor any determination of the word to be either.

“Now it is very certain that this notion of knowledge of myself, taken precisely in this way, [...] for I would be feigning in fact if I imagine being something [...]” Thus doubt,

which in the 1st Meditation applied to the side of the world, so that one never mistook being, now bears upon thought so that one never mistakes the “I am.” It is always the same ontological purging. And, until the piece of wax gives me my ontological determination – in fact, it gives it to me according to Kant, but according to Descartes, it is God and not it that gives it to me –, I can only refuse all of them. To be [*être*] remains not a hollow, but an empty word, and “I think” a truth that lasts in truth only because it doesn’t give any contents, or here rather an impression of composure borrowed from unknown proofs in an uncriticized language. It is not necessary to imagine being something. Relate that to the “I am.” Descartes is the man who says both at the same time: “I am,” but above all one must not imagine that I am something.

“Now I know already certainly that I am, and that all together it may happen [...] Following which I clearly see that I would also be little correct by saying: I will excite my imagination in order to know more directly who I am [...],” which he was doing earlier, in these very terms “[...] that if I said: I am now awake and I perceive something real and true [...]” A textual reprise of the terms of the first Meditation (sleep hypothesis). To try to grasp within the sensible the reality of which he is, however, by himself the constant assurance, to assure oneself of this assurance, to assure oneself that the white paper *is*, or that the hand that I am moving *is*, that makes no sense. If not to reveal to what point my thoughts of the reality of the real are sleeping, to what point that which makes up the framework [*trame*] of the simple consciousness is for the reflecting consciousness, or for thought, a nothing. The same holds regarding the “I think.” I am certain of the “I think” as “I am,” but no determination can legitimately be attained here, for the instant in any case (one must go in order.) It does not concern determining what I am, the *quid*, the *quiditas*. Descartes refuses to pounce upon thought as upon an object of thought, a domain, a subjectivity that it would be necessary to question concerning its essence. And so the text becomes more and more surprising, and quasi surrealist:

“[...] but, because I do not yet perceive it clearly enough, I will go to sleep on purpose, so that my dreams show me this very thing with more truth and evidence.”

It starts again! Exactly as in the 1st Meditation regarding the world: “Let us now suppose, therefore, that we are sleeping.” It is the same here for the Cogito: “I will go to sleep on purpose.” As soon as Descartes finds something, he falls asleep. Extraordinary text. When one says “the Cartesian mind,” and understands by that mathematical logic, indeed any kind of good sense, one doesn’t know what one is saying. Descartes comes

from an imagination, and a prodigious metaphysical imagination. Sleep is the means of doubt, its refuge. Everything, therefore, must start again.

“But what, then, am I? A thing that thinks. What is a thing that thinks? [...]”

You are going to see now how one progresses: one progresses by returning backwards [*en revenant en arriere*]. A thing that thinks, it's a thing that wrote the first and the beginning of the second Meditation:

“That is to say a thing that doubts, that conceives, that affirms, that denies, that wants, that doesn't want, that imagines also, and that feels.”

See how the Cogito is, so to speak, described carnally. “A thing that thinks.” We imagine Faust at the foot of his spiral staircase, thinking; or Rodin's “thinker.” Rodin's thinker is naive: returning manifestly into himself. It is thought such as one imagines it, an effort towards the internal. But Descartes does not return into himself at all; he avoids such naivetes. He defines the Cogito purely exteriorly: what is not “interior,” the self, the “I” itself, the unity of thought itself. By what is it defined? By unity? Not at all. But by the diversity of contents: “that is to say a thing that doubts [...] that imagines also, and that feels.” Everything, then, is encompassed, and the Cogito is not a small internal reflexive point; it is simply the constant form of simple consciousness. The Cogito is Descartes taking a walk in Amsterdam; for the instant it is not another thing.

“Certainly, this is nothing small [...] Aren't I still the same one who doubts almost everything, who nevertheless understands and conceives certain things, who assures and affirms only those to be truthful, who denies all the others [...]”

In spite of doubt, or rather inside of doubt, certitudes remain in an uncontrollable state. We all believe, even while reading Descartes, that 2 and 2 are 4 and that the world is real. This is because it is never a question of ruining consciousness such as it is. Philosophy changes nothing. But it produces an extraordinary detachment through which it discovers that all these certitudes are, first off, unsituated, they don't fit nicely together with each other, sense certainty and mathematical certainty, for example, fit together poorly; there are several truths, therefore, there aren't any. Philosophy discovers that I do not know what truth and reality are. Through this there is detachment and absolute detachment. But this absolute detachment only takes aim at thought itself and not at all at the actual form of consciousness. This latter doesn't move. That is why the Cogito includes a being that effectively “affirms,” “denies,” “conceives certain things, assuring and affirming that only

these are true, denying all the others [...] and that senses a lot as well, *as* through the intervention of the sensory organs.”

Watch out for the “as.” Suddenly this strange philosophy, that does not change simple consciousness, astonishingly changes the language of reflexive consciousness, which believes it knows that I sense – which here means: I deal with things – *through the intervention* of bodily organs. One sees through the eyes. One touches *through* one’s hands. Philosophical detachment is translated here through the addition of an “as”: “[...] and that senses a lot, *as* through the intervention of the bodily organs.” What is doubtful here is not the body but an abstract proof that is substituted for the body, i.e. the idea of a center of subjectivity that, through the intervention of the bodily organs, puts together little by little, within diversity, unities that it ends up visualizing. This is refused, or held to be false, because it is essentially uncertain. And, in fact, it is transcendently uncertain. I am not in the real through the *intervention* of the senses, for the very nature of the sensory is opposed to this. What is denied here is not the eye, it is an abstract metaphysical schema whose starting point would be a subject of representation, dwelling somewhere in the body, or having to do with the body, and in whom would resound as representation what the *body* would glean for its part as sensation, or rather as sensory information. *That* is a scientific schema, but it is an abstract scheme from the point of view of perception. Now perception is primary. It is necessary to understand that Descartes’ “as” aims for the idea of intervention, while philosophy aims, on the contrary, for there not being any intervention, for our living originally, and not through intervention, in the real. Compare this to Plato’s *Theaetatus*, the famous text that opposes the dative form to the expression *dia* + accusative in order to express what it is to “see.”

NINTH LESSON

THE PIECE OF WAX (2ND MEDITATION)

The famous analysis of the piece of wax is a sort of counter-proof to the first part of this second Meditation; it is also introduced by a recalling of the very title of the meditation whose terms are found here expressly:

“But I cannot keep myself from believing that the bodily things whose images are formed in my thoughts, and that fall under the senses, may be much more distinctly known than that unknown part of myself which does not fall under the imagination [that is to say, under thought].”

Also, equally the result of the analysis is to reinforce the certitude of the Cogito:

“But in the end [says the last paragraph of the Meditation], insensibly returned to where I wanted to be; for, since it is a thing that is known to me at present, that, to put it plainly, we only conceive of the body through the faculty of understanding that is in us, and not through the imagination nor through the senses, and that we don’t know them by seeing them or by touching them, but only by conceiving of them through thought, I evidently know that there is nothing that for me is easier to know than my mind.”

The analysis of the piece of wax, as the return to the persistent evidence of the World after doubt and in spite of it, is therefore destined to assure the mind of itself *in its primacy*. This will be secured when the mind will have been shown as the truth of perceptive certitude, when it will have been shown *first* within that which itself seems to be opposed to its primacy and which seems as primitive as it: the perceived thing.

The whole passage speaks, therefore, the language of self-consciousness and has for a result showing that *the second question of philosophy, after thought itself, is not the world, but God*. This comment must be for us the occasion for coming back to our beginning. In that beginning we noted that in relation to the traditional concept of metaphysics Descartes’ *Metaphysical Meditations* are presented, according to their complete title, as only covering at first half of this concept (that is to say as concerning *Metaphysica specialis* and not *Metaphysica generalis*), and subsequently as only consisting of two of the three “objects”

of special metaphysics itself: i.e. the soul and God, with the exception of the World. This exception of the world already produces the emergence and the entire movement of the first Meditation and ends up, at the beginning of the second Meditation, with the affirmation of the “I think” as “I am,” in a total indetermination of the sense of the verb “to be.” Now it is not the piece of wax that will put an end to this ontological indetermination of thought, since to the contrary it will refer itself back to thought, to the end of the questioning it will undergo concerning its being.

One must even note that the analysis is not presented thematically as a questioning of the piece of wax concerning its being, but as an inquiry into what is “known distinctly” in it, or rather into itself as “known distinctly.” What, however, does “known distinctly” mean in the context of the first and second Meditations if not: known as “true and existing”? In other terms, as being (*étant*)? When the title of the second Meditation declares: “Of the nature of the human mind, and that it is easier to know than the body,” we must understand that it is easier to know as being (*étant*) (in the verbal sense of the participle), as the first Meditation well shows, that “knows” the Cogito as “I am, I exist.” From there we can, and we even must, draw this consequence, that in the second part of the text it is also a matter of the perceived thing such as it is. The general sense of the passage will therefore really be to show that the analysis of the perceived real such as it *claims to be* sends me back to the being of thought and not to that of the perceived. Thus, the knowledge of God will be, in the order, second, and that of the World, only third, through the intermediary of divine Veracity. This situation will endure in philosophy until the moment that Kant will summarize in the *theory of the refutation of Idealism* the general senses of its “deduction,” i.e. that the Cogito can only assure itself of itself in the original bond that unites it to the perceived *as real*. Again the language of phenomenality and that of representation (of a self consciousness) are inextricably mixed in Kant himself.

In the movement of Descartes’ *Méditations* the piece of wax is not therefore a decisive step: on the contrary, it confirms that the first decisive step is the Cogito in its ontological interpretation, and that the second will only be the divine step. Such is really the sense of the text, taken in its intentions and its results, in short, in its role inside the economy of the first three Meditations.

It is, however, possible to consider the famous analysis in itself, so to speak. It then appears as the first approach, along with certain passages of Plato and Kantian thought, to a unity of thought and the reality of the real *established at the heart of the perceived (as possibility of the perceived)*. The body of the analysis is not only framed, in fact, by the

two texts that we have already cited, the first of which introduces a sort of competition for ontological evidence between perceived things and thought, and the second of which determines the competition in favor of the Cogito. It is also framed by two other texts that situate the place of the debate at the level of the possibility of the perceived and not at the level of science or of rational philosophical knowledge. It follows that the universality of the understanding appears for the first time there where Kant will try to keep it: within the possibility of the universe as appearing. Those two texts are the following:

– At the beginning of the analysis:

“Let us begin with the consideration of the most common things, and that we believe we understand the most distinctly, i.e. the bodies that we touch and that we see. I do not intend to speak of bodies in general, for these general notions are ordinarily more confused, but of someone individual.”

– And in the conclusion:

“Now what is this wax that cannot be conceived by the understanding of the mind? Certainly, it’s the same that I see, that I touch, that I imagine, and the same that I knew from the beginning. But what is to be noted, *its perception*¹¹, or the action through which one perceives it, is not a vision, nor a touch, nor an imagination, and never was it, however much it seemed to be thus before, but it was only an inspection by the mind [...]”

These preliminaries on the general situation of the text being established, we must now come from there to the body of the analysis.

“Let us take this piece of wax which was just pulled from the hive: it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey it contained; it still retains something of the scent of the flowers from which it was harvested; its color, its shape, its size, are apparent; it is hard; it is cold; one touches it; if you hit it, it gives off a sound. Finally, everything that can distinctly make a body known comes together in this.”

What is notable in this beginning is that the appearing thing is not reduced in advance to its abstract philosophical substitute. Firstly, because the “secondary qualities” (that is to say, what corresponds on the one hand to the sensory, on the other hand, to the

¹¹ Italics added.

intelligible) are precisely not distinguished as one part and another of the object, but are named as so many ways in which the thing itself is shown, and are named *pele-mele*. Thus color and scent are listed on the same level as figure and size. And secondly because the sensory is not considered either in a way that cuts it off already from the appearing real, whether through a reference to my senses (conceived of as organs of subjective representation) or through a reference to “temporal” alteration (which lets no identical content subsist.) Thus the “sweetness” is not yet that “sweetness” that only exists in philosophy’s examples, as one finds it, for example, in certain of Plato’s detours where it is a matter of knowing if the wine is sweet *for* one man and bitter *for* the other, that is to say, where sweetness is reduced to sensed-sweetness. In this beginning of Descartes, on the contrary, the world enters through all the windows into the description, which already is not an “analysis,” which is to say a philosophical reduction of appearance. Sweetness does not appear for itself (like the famous “whiteness of white” in Aristotle), neither is it replaced already by the sensual experience of the sweet, conscious of itself and self-occupied. Sweetness is nothing: it is the appearing honey; not *the* sweetness, but “sweetness of the honey.” Furthermore, scent is not considered beforehand as the *scented* as such, that is to say as the corollary of nasal representation (if one dares say): it is “scent of flowers.” Finally, neither the hard nor the cold are taken for themselves, that is to say, for appearances having as their proper standard status some substance *through which* the object would be proclaimed. Here it is not a matter of the *durities*, as in the *Principles*, an abstract sort of sensible representation, defined very obscurely as a psychological experience of resistance to the movement of the hands; it is not a matter of the *durities*, of the “hard” as such. Hard is nothing if not what the piece of wax *itself* is. The cold is nothing either that one may detach for itself (for example, in order to wonder, as Descartes will do in the third Meditation, if it is only “deprivation of heat” or something else), the cold is “cold-piece-of-wax.” This is why Descartes doesn’t analyse the sensory but rather lets appearance appear and says nothing about qualities, unless it is always as that which the object is: “it is hard; it is cold.”

This respite in the phenomenon, this short moment of the World in philosophy – we will lose it, or rather Descartes is going to lose it quite quickly enough. This is why he *must* take all his time in this beginning. So as to better know what we are going to lose. And also what the inspection of the mind commits itself to being equal to, what it commits itself to being the possibility of. This piece of wax, in this beginning, is still full of the scent of the world from which it was harvested, and which philosophy, not only Cartesian (for it does not see this garden where it gets its examples), but again Kantian and even

Husserlian philosophy has not yet today begun to remember, has not in any case been able to continue to begin.

The death knell of this pure moment of appearance sounds right from the second sentence:

“Finally, all the things that can make a body distinctly known, combine in this one here.”

It is the death knell because:

(1) the certitude of being that makes up the stuff of perceiving consciousness and that is not a *moment* for it, something that is detached and that is noted, is here taken to the contrary as a *knowledge* of this: that the body *is*.

(2) Because all the aspects of the wax are divided into appearances that *are* not the body but that *make it known* [*le font connaître*]; that are not the very moment of the object, but meet up in it and converge towards it.

To tell the truth, the sentence itself can also be understood in a neutral sense, in a sense that is not already philosophical, provided that one takes as “a manner of speaking,” as a turn of phrase current in the 17th century, the two expressions “to make known” [*faire connaître*] (to say quite simply “to show”) and “to meet up” [*se rencontrer*] (to say quite simply “to appear” [*se montrer*]) But the following paragraph does not leave us this choice. With it the description ends, and the analysis begins.

“But look here, while I speak, one puts it near the fire: what remained of the flavor is gone, the scent disappears, its color changes, its shape is lost, its size grows, it becomes liquid, it gets hot, hardly can one touch it, and no matter how one hits it, it no longer gives off any sound. Does the same wax remain after this change? One must admit it remains, and no one can deny it.”

This passage is more precisely the hinge between the simple description and the one of philosophical analysis. There remains in it, in fact, something of the primitive indissociation [*indissociation primitive*] of the qualities and of the object itself, in the sense that the color that changes is always “*its* color,” the shape that changes, “*its* shape.” These possessives signify that the alteration of the appearances of the object is not yet separated from the object itself, that there is not yet any split in the language between a moment or

level of appearances, that would also be the one of pure change, and a moment or level of the object, that would be the pole of identity itself, of abstract identity. But the aim of this passage is clearly to establish such a split between whose terms may be inserted the question of the possibility of their unity.

In the language of description, the forms of change and the forms of the “same” are themselves a single and same form. It is the *wax-that-changes* that is seen and that it is a matter of describing. The passage from description to analysis consists in putting on one side all the “changing,” and on the other, the identity of “what” changes. How is this substitution possible and even, in a sense, evident? How even is it possible *because* it is evident and from what evidence? To respond to this question it is necessary to return to the beginning, to the lines where Descartes shows pure appearance. In this beginning we were saying that the moment of appearance and the moment of the object are not already distinguished, that neither exists precisely as a moment. But that was to stay at the midway point in the commentary. There remains still something for us to recognize in this beginning, that we have therefore left too quickly in spite of the slowness we wanted to bring to it. It remains to note in fact that in the primitive indissociation of the aspects of the thing and the thing itself, the latter has not got the same standing, if one may say, as its own aspects: it *is* only there under the effaced form of the little word “is.” Constant form of all the richness and determinations of appearance, the object, however, *itself does not appear*: “its color” said the beginning, “its shape, its size *are apparent*; it is hard, it is cold [...]”

It is already in this detail of the initial text that appearance in its content takes center stage, passes before appearance in its form; it is already in this turning that it is destined to become the philosophical notion of appearance. The possessive or genitive form of the object is, to the contrary, effacement of itself. When, of the piece of wax, I say: “it is hard,” it is that hardness itself, however perceptively and not already through conceptual abstraction, that takes the initiative or the advantage. The real here does not reveal that what there is that is hard in this hard piece is that it is hard. Perception is mute concerning its ontological constitution; this is also why, even if appearance will have become the decisive instance for thought, that is to say beginning with Kant, and thematically beginning with Husserl, thought will not consist for all that in “returning to the world” purely and simply, but rather in looking for *its* language in which the mute world could be said.

But to go no further than Descartes’ piece of wax, let us therefore now note what we had neglected in our first commentary on the beginning, i.e. that the evidence of appearance

is prepared at the very heart of perception, at the heart of the indivision of appearance and its objective form. For this indivision itself includes an essential inequality, i.e. that the appearing determinations (the “content,” the richness of aspects) are declared while the objective unity, if it is never missing, never declares itself either as what is the “*clarum*” of which all this is declared. To the contrary, the being of the perceived is itself inappearance and retreat. And so Descartes can say, while falling over the evidence of the perceived, that these aspects, in their richness of determination, “make known” the body. Only Kant will try to show that it is, on the contrary, the objective unity that is the condition of the public appearance of appearance [*la parution de paraître*], that it is this unity that diversifies the “miscellany of intuition.”

What have we gained by this regression? This: that we have approached the origin of philosophical abstraction. This abstraction is *committed*, we said, when the analysis leaves description in order to put to one side all changing, and to the other, “what” changes.

But we now perceive that the distinction of analysis and description, the description of the philosophical and of the authentic (primitive) lived experience, is not as simple as we would have been able to believe it to be. For if there really is, in the “description” that opens the piece of wax, a “moment of the world” that has some purity and authenticity, that is to say, in which the aspects of the thing and the thing are not already distinguished, there is also an obedience on Descartes’ part regarding the “retreating” character of the objective unity or identity itself, which goes as far as oblivion, the total oversight [mistaking] of the link between being and quality in the “description”: “it is hard, it is cold [...].”

Thus in the evidence of the perceived, appearance already has the seeds of its autonomy as a “moment” distinct from the “moment” of the object. Which is also to understand that philosophical abstraction has its insertion into the world, far from being an “error” pure and simple.

It appears however to be a pure and simple error to ask as Descartes does: “Does the same wax remain *after* this change?” For this change itself has never ceased to be the change-of-the-wax; it was not a change in itself of appearance in itself, of which one then wonders if I am going to be able to recognize in it my piece of wax. But the sense of Descartes’ question is that it is inevitable from the time of description itself. For the result of this description, and even its soul from the beginning is that objective identity comes “*after*” the determinations of content, and it is they and only they that “*are apparent*;” identity happens “*after*,” in fact, even if it is “*always there*” through the presence of the possessive and of the little word “*is*” in the description, because it is thus everywhere

present as some absolutely effaced thing which has no determination of its own, that is *nothing*.

This “nothing” of the ontological determination not being recognized as the whole of “real” determinations, this “nothing” of the object not being sought as the whole of the aspects, these latter subsist from now on for themselves and constitute the philosophical level of *appearance*.

Thus reduced to itself, this level of appearance which is missing the moment of the “same,” cannot therefore account for the unity of the perceived:

“What is it therefore that one knew in this piece of wax with so much distinction? Certainly it cannot be anything of all that I noted through the intermediary of the senses, since all things that fall under taste, or smell, or sight, or touch, or hearing, find themselves changed, and yet the same wax remains.”

TENTH LESSON

THE PIECE OF WAX (CONTINUED)

Last time we had reached the point where the birth of philosophical analysis in naive description was accomplished, that is to say, the point where appearance is detached for itself. Immediately the determinations of appearance separate from the world in order to become the content of the representation of a subjectivity. In demonstrating that the contents thus considered do not contain their unity, Descartes really inaugurates a sort of transcendental philosophy: he shows that the thing of perception cannot spring up from consciousness's frequent contact with contents, that is to say it cannot spring up at the completion of the "sensed" or the "imagined." It is necessary therefore that the unity of the perceived be an original unity, and there is the place of thought, also rendered in its original dimension under the name of understanding.

But at the same time, since the perceived world was reduced, through the ambiguities of the beginning, to the rank of appearance, *this transcendental critique of appearance is as well a pure and simple surpassing of perception*, a surpassing in which the "mind" finds itself alone in the world (according to Descartes' bizarre expression, since its solitude consists precisely in being-in-the-world not being contained in the "I am.") The result of this is that there are, so to speak, *two possible readings* of this famous analysis of the piece of wax. One, in fact, is grounded in this essential aspect of the text according to which the deduction of the understanding (to speak Kantian: it is in fact the moment) is rooted in the possibility of perception; but the other is grounded in the fact that perception has not been able to keep the authenticity it possesses in the exhibition of the piece-of-wax that still has the scent of the world (at the beginning, consequently) for which is substituted the abstract notion of appearance, so that the critique of appearance for Descartes equals a critique of the world. The second reading is the one that is the truest if one considers the intentions and results that are Descartes'; the first is the truest absolutely speaking, that is to say, the one that gives us the most to think about. As for the actual reading of the texts, it is situated precisely at the junction of these unjoinable languages, that is to say, *it begins with the ontological ambiguity itself*. To set oneself down in such ambiguity is not however to mix everything up; on the contrary, it is the only way to unravel [*demêler*] the actual obscurity of the text in its very details. Let us come, then, to these details:

“Perhaps it is what I now think, i.e.: that the wax was neither this sweetness of the honey, nor that pleasant scent of flowers, nor that whiteness, nor that shape, nor that sound, but only a body that a little while before appeared to me under these forms and that now gets noticed under others?”

Here begins the intermediary passage where Descartes, who renounces imputing the unity of the object to sensory qualities reduced to themselves (or rather to their philosophical substitute) has not yet brought the analysis to the point of recognizing in this unity the inspection of the mind. In this passage Descartes is looking for what remains of the piece of wax once I have removed from it all the sensory aspects through which it was making itself known, since I discovered that it is not *through* these sensory aspects that the unity is known but *in the unity* that every sensory thing conforms to its definition, that is to say, *can* actually be sensed.

This moment which is not the last – far from it – which is only provisional, which, finally, is even a faulty moment of explanation, would consist, when faced with the incapacity of the sensed to give an account of the unity, in imputing this unity to the body itself. What does one understand by “the body itself?” Necessarily something abstract (“corporality” so to speak) since it is not any of the ways the body actually is for me, that is to say, not any of the ways it shows itself. All these ways, which are all sensory ways, have been cleared away. To know more precisely what Descartes understands here by the body “itself,” we must pay attention to the repetition of the word “under” [*sous*] in the passage that we are reading:

“[...] a body that a little while before appeared to me *under* these forms and that now gets noticed *under* others [...]”

The passage therefore means: perhaps the wax is not any of these appearances, but that which remains “beneath” and which is something else. It is the idea of the transcendence of the object either as an object of physics, or as an object of metaphysics, in relation to the sensory. In other words it is the classical notion of substance: *sub-stare*, to stand [*se tenir*] under. Now, it is precisely this notion that Descartes is going to critique.

“But what is it, precisely speaking, that I imagine when I conceive of it in this way?”, that is to say, as a body that is presented *under* certain aspects, then *under* other aspects.

“Let us consider it attentively [...] Certainly there remains nothing but something extended, flexible and mutable.”

A simple recalling of the consequences of the reduction to appearance of all sensory determinations: these “second” qualities being removed, there only remain the “first” qualities. But what matters to us is the question that comes now and its answer. The question is:

“Now what is this : flexible and mutable? Is it not that I imagine that this wax being round is capable of becoming square, and of going from square to a triangular shape?”

And the response is stupefying and deserves interpretation:

“Certainly not, that’s not it [...] “

However, we believed to have understood that for Descartes the reality of the real is precisely the *res extensa*, the extended thing and that it was not necessary to account for the richness of appearance other than through a composition of that extremely simple nature which is extension itself, such that each time it would be extension itself that would be present *under* the singularity of the aspects of things such as we experience them [*nous les vivons*], and that there would be nothing that could correspond to any of these singularities, if not each time extension itself. Thus, appearance would be a composition of the inapparent, of the absolutely inapparent, of the extension that *is* only at the level of the intelligible. Now, Descartes does not stop there. Why? Because I cannot follow through the imagination, he says, the infinite modifications that this explanation would suppose of a simple nature, folding into itself, composing itself of itself in thousands and thousands of ways with the aim of rejoining the actual diversity in which the real is given to me.

What is the sense of the supposition that is advanced here? “Is it not that I imagine that this wax being round is capable of becoming square, and of going from square to a triangular shape?” This supposition would signify that shape is contingent, that the form of things is contingent, that the essential is the (transcendental) matter or content as such. We would then be within the classical split of form and matter in which I can imagine that matter takes on all forms. But Descartes refuses: “Certainly not, that’s not it [...]”

The reason for this refusal is surprising; for it is to send back the categories to the imagination; it is to send back the category of substance, whose Cartesian expression is extension, to the imagination. It is true that it is not the first time that we see that the categories are not the level at which the Cartesian approach, Cartesian doubt, stops. Already, the Evil Genius signified precisely that intelligible evidence can itself also be cast into doubt, *must* also be cast into doubt, which supposes that there can be, however, in the

the most constant inevitable forms of my thought, in the supreme logical forms, an appearance, a “trickery” [*tromperie*] as Descartes says. Here too, it would be trickery to imagine that the unity of the objects of perception, of perceived things, comes to them from substance, that all the real is in its reality only a single and same extension that I never see as such (no one sees extension or matter) but that I would see, each time, in each object simply as it appears and not as it is, in other words, that I would see in the composite state. I would see the simple always in its composite state, but in itself it would not cease to be the simple. This idea is the idea that *there is* matter, it is the idea of the physical transcendence of an object, and that all we see at the level of perception is only appearance. All the differences in things are thus only the appearance of the composition of a same reality with itself. There are already similar schemas in the *Regulae* (nor is this the first time that we see that the *Meditations* go quite further than the *Regulae*), when Descartes tries to give an account of different colors as greater or lesser degrees of the composition of extension (cf. the drawings of the *Regulae*). The underlying idea in these pictures – it is invincible in each one of us, it is a logical form of thought, which is why I call it a category – is that man, so far as he simply is in the real, so far as he simply perceives, is not through himself at the level of the true, that is to say of what is; that, on the contrary, he only deals with the appearance of what actually is, which being is consequently subjacent to this appearance, or more exactly, *is as it does not appear and appears as it is not*. Thus is extension.

Such a metaphysics of the physical object in its transcendence regarding perception is necessarily the metaphysics that science leads to. For example, I am obliged to think that red as such is a pure subjective determination, and that, taken in its objectivity, it quite simply concerns a certain vibration defined by its wavelength and its frequency, which in itself is not at all red. And I can reduce all of the sensory to a sort of scale of vibrations that have no relation with the way in which they are actually experienced, whether as sound, or as treble, bass, bright, dull, red, etc.; consequently, all the sensory would only be the envelope of physical realities. And in truth this wouldn't be *nothing*: it would simply be *my* relation to these realities, because there could not be any appearance that subsists as such. One must say squarely that it is not. What has being, is the physical definition of what I feel, I, a finite consciousness, but I do not feel its being, I feel it in determinations that have nothing to do with this physical reality unless this physical reality produces all the substance, all the reality of what I see. What I see *is* a vibration, and *I* believe that it is red.

The categories are notions of the same type; they are in the same sense transcendent to appearance. The idea of substance only generalizes this explanation through the

transcendence of the physical object. It comes down to practicing this analysis at all levels of the real in order to arrive at this: that there is only matter as such which is not equal to any of the sensory determinations under which I encounter it, and under which science itself always encounters it, science itself explaining ceaselessly through the object a system of appearances but being obliged because of this to also make this object itself appear and consequently finding itself before a new system of appearances that has *its* objective reason. The ultimate idea of all this is that there is an infinity of appearances for a reality taken in itself, which is extension in Cartesian terms, or in the whole tradition, “substance.” Now, it is precisely this idea that Descartes imputes to the imagination. In the 17th century, imagination is always the contrary of understanding, of thought; it is the false itself, being “mistress to error and duplicity.” It is to suppose, therefore, that there is an imagination in metaphysics, and even perhaps that metaphysics, under its classical categorial form, is an “imagination” of what is, but is not necessarily true.

“Certainly not, it is not that, since I conceive of it as capable of receiving an infinity of similar changes [...].”

We come to see, in fact, that the infinity is in the very idea of the difference of the real and its appearance,

“[...] and I could not nevertheless run through this infinity in my imagination, and consequently, this conception that I have of the wax is not finished by the faculty of imagining.”

What does this mean? Why is it necessary to “run through” this infinity with his imagination? It is because it concerns giving an account of the perceived object, not of the world of science, but of the world of perception, of the first way in which the world is encountered and not of its first objective explanation by science; it concerns the world itself, appearing. It is necessary to rejoin, to account for the piece of wax, not as a chemical concept of wax, nor as a metaphysical concept of the object in general (substance, extension), but it concerns accounting for the unity of the perceived object. It is, in fact, an absolutely simple experiment that Descartes makes: he takes a piece of wax and melts it; he observes that all the sensory aspects are modified, but that they are always modified under the following form: that is to say, as aspects *of* the object. This *alteration* is an alteration of the same; put otherwise, *it is not an alterity*. The sensory qualities do not fall on one side and the object on the other, but the object *itself* changes. In order to be able to say that the object changes – old analysis: it is in Aristotle – permanence is necessary, which is to say, it does not change. It is necessary in any case that something doesn’t change. It is the

relation of appearances (improperly named; one should say aspects) to what they are the aspect of, to the unity that they constantly announce and that they contain. This is what it is necessary to account for. And it is this that is not accounted for by a reality that is at infinity in relation to all possible appearances. “It is not possible to run through this infinity.” Which means that if unity is transcendent in relation to diversity, if it is taken as the alterity of the Sensory and the form of the Same, then this alterity is an infinity that I can never run through, it is an irremediable split. If, in fact, the unity is beyond all appearances, if none of the appearances contain it, if I make the change in appearances into a sort of metaphysical absolute (it changes, therefore it changes absolutely), then these successive unities, more exactly this diversity of appearances that constantly change content and are only precisely defined as content, has definitively lost the form of unity, it is no longer the changing aspect of a thing. If this thing is posited at the infinity of all appearances, as the simple that is composed in thousands and thousands of ways, how is this unity that is never at the level of appearance but always beyond going to account for the unity of appearance? It is impossible because it is impossible that simple consciousness constantly run through the infinite difference that there is between the unity of the simple in itself and all the “compositions” that it can take on. But I don’t have, I don’t *ever* have to “run” behind the diversity in order to unify it or in order to recognize a unity in it. There are no difficulties in perception. Never. This is what really creates them in philosophy. The hardest thing to think is the simple; the fact that it is a quite simple experiment to melt a piece of wax and say: it’s the same piece that melts. Of course. But this simplicity here is precisely what one cannot explain with the simple taken abstractly. For it is abstractly taken when it is taken in the sense of “simple nature,” as will happen later in Descartes (but in the first three Meditations all metaphysics is open, not decided), that is to say in the sense of the reality that is no longer doubled into appearance and reality, but which *is*, absolutely speaking. If what is absolutely speaking is cut off from all appearances as the idea of matter is cut off from all the actual richness according to which I deal with the rough, a tree, some bark, some water (but never with “matter”), then this categorical simplicity of substance is an inclination of reason that is rather its falling. It is an inclination of reason when I reflect *on* the content of experience, but this evidence is also Reason that talks nonsense: metaphysical *imagination*, and this because my actual imagination (that is to say the fact that the real actually makes a figure for me: *imago*) cannot be explained thereby.

Said another way, when one has cut off the intelligible from the sensory, one can no longer put them together; once unity is supposed as the beyond of diversity, it can no longer

be the unity of that diversity. It is therefore unity in itself. It falls on its side, diversity falls on the other, and thereby diversity is no longer a diversity. It is in fact a diversity only if it diversifies the being *one*: the aspects of the wax change only because the wax in them continues to appear. But if there were simply aspects of things, aspects taken absolutely, aspects of nothing, there wouldn't even be any aspects. The object – this is the second analogy, the Kantian deduction of the notion of substance – the object is the very form of the real, of the sensory, it is the possibility of experience to the extent that it must appear since it actually appears. This appearance supposes that I am never given over to contents as such in the instant, so well named: the In-stant, that is to say what doesn't stand, what has no stature, *id quod non stat*. To such a point that no object can remain there. For what is proper to appearing is that the object stands, and that there is no difficulty in this. But this is what is in question, once more, in the thought: where does unity come from? How is it necessary to think unity? This unity is difficult to think because, on the one hand, it is not in any contents, it is not the same thing – at least, I believe at first that it is not the same thing as each of the aspects of the thing, and in fact, in a certain way, it is not each of the aspects of the thing; it is even *necessary* that it be another thing, that it be other, that it withdraw in relation to each of its aspects, because it is only in this withdrawal that these aspects are accessible themselves as aspects of the thing: thus in Kant the form of space as *a priori* signifies a withdrawal, that is, the real is not purely thrown there, willy nilly, for a consciousness to which one would say: “figure it out now, perceive *this*,” but if it is originally perceptible, if this origin itself is never stuck in contents, it *is* not. The very form according to which things *are*, this form is not, it is neither this nor that, but it is the possibility of all the rest. And at the same time, this withdrawal (*sub-stare* in this sense is a precise idea: the real stands under the form of an “under,” it is always retreating, it comes from elsewhere. It is because it comes from a unity that is in retreat in relation to a diversity that this diversity appears and diversifies) but at the same time therefore, and in the same stroke, and, however, it seems to the contrary, this unity that must be a withdrawal, must be the form of the diverse. It is not necessary that it be posited beyond, that it be hypo-statized as an existing substance *under* what would only be appearance. For if I make of being a domain other than the domain of appearance, appearance can no longer even appear. Now this is what occurs in the classical notion of substance, and it is again what occurs in the Cartesian notion of extension. And so, as our passage says: “*It is only this [...]*” That won't do since “I conceive of it as capable of receiving an infinity of similar changes, and I would nonetheless not be able to run through this infinity with my imagination.”

“What now is this extension? Is it not also unknown since in the wax that melts it grows [...]”

Descartes little by little is going to free the concepts of the extended or extension (*res extensa*) from all traces of the imagination, in order to completely purify it and truly make of it the transcendental concept of substance. Notably, he is going to remove from this extension, if one dares say, its extension: it is neither big nor small.

“Isn’t it also unknown since in the wax that melts it grows and is found to be still larger when it is entirely melted, and a lot more still when the heat is increased more? And I would not truly and clearly conceive of what truth is if I did not think that it is capable of receiving more variety according to its extension than I ever imagined.”

Extension is not therefore a *substratum* that has a defined quantity. It is not through the defined quantity of the object that I come to perceive it as one. That’s not it either. For this quantity itself varies. It is not the imagined extension that helps me gather together diversity as the diversity of a *same* piece. The Same escapes us again.

“It is necessary that I fall in agreement with the fact that I could not even conceive with the imagination of what this wax is, and that it is only my understanding that conceives of it.”

In opposition to the imagination, my understanding designates here what ceases to form an *image* of reality as such, an image of being. It is not necessary to form an image of the ontological support of the real. Certainly, there is only a real because the sensory is by origin, or again because the unity of being is the foundation of the possibility of any actual unfolding of appearance, but one must not imagine the reality of the real, one must not posit it somewhere as a sort of big plastic material below: the *upo-keimenon*, sub-stance, *das Unter-liegende*, what lies below. Being is not posited under things; reality is not under appearances, because then it would never connect to them, it would no longer be the unity of anything, that is to say that being would fall into nothingness, would be a hollow concept. Now, I have an absolute need for this concept, it must absolutely not be hollow; it is the form of every plenitude, on the contrary; it is the form of the diverse. We must not let the Universe go away in order to stay with the contents [*pour en rester au contenu*] because in fact it is the Universe that is the composure that the so-called contents produce as appearances. So, no metaphysical imagination, “there is only my understanding alone that

conceives of it.” There is, on the contrary, imagination as soon as I *represent* reality as such.

In its essence, this Cartesian doubt is the unceasing fulfillment of the task Plato himself proposed for philosophy: “One must extract being from everything.” Here, it is the high point, one extracts it from itself, one refuses to posit it, to imagine it, that is to say, to think it poorly, to think it as a sort of great thing. “There is only therefore my understanding alone that conceives of it.”

“I say this piece of wax in particular; for wax in general, it is still more evident [...]”

It is quite evident, in fact, that wax in general, the *conceptus communis* of wax, its chemical definition for example – there is only my mind that conceives of that. I am wholly ready to admit that common concepts are abstract and that when one sees water one does not see the developed formula H-O-H. There is only my mind that conceives of H₂O, it is not seen. Still, the articulation of science with perception would demand many other developments. But Descartes is not now speaking of the generality of science. What he wants to show is that the non-visible is the form of the visible in its singularity. This only comes under the understanding or the mind, and one must not try to find it in things, one must not try to *see* it. Being is certainly the form – the being that Descartes calls understanding, that is, finally, to say, substance, is certainly the form of the possibility of seeing. One must give up imagining, that is to say, giving the form of an object to substance. And so as I refuse to posit it everywhere, I appropriate it for myself. Descartes says: “there is only my understanding that conceives of it,” and finally from there he will come to say: it *is* my understanding. Which is probably an illegitimate passage. You will see that, contrary to Descartes, the Kantian Cogito is only sure of itself under the condition of the unity of the world itself, and it is far from bringing about this unity. But as Descartes effects a sort of negative ontology, as he extracts being from everything – and he is right – as he cannot, therefore, posit it, it seems to him that it is a sort of nothingness, that there isn’t any of it, that there is nothing in the world that might be its being (and this proposition remains true); from which arises the sort of necessity of sending the instance of unity back to thought itself. This unity being unable to come to me from any thing, no matter how I dig into it and how I suppose that it lies under itself (*sub-stat*), as in any case unity does not account at this moment or appearance, we must cease positing it, we must cease imagining it, “there is only my understanding that conceives of it.” But from there Descartes makes a

kind of leap in spite of everything by making the mind responsible for the unity of the world.

But one must never criticize great authors; one must manage to make them give birth, to make them say what one wants them to say. Not through violence, but because, when they are great, they have already said it, they have already gone beyond the meager critiques that one is capable of addressing to them. Here, for example, what is the role of the mind? One must be wary as soon as one sees in philosophy the mind that “constitutes” experience; no one believes in this, and one is quite right not to believe in it. “I was quite gifted,” Alain says in substance when he tells of his entrance into Lagneau’s class, “because if one had put into doubt before me the existence of the world, I would have fled as fast as my legs could carry me.”

In the same way that philosophy does not consist in pretending that there is no world (cf. the commentary on the first Meditation), neither does it consist in pretending there is a sublime activity, however hidden and unknown and below the surface of actual consciousness – sublime activity, quasi divine, of a transcendental dimension of consciousness, as if there was an “I think” behind what we actually are as thought (which isn’t declared with so much mystery and fulguration), as if there was an “I think” that itself was in on it, that is to say, in the creative plan and would work on the possibilities of things. The mind producing the real; no one believes it. Blissful incredulity. But also, this moment is not in Descartes, contrary to the fact that one imagines Descartes to be the man who imputes to understanding, we have said, the unity of the real as the singular object of perception; as if the world needs the consciousness of man to constitute it, as if it were going to fade away [*s’évanouir*]. But that is not exactly what Descartes says. He says that it is not necessary to imagine being, that one must conceive of it; but he doesn’t say more, he doesn’t say that this conception is some unknown transcendent constitution of experience. We will therefore have to understand it otherwise. In what sense is mind in its place, caught up itself in the possibility of things, this here is what it will be necessary to understand: in what sense it is consequently a participant in the origin, but not an actor, hidden from itself, which would secularize more or less the Christian concept of creation.

“Now what is this wax that can only be conceived of through the understanding of the mind? Certainly, it is the same one that I see [...]”

Descartes only assures himself of thought at the level of perception. Not at the level of knowledge that constitutes intelligible systems in order to unite appearances or an abstract object, nor at the level of metaphysical knowledge that unites all appearance in the

abstract object *par excellence* which is sub-jacent reality. Descartes refuses to seize the unity of the mind as playing a part in the unity of the real and therefore to fulfill the intention of the first philosophy; it is the same thing, being and thought – outside of perception. The *conception* of wax *that I see*, is not therefore the abstract conception, but the transcendental concept. It is not the concept as representation of representation, the *conceptus communis*, but the possibility of representation, or rather the possibility of the presence of every thing.

The “conceiving” to which Descartes invites us here is not a logical, abstract, reflexive, remote activity of a consciousness. “I *conceive of* the piece of wax,” then, means nothing, absolutely nothing! But to conceive of here is a word that one must take carnally, it is *concupere*, to take together.[*prendre ensemble*] I take together this wax, more precisely: there is actually for me a whole into which all diversifications of the wax is taken: “the same wax remains.” There is in this sense an original conception of the thing, but in this sense: that is to say, at the level where I see it; it is a matter of appearing. And when one says that “I conceive of it,” that means that thought is never elsewhere, has no other place than in the real, than this place where the real itself *conceptium est*: is conceived, that is to say, actually born in temporal richness through unity. But above all, one must not take this conception abstractly since it is a matter of accounting for the perceived. The real is taken together in the *a priori* form of unity: it is the transcendental Esthetic. In the thing itself there is no diverse, abstractly speaking, no diversity; but this “diversity” is constantly taken with itself under the form of the one and it is *from there* that it diversifies. Now this “there” is not a place within things, the truth is not an instance within the real; that is why we always believe it is abstract, that it is nothing. The Truth! Who is not convinced that it is abstract? But it is not abstract; it is not even only the form of the sublime knowledges of humanity that one calls philosophy or of that prosaic but quite useful knowledge that one calls science. The Truth is the form of appearance, the transcendental truth or the ontological truth. It is that out of which the diverse constantly diversifies. But this “there” that is not within things but which is their wholly first position (their “Logos”), it is “there” that thought too is possible. In this sense this “conception” doesn’t gather only the real with itself, but thought to itself, puts together thought with itself. What is beautiful here is that my thought never has to return, from losing itself in the contents of the real, to itself. Unity is not something to be won. It is not reconstituted. Therefore, it is constitutive, as Kant would say. What is not reconstituted is constitutive. Thus I never return to myself, unity of a self-consciousness, from an absolute loss in the content of empirical consciousness. When I look at the field over there, as big as it may be, in Beauce for

example, if I go to Chartres on foot passing through Beauce, and my gaze “gets lost” as one says, in the constant movement of the wheat, my gaze gets lost perhaps, but it is purely metaphorical: it does not get lost in the transcendental sense, which is what permits it to “get lost,” that is to say, always to find itself further on. If empirical consciousness always *finds* itself at home in the world, it is because it is not essentially, not originally lost. My consciousness is *of* things because it is never taken *in* things, and consequently it doesn’t have to triumph over diversity. Think this: *there is no diversity*. Confusion is the abstract (confusion in the metaphysical sense, that is to say either wholly confused or wholly and absolutely distinguished “*partes extra partes*,” because that amounts to the same, the diverse absolutely dispersed [*é-pars*]). The real is not dispersed, but it absolutely parts unity; and this parting out is what consciousness itself receives as itself, it is its definition, its lot. It is taken within the possibility that is the same one that throws appearance in its own display.

That is why I never have to triumph over time although metaphysics believes this: triumphing over the diversity of time through the intemporal unity. Not at all. Kant himself has shown that temporal diversity supposes time itself: the form of unity appeared then as time, not as the intemporal. The intemporal is imagining being. Imagining that there is a truth beneath, elsewhere. There is no truth elsewhere. There is no beyond. The world is the place of truth. But through this I do not fall back into empiricism, inferior to philosophy, but to the contrary, into a renewal, into a renaissance of ontology in the question of appearance. What, in school terms, one calls contemporary phenomenology. All this is in some way in Descartes, at least in the text on the piece of wax. A text without reproach: understanding, that’s perception. Even Husserl will take some time to get there, and will never get there better. The conceived thing is the seen thing, that is to say that it is never conceived by an act of cognition. First determination of the Cogito: It does not cogitate. It sees. “Certainly, it is the same one that I see.”

But we have already said at the beginning that this transcendental moment without reproach is not perceived by Descartes himself, that it is rather turned back into its opposite. The mind, permanently dwelling in the truth of the perceived, on the contrary, comes back to itself and to its act [*son acte*], to its “inspection.” Inspection of the mind; that means, then, that the mind puts aside appearances in order to look inside and across (*in-spicit*), in order to look at unity and from there *rouse* the diverse into unity. Thus understood, this inspection is still by the imagination. We must say, however, [*plutôt*] that if something inspects something, it is rather the thing that inspects me. When I look at the thing, it is the thing that looks at me. As one says: “It regards you.” The world regards man, essentially

concerns him. This inspection is certainly expressed in the language of self-consciousness, imputing unity to itself. Therefore, one is certainly right to reproach Descartes. But one must recognize that he does all he can to empty his language of metaphysical imagination, to purify his thought of unity. What he simply means in distinguishing “vision, touch [etc.],” from “the inspection of the mind” is that there is no psychological genesis of appearance in its unity; and as there is no appearance outside of its unity, there is not, absolutely speaking, any psychological genesis of appearance; consequently, the sensory is not what is given to me by the *intermediary* of the senses, which is not a way of denying the body but of denying a false relation of man to the world. But everything is at the level of the mind: the real is one at the level of the mind. That is to say, in it at the level of this unity by which it is constantly delimited, and that is in me, the possibility of the mind.

To remain at this level would be for Descartes to discover the question of the world as a co-primary question with that of the Cogito. On the one hand, however, he doesn't remain there because perception is absorbed from the beginning into the notion of appearance. But, on the other hand, he doesn't remain there because the question of God is *also* co-primary with the two others. And if the first reason is bad, the second is good. There is not in fact any possible sojourn in phenomenality without a question about being.

ELEVENTH LESSON

THIRD MEDITATION : GOD (1)

“I will now close my eyes, I will plug my ears, I will turn back all my senses, I will even erase from my thought all the images of corporeal things, or at least, because this hardly can be done, I will reject them as vain and false; and thus interrogating only myself, and considering my interior, I will try little by little to render myself better known and more familiar to myself.”

The vulnerable word here is the adjective “interior.” I will not begin again a lesson on the interiority of the soul that you already possess. It is only a matter of noting that this interiority of the soul, this opposition of the interior and the exterior, that itself is not put in doubt because it is the structure upon which doubt itself is constructed, this notion is also the source of all the critiques, or rather the dialogues that the great thinkers after Descartes were able to address to him or tried to maintain with him. This is the case, for example, with the refutation of idealism in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the Cogito is seized precisely in its unity *because* it is not possible as interiority.

One could note, right now, that it is in the same way impossible to teach a philosopher a lesson when he is so great (great enough) because one falls again oneself into the difficulties he fell into and for which one reproaches him for having fallen into. Thus Kant, who critiques the idealism of interiority, critiques it through a proof of “the existence of objects in space outside of me,” that is to say, of the existence of the *exterior* world. But if I speak the language of exteriority, I am quite a bit on the same terrain as the language I claim to combat (that of interiority), because these two notions are rigorously interdependent with one another.

It is in showing the emptiness of the notion of interiority that Kant refutes idealism in the name of what is the mechanism of idealism itself, i.e.: the unity of consciousness; he shows in fact that this unity can be nothing other than the very opening of the object. But as a result one would no longer need to call this object “exterior”; one would need to establish a language that might be primitive in relation to the secondary opposition of the interior and the exterior. This is precisely what doesn’t happen in Kant. And this is, finally, because he has not sufficiently “considered [his] interior,” as Descartes says, but “interior”

taken this time in a new sense, which is the truth of the Cartesian sense. To consider his interior is to consider everything as simply as it is “thought”; but this means not as it has been transformed in its image for a subjectivity; this means the very world such as it shows itself. The moment of consideration of what shows itself such as it only shows itself is in Kant the Transcendental Aesthetic. Only the consideration of the phenomenon in its phenomenality (of the nature of appearing) can in fact give its possibility to a language more primitive than that of the split of interior and exterior. And it is quite true too that this consideration, that is to say, this thematisation of the phenomenality of the phenomenon, cannot be accomplished without the question of being appearing there as the leitmotif on which all depends. Kant himself perceives something of this kind when he writes that “the theory of sensibility is therefore the theory of noumenas in the negative sense.” That is to say that the question of ontological truth, which for Descartes is the question of God, is once again the question that comes immediately after the Cogito, precisely so that there might be a thought of the World – what Kant is the first to seek and approach, rousing himself and rousing the Tradition from the forgetting of the world that characterizes the Cartesian tradition. In this sense, consequently, there couldn’t be any pure and simple progress from Descartes to Kant. Nor any pure and simple critique of one thinker based on another. But the relation of the thinkers passes through the intimate relation maintained by the three questions of the World, Thought, and Being, as a single and unique question. And the way that this unity “progresses” in its relation to itself, that is to say, at once calling each thinker to his thought and to his relation to other thoughts; this way has nothing in common with our representation of progress. This is in fact a reflection of representative planning, not of the life of the truth.

The same thing could perhaps apply to Husserl. What is peculiar to contemporary phenomenology is trying to describe the real at all the levels where I actually encounter it, without ever borrowing an already philosophical language. But the third Meditation of Descartes is precisely the one that poses the problem of the relation of the “pure beginning” to the “tradition.” One can call pure beginning, or in any case the will for such a beginning, the absolute starting point of “doubt” and the absolute halting of the Cogito in Descartes. Not one word is borrowed from the tradition, in this case from Aristotle and the Scholastics, in the first two Meditations. But Descartes’ start is not even itself begun, it is a start that isn’t made so long as he does not secure himself in divine truthfulness; and the same goes for this halting, for his place of repose, for the Cogito – pure suspension of a pure possibility, and finally an enigma right up to the same divine truthfulness. So much so that the beginning of the beginning is the question of God, is the third Meditation. Perhaps we

are coming to find in passing the place where Spinoza took his course in Descartes. But that is not presently our question. Our question, it is to be noted, which moreover shows itself in a simple reading, is the *change in tone* in the third Meditation in relation to the two others. Here, in fact, philosophical knowledge – constituted philosophical language, the tradition – makes a grand entrance [*entrée massive*] which nothing prepares us for. Abruptly, Descartes ceases to begin philosophy in order to invoke philosophy; he invokes the notion of a degree of reality, that of participation through representation, the distinction of objective reality from formal reality, the doctrine of judgment as the site of truth or error, etc. This invocation of the tradition in and by the beginning, this invocation of Darios by a Xerxes tired of “thrashing the sea,” this link of the dead to the living in which, as the law says, “the dead seize the living,” is the relation of primacy to essential history at the very interior of the actual thought of every thinker. For this relation is in everyone. Thus what happens to Descartes continues to be *exemplary* of philosophy in its very essence. The genius of the French is to exemplarily fulfill their destiny, but not at all within “self-consciousness;” on the contrary, this goes quite over their heads. Joan of Arc, Descartes. The Germans, inversely, always have their heads above the level of what happens; they *are* in thematization. But they don’t have any destiny.

Husserl, therefore, tries to go to the real, or rather to let it come, without ever borrowing an already philosophical language, for example, without ever posing problems of existence; or rather without ever enshrining the problems in a language of existence; without employing, consequently, the distinction of interior and exterior, and therefore by trying to avoid the schisms that run through metaphysical language. Thus he undertakes to describe the perceived without wondering for an instant – by refusing to wonder – how an object is possible for a consciousness; because this is already to divide up the originary unity that I want precisely to attain insofar as it is originary; it is to divide it into two terms that it doesn’t contain in itself. If it is true that when I see the window there is the window and me, this doesn’t mean that there is a relation of an object to a consciousness, an abstract theme not in the fabric of the lived. This will to primitivity therefore makes it so Husserl too would not admit as self-evident the language of interiority that the third Meditation speaks from its beginning; rather he would continue, consequently, Cartesian doubt at a still more profound level, as if he were saying: “I don’t even know if I can call myself something like an ‘interior’.”

But on the other hand, we must note that Descartes himself has said in the preceding Meditation that he didn’t know if he, who is, he that is sure that he is, is in fact different from the things that he declares not to be because they are unknown to him (“unknown,”

which is to say unknown as being). A passage which we have already commented on and that permits one to say that for Descartes it is less a question of ontological affirmations or negations than of the stages of a negative ontology, than of the stages of a negation of ontology: up to the moment at which this ontology is reduced to its pure form, the relation of thought to being, the relation of Cogito to God, that is to say, at the moment at which one leaves it. But any other relation is simply denied. By understanding thus as stages what Descartes seems to deploy each time as so many realist affirmations or negations, one can claim that he dodges in advance, at least in the first three Meditations, Husserl's reproaches, that he doesn't truly believe *that there is* something like an *interior*, that he simply takes all things insofar as they are thought, which could really mean: insofar as they appear, that is to say, in the phenomenal primitivity that Husserl demands. Otherwise, one would have to suppress a certain number of texts from the first three Meditations. But one doesn't have the right. One would have to suppress this passage to which I was just alluding:

“But may it also happen that these same things that I suppose not to be, because they are unknown to me, are not in fact different from myself that I know? I know nothing about this, I am not now arguing about this [...].”

One would also have to suppress the Evil Genius etc. If one thus suppresses the moments of obscurity, that is to say the moments at which the text speaks the most, of course one can reduce Descartes to an idealism, an idealism of the content of consciousness, and make short work of [*faire tout un sort a*] this word “interior.” But before debating authors, one must read them, and above all, one must not amputate their texts. What is true is that Descartes' *result* corresponds to the critiques of Kant and Husserl. If one takes Descartes in his results, that is to say finally, his vision of the world such as it is sanctioned by divine truthfulness, then all the critiques are valid. At this moment, in fact, there no longer remain any but clear and distinct ideas that correspond in fact to the object of mathematics, in order to account for the reality of the real; at this moment, too, consequently, the perceived is reduced entirely to appearance, which goes in fact against the very possibility of perception, and consequently again, there is Descartes' “intellectualism,” a “substantialism” of thought (*res cogitans*), a “dualism” between this substance and the other substance (the extended thing), etc. ...

Only one must *never* reduce a thought to its result. Before these results there is the stunning movement of “doubt.” In a sense, this movement remains in the air, since finally – although it led me to the point of posing in its bareness the problem of thought and being,

which is to say in Cartesian terms, the relation of the Cogito to God – it is not capable of respecting this bareness since the content of divine truthfulness is a return rather to the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* or to the *Discourse on Method*, that is to say, to a Descartes whose first philosophy is simply the foundation of science. Of course, this happens. But the stunning movement of the first three Meditations, as an enigma for philosophy, remains. And faultlessly. There is negation in this movement of all that Descartes will in fact restore thanks to a divine truthfulness whose content he himself defines by representation. But first there are moments of strangeness, moments of astonishing metaphysical invention, such as that Evil Genius no one dares to consider as a question, whether because one accepts it right away as self-evident (although it is a stupefying hypothesis whose seriousness grows in proportion to its evident “lightness”), or because one quite simply finds it bizarre. But if one takes into account these moments of obscurity that are always essential moments, as when the intelligible itself is denied by doubt (that is the Evil Genius), as when the Cogito itself denies that it knows something even of its difference from the world it has denied and within which difference it has however grasped itself, when now in the third Meditation we see that God puts into question clear and distinct ideas and legitimately precedes them, so that it is not representation that dictates ontological truth, but that an ontological doctrine *as such* is needed before I may be satisfied (or not) with my representation, then Descartes comes to life [*se met à vivre*] in his obscurity. On the contrary, if one suppresses all of this astonishing movement, then one has a Descartes who is quite clear, quite simple, who has suppressed ontology, renounced Aristotelian obscurities, and who simply (because the unhappy fellow was quite a believer or in any case he lived in the 17th century) believed himself obligated to demonstrate God and the existence of the soul, but who at bottom was only interested in mathematics, and only did philosophy to justify that mathematics may *be* the very mode of representation – in order to justify, definitively, science.

You see, there are two Descartes. There is the one that one takes for his results, and even, in fact, for his cultural impoverishment; and then, there is the Descartes in the movement of the texts, particularly of the first three Meditations.

And so it is not by chance that the division of the year into two semesters corresponds in our work to the end of the third Meditation. What I was insisting upon in this semester devoted to first philosophy was explaining the first three Meditations because *afterwards* Descartes resembles the Descartes one knows; but in this absolutely negative movement he resembles nothing; he essentially deserves commentary.

“I am a thing that thinks, that is to say that doubts, that affirms, that denies, that knows few things, that doesn’t know a lot, that loves, that hates, that wants, that doesn’t want, that imagines also, and that feels.”

It is the second time that the Cogito is described, not only in accordance with an intellectual unity, complicated and remote, but simply as the form of simple experiences: Descartes, who loves, who wants, etc.. Thereby you see that interiority is only a positive way of expressing doubt, but it is not the position of a proper domain.

“For as I have often remarked, although the things that I sense and that I imagine are maybe nothing at all [...]”

maybe nothing at all.

“[...] are maybe nothing at all outside of me and in themselves [...]”

How can Descartes say that they are *maybe* nothing at all since it seems to us that he has *decided* that they were nothing at all. How can he now act as if he hadn’t decided and say that *maybe* they are nothing at all? It is because, once again, when doubt is exerted as negation of the world, one must see a figure there, in substantial language, in realist language, of its veritable signification, which is never directed towards the contents but towards the foundations (as the beginning says), that is not, consequently, directed towards simple consciousness in any of its certitudes, which all have ontological form, which all have the weight of being (it is, in fact, characteristic of simple consciousness to posit being everywhere), directed, therefore, simply towards the fact that this ontological form of natural certitude doesn’t correspond to anything that I can grasp in it and think in contents, nothing that I can *imagine* [*me représenter*]. And so all is a *maybe* insofar as I have not determined *being*; insofar as God is not attained all is a maybe, even doubt, in a sense. That is why the true beginning is God. There is an internal logic to Descartes that will become the historical logic of Cartesianism. One could show it in Leibniz; but concerning the problem raised here, it is evident through Spinoza. The beginning of Spinoza is in fact: *De Deo*. Spinoza doesn’t begin with clear and distinct ideas; he doesn’t even begin with doubt; he doesn’t begin with the Cogito; he begins with God. In consideration of which all he does is exploit one of the senses of these three Meditations that are three times the same, that are three times doubt, three times thought, three times being.

It’s that all must begin with being itself; such is the sense of the *De Deo*. Doubt itself is not truly a thought, but rather a preparatory way for exiting the forest, according to Descartes’ own image. When one doesn’t know at all where one is in the forest, one must

walk straight ahead in order to leave it. To walk straight ahead in order to leave it is to walk in accordance with the obstinacy of a straight line that ignores any developments, that ignores the geography of things: descending into the ravine and climbing back out instead of making the detour. Thus does doubt cut across the configuration, the geography of simple consciousness. By this very fact, it is not a way; it truly has no direction: it is simply the mind gaining the possibility of posing problems through the pure exercise of negation. But this negation is therefore itself indeterminate, save in that it passes through all contents, through all languages. Where is it going to stop? It is going to stop, consequently, at the root of all language, which is the relation of being to thought; in Cartesian terms: the Cogito finding God in itself as its possibility. So much so that one can rightly say that all begins in God and that doubt itself would be absurd if there wasn't the third Meditation. It is the need for God in relation to all the other ways of affirming what is; it is the fact that God may be necessary even for mathematics, for example; therefore, his absolute retreat in relation to any content of experience, in relation to any concrete geography of things and of thought; it is this retreat that justifies after the fact that doubt has cut short.

Said otherwise, we have recognized, ourselves, by simply reading the texts of the first Meditation, that doubt had an ontological nature, that is to say, that it was always attacking consciousness in its very form, i.e. that it posits all that appears to it as what is, and that it is then incapable of explaining its own content such as it is, that this "such as it is" that is the constant form of consciousness is also what is never thought at any level. But this was only a sort of note on the ontological nature of doubt. Now it remains to understand that a reflection, because it is ontological, must take the form of doubt. This is only possible because being *flees* in relation to any domain, or is absolutely *different* from any ontological affirmation *in* the content of experience. It remains to know also, moreover, how it is going to be able to "found" them. But for the instant, we ourselves have got to the point of understanding that it is the *primacy* of God in relation to perception, to science, even to mathematics, in relation to all actually defined certitudes, all certitudes of natural consciousness having a content (and there are no others), it is the primacy of God in relation to all this, and therefore his *difference* from all this, that explains that doubt, *indifferent* to the obvious facts of consciousness, cuts short. So much so that everything begins, if you will, in the third Meditation.

But everything also begins in the first. It is only in fact because doubt is carried out as it is, because the mind radically denies without regard for the configuration of the terrain, that it actually goes far enough and reaches the problems in their purity, at their level of

authenticity. And the beginning is the Cogito as well. It is always the unity of thought that is the way of philosophy, in order to distinguish itself from natural consciousness, that is to say, to exercise doubt, that is to say, to remark that natural consciousness has a material [*une étoffe*] that is nothing for it, and therefore to live in this nothing, to be always on the horizon of what is determined. The Cogito is nothing else. It is, itself, what drives doubt [*le ressort du doute*], it is, itself, the way, consequently, of raising oneself little by little to God as to the very form of this character of horizon that being presents for all content.

So much so that the first three Meditations are therefore identically *the same*, the same as dissociation and appearance, that is to say, the flight of being, the same as grasping of consciousness as unity, but a unity that is always un-contained in its content, that is always at the horizon in relation to simple consciousness; and in these first three Meditations, it is always being itself that leads the game, because it withdraws my consciousness and the real from what they always are immediately in order to draw them towards a horizon that itself retreats – for all horizons, when I advance, retreat...

It is therefore necessary that we question ourselves [*s'interroger*] all the more concerning the difference between the three Meditations; For within the “same” where they are the same thought, they are not leveled off in a modern or technical way. On the contrary, triplicity *is* now unity. We must question ourselves...

Even so, it is in fact God that leads the game. In this triplicity it is still necessary to have an absolute beginning, and the force of Spinoza is almost invincible. If you think that one day or another you can master Spinoza, first master Hegel in whom Spinoza has found shelter for a hundred and sixty-one years! Let us submit, therefore, and let us admit, that the first question is the *De Deo*.

You see that the first question is not at all “Of the True and the False.” This, too, and perhaps above all, is important to understand when it is a matter of an “introduction to philosophy.” The authentic problem of the beginning of thought is not at all a problem of the type of “method.” Many among you confuse doubt and method in Descartes. First, there are a great many erudite reasons to show that the method, at the time of the *Discourse* or the *Regulae*, didn’t have the scope that doubt manifestly has in the *Meditations*. But finally, there is still a wholly other reason, which is that the method supposes a nature of the true defined by clear and distinct ideas; it supposes, therefore, what doubt itself overcomes. Doubt falls upon what the method is certain of: that all begins with the clear and distinct, that one must go to the more complex. Doubt in fact doesn’t stop at simple natures; it corresponds in fact to a question that is capable of clouding up this simplicity,

that of knowing if all the clear and distinct ideas are decisions for the real, if they have the weight of being, or if man in his logic is dealing with the internal logic of a subjectivity that is closed in upon itself alone. The question is to know if this rationality, this language, these possibilities of understanding that belong to man, these facts that the sciences are at diverse levels, are also, and even primitively, overtures of the real, *are things*. And this problem is not the problem of the true and the false; it is the problem of the truth *itself*, as transcendental or ontological truth; that is to say that it is the problem of being, of being as “truth.” It is not at all the problem of the true and the false, and by that one must understand the problem of the adequation of the thing and the representation. From the point of view of the adequation of the thing and representation, the most perfect definition of the truth would be that the real be nothing other than the representable as such. But this in fact is precisely the philosophical *error*, the ontological error, or better yet, erring [*errance*], appearance itself.

Thus the anteriority of God is perhaps the most serious problem in Descartes, not only for the explanation of Descartes himself but for discovering philosophy. For it is truly a dazzling way (and all the more because it is totally incomprehensible if reduced to a “thesis” of special metaphysics) to show that the question of being such as *it is* is primary in relation to any method and any critique. Now, what is going to strike us in the reading of the third Meditation, is that this profound, decisive problem of the sense of all others is introduced by Descartes as a problem that he almost excuses himself from treating and that only subsists through a doubt that is very “light” and, as he astonishingly says: “*so to speak* metaphysical.” Which shows to what point thought can, in its actual history, be far from itself. It is really too little to say that the question of knowing if God is, and if he is “true,” that is to say, of thinking ontological truth or of thinking being as the opening to all the rest, not only is not “so to speak” metaphysical, but is again entirely metaphysical; one must still say that this question is metaphysics itself questioning itself upon its foundation; it is metaphysics become question. It is, therefore, *the* question of metaphysics, and not “so to speak metaphysical.” Nor is it “light:” it is the one that, on the contrary, made the others so light that doubt could blow them down and make them disappear. It is the gravest question, the *center of gravity* of the Meditations, because it is the center of gravity of every constituted language as of every simple consciousness. But it is at the moment when metaphysics thus attains its center, which is at once its beginning and its whole, that it excuses itself, as if it were going outside itself, and as if it were treating a question a bit beyond its concerns, as if it were simply so that the picture might be complete that it was necessary to *also* treat this question.

This state of things is among all of them the one that would deserve to be interpreted. It is also, among all of them, the one whose origin is the most difficult to understand.

TWELFTH LESSON

THIRD MEDITATION: GOD (2)

The third Meditation, *Of God, That He Exists*, begins, therefore, by revealing the Cogito in its barest determination, that is to say, as being equal to all that has been put in doubt, since, in fact, I imagine things, I sense others, I deny some etc. in such a way that all this content is taken only as thought, which does not mean that the world is only an image in me, but that I only know it inasmuch as it actually shows itself to me. And so on.

Can one now remain at this sort of retreat where things only exist through the side through which they purely and simply it shows themselves and where all affirmation of being, all ontological weight is left aside as the unknown *par excellence*? As there is only one thought, which aims to determine the being (at whatever level that may be), it is necessary all the same to exit from the stage where I reduced all things, that is to say, from the stage where they simply show themselves, and which is moreover, less a stage than the perspective from which I approach them. And so Descartes struggles in the Cogito and wonders how he is going to get out of it. The third Meditation is the inspection of the *cogitata*, of things, in as much as they are thought (which is to say, again, that they actually show themselves, and not simply that they are my representations: in this *summum* of subjectivity there is no shadow of subjectivism.) But finally, it is necessary to get out of this pure instance, this pure beginning. And so Descartes inspects what he is, since now all the real is only himself so to speak, not in a subjective encompassing, but because it is taken simply as showing itself, and Descartes is looking for the road that leads towards the affirmation of reality. Consequently, he looks for what in its very appearance, in the very way it shows itself must be admitted as existing, he looks for something the essence of which is to exist; but that of which the essence includes existence is the very determination of God.

Thus the climate of the ontological proof encompasses the whole third Meditation and is not only found in the passages consecrated to the demonstration of God. All its language is the quest for an ontological proof.

What can that really mean, “an ontological proof?” At this stage it means: the moment at which I consider, to the extent that it simply shows itself, leaving aside the sense of being that it possesses however, the moment, therefore, when this real considered as a *cogitatum* admits of itself that it *is*, and in such a way that the weight of being can no longer be suspended as it was up to now, but imposes itself and is *tested* (ontological test) in the very sense in which the thing shows itself. That which, in the way it shows itself, includes the affirmation of its being, is therefore tested ontologically, ontologically “proved” in scholastic terms: that whose essence envelopes its existence. But the essence here, in Descartes, has been purely and simply reduced to “showing itself.” Things are no longer distinguished from one another at all; they are all taken simply to the extent that they appear.

In this sense the ontological proof is not something that can be refuted nor something proper to Descartes. What Kant, for example, calls “the refutation of idealism” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is the grasping of the “empirically determined” Cogito, which is to say, not the supposition of some abstract subsistence or other, but the “I” defined as in Descartes by what it actually and constantly deals with, and outside of which it doesn’t know itself: that is to say as “I see, I sense, I hear the door that opens ...” This perceiving I, “empirically determined,” finds within the perceived what is in essence or again, as Kant says in its “possibility” – possibility and essence are reciprocals in metaphysics, *possibilitas et essentia, Möglichkeit und Wesen* – includes the affirmation of being and refuses to turn to the image or to representation, which consequently is posited originally in itself and could in no way contain a self as in a subjectivity. In a sense, consequently, the “refutation of idealism” is the ontological proof of the perceived, that is to say, the perceived is tested *as* being. Its condition of possibility – that is to say so that it may actually deploy itself as withstanding time – is that it must be from *itself* and come from itself, that it *may be*, that is to say that it *may be through itself*, which is a tautology. The *Esse* is the *esse per se*. “By substance I understand what is through itself,” says Spinoza: “*Per substantium intellego quod per se est et per se concipi potest.*” What one means when one says that it is, is that it is through itself, and that it can only be thus conceived. It cannot be conceived as the pure event or appearance, that is to say the non-being or the pure event in me. What Kant finds in a certain *cogitatum* is the sense of the inclusion in a subjectivity. The impossibility of being posited at first as the representation of a subjectivity belongs to the real. But, on the contrary, the unity of this subject that “I am,” the unity of thought, is only possible *as* (which is here to say in as much as) the unity of the object. It is an ontological proof.

One must not, therefore, rush to criticize Descartes because he employs a sort of abstract language, “whose essence envelopes existence” to define God. In a sense, all thought from this is reduced to being the inspection [*revue*] of itself, of its “ideas,” as Descartes is going to do it, in order to find what, in the very figure of what shows itself, includes the avowal of reality, constantly pulls me away from my subjectivity, returns me to my definition by returning the world to itself, and founds our community in our distance. What is rather particular to Descartes is that no idea includes this ontological proof as its essence (that is to say, as the way in which it shows itself) if not the very idea of being. What Kant finds out right away, that is to say at the simplest level, about that which is to the extent, first, that it gives itself (and the real is given as a tree, a window, but not as being), therefore what Kant carries out at the level of perception, Descartes only carries out further along, at what one could call (if it wasn’t nonsensical) “the level of being.” The difference now is not perhaps so considerable because the analysis of the perceived as being the refusal of the image, the dislocation of representation, the definition of man as non-subjectivity, in short, all the senses that culminate in the “refutation of idealism,” that is to say, the ontological test of appearance, all this implies that the perceived be analysed *as being* [*étant*], so much so that in a sense the analysis of the perceived in Kant *is* the analysis of being [*être*], of the very thing Descartes calls “God,” and in the final analysis it is always being itself that is the first to fall under the understanding. For the third Meditation illustrates in its way that old scholastic adage (in no way “old,” and which is much more than an adage!) that being [*étant*] to the extent that it is, therefore that being [*être*] itself “is what falls first under the understanding.” We always find it hard to believe because this “being itself” [*être même*] is not just any determined level in the real, and as such it seems that it “falls” rather within the abstract or within the distant. But the analysis of the near and the concrete always supposes a condition of proximity, supposes a possibility of approach, supposes a mode of *concrecere*, which is revealed each time to be “ontological.” This more distant is at the same time what originally attends every thing and my presence in every thing.

All this is said by way of introduction to the third Meditation, to anticipate the moment of incomprehension or of refusal that could legitimately be yours in reading this astonishing text.

“Now I will consider more exactly [...] And yet it seems to me that I can already establish as a general rule that all things we conceive of very clearly and very distinctly are all true.”

This second paragraph is again a resurgence of what one could call a “temptation” of the method. But I have tried to show you that doubt is not reduced to the method.

It is only in the content of divine truthfulness that the *Meditations* will make their connection with the *Regulae* and the *Discourse*. But not before. For example, here Descartes is tempted to draw from the evidence of the Cogito a general doctrine of the conditions for evidence, consequently, to immediately write a *De vero et falso*. But the True and the False is a doctrine that comes in the *fourth* place (fourth Meditation) and only after the thought of being [*être*]; in Cartesian terms: only after the demonstration of existence and divine truthfulness. So much so that philosophy does not begin with a method concerning the true and the false; it begins with an amalgam of the true and the false. One is mistaken, then, when one says that doubt is a method for separating the true and the false; such a separation will only be possible in the fourth *Meditation*, and Descartes doesn't cease saying that he has put together in separate Meditations the questions that go together and that one must follow the order. If there is someone who has worried about the problem of the beginning it is truly Descartes. Here we witness the same retreat from the true and the false. The paragraph that I just read to you is, however, the moment of a quite simple temptation: to transform the Cogito, which is a certain kind of evidence, into the exemplary type of evidence and certitude. It is what Descartes, however, will not do: the Cogito is not the first link in the chain of clear and distinct ideas, in the long chain of reasons borrowed from the mathematicians. And so philosophy is not simply the method, an axiomatics, a *mathesis universalis*. It will become so in Leibniz, and Descartes has in this sense that posterity, but it isn't yet so in Descartes, where it is truly first philosophy and not pure and simple *mathesis universalis*. What one must move on to after the Cogito is being [*l'être*], is the unity of thought and being, and it is only when the unity of thought and being will itself be *true*, that is to say, properly thought, that the question of the true and the false will be able to be posed. So much so that ontology takes precedence over theory of knowledge in Descartes. The “philosophy of the Moderns” that begins with Descartes is not so fundamentally opposed to that of the Ancients. It is superficially that, since Descartes, philosophy would have become essentially a reflection on science and something “epistemological.” It is superficially that it would seek out its type in the absolute representability of mathematical objects. Of course, this superficial aspect is also, since it is what surfaces, the one that everyone will see; consequently, it is culturally the dominant aspect, but it is not what, in truth, dominates the texts. If the method was what dominates doubt, one would move on from the Cogito to the exploitation of its evidence as the first link in the chain of reasoning. Now, the clear and distinct ideas are to the contrary

suspended by the hypothesis of God. God here acts as he was already acting in the guise of the Evil Genius: he acts as the suspension of rational or intelligible evidence. Which means that the question of being in its “truthfulness” must precede all evidence, even philosophical, metaphysical, categorial evidence. Descartes in this sense is a schema without defect in the order of the questions (which doesn’t mean he *treats* them properly, but that the *bare schema* is without defect.)

“However, I received and admitted above several things as very certain and manifest, which nonetheless I recognized afterwards to be doubtful and uncertain.”

Finally, clarity and distinctness, certitude, retreats one more time; that is to say that doubt which had already redoubled in the second Meditation retriples in the third.

“What were then those things? They were the earth, the sky, the stars [...]”

One begins doubt again with an enumeration of the sensory and an explanation of what is deceptive in the sensory: it is that it makes me think being in direct continuity with content.

“[...] and all the other things that I perceived through the intermediary of my senses [...] And still at present I do not deny that these ideas are found in me [...]”

That is to say, that still at present there is no question of transforming the philosophical enterprise into a perturbation of actual consciousness.

“[...] but there is still one other thing that I assured, and that because of habit I had to believe, I thought I perceived very clearly, however, truly I didn’t perceive it, i.e. that there were things outside of me from which these ideas proceeded and to which they were quite similar.”

A hint of a distinction of what in the fourth Meditation will become that of the understanding of the will, but here more original – between what shows itself and then the affirmation, or rather the weight of being that these things carry, although this is nothing that shows itself, in other words, although existence may not be itself a determination of essence. Therefore, the seeking for what by its essence is the avowal of existence appears to want to resolve an abyssal distance because existence is nothing in things: there is “neither mark nor index” of it as the first Meditation already said (the example of sleep).

The *quod* is not itself a *quid*, the *Da-sein* is not *So-sein*. This determination signifies that “reality” is itself totally undetermined, although it is nowhere absent and no one doubts it.

Then, why must we pass through clear and distinct ideas? Because they are simply at the level of essence, to speak the same language that we have borrowed from the beginning, or as Descartes will say, at the level of the *idea*, at the level of what *shows itself*. But they leave quite outside themselves the ontological determination, or the existing [*l'exister*] of things. This “existing” does not declare itself at any level of things although it is the permanent material, the actual form of experience. Consequently, I cannot judge it; it is at once present everywhere and nowhere graspable. If, again, I didn't have *deceptions* regarding reality, it would go well; I would grant being to everything, everywhere, and in the same sense. But I have deceptions: and first of all this one, which is constant, to not be able to immediately harmonize my *conceptions*. It is quite necessary, or at least it seems, that I choose between the sun that I see and that of Copernicus, between perception and science; or in any case, if I want to find the truth of both of them, as it is not the same, I must have a doctrine of being that places them in a hierarchy and that articulates them with each other, which explains to me how there are two unities of the world although there is only one world. There is, in fact, the unity of the world at the level of appearance, and there is the unity of the world at the level of the constitution of the scientifically intelligible. But how is it that these two unities of the world are both unities of the same world; here is what it would be necessary to decide (without speaking of other unities of the world: that of Art, that of morality...); but this is never simply given in representation defined by its content, by the idea, by what draws itself and takes form [*se dessine et fait figure*]: *eidos* as *idea*. And still less by the idea in the sense of the Moderns, such as we find it here in Descartes. Doubt therefore begins again in the form of a refusal to identify the essence of existence otherwise than in God, which amounts to saying: otherwise than in the problematic form. God is in fact the moment at which the identity and difference of essence and existence escape me and must be true in themselves; it is the discovery of a problem. But also, for Descartes it is not a problem, it is a transcendent level; however, for subsequent philosophy, it will become a problem.

“but there was still another thing I was sure of, and that because of the habit I had of believing it , I thought I *perceived* [...]”

But precisely “this” is not perceived. The general form of apperception is not perceived ; it is the originarily synthetic unity, that is to say that all being [*étant*], every phenomenon, is co-position of its being [*être*], and is only possible through the objective

unity (in Kantian terms). But this is not perceived: it is the *form* of the perceived. On the other hand, there is something like an apperception of being [*être*] at every level of experience, although I am “tricked” because in truth I do not perceive it, and it is not a level of experience but its universal possibility. But, spontaneously, I ascribe being everywhere: I say, “the piece of chalk is.” And if one asks me if it is such as I see it, or rather if they are its elements that are, I will say: it *is* such as I see it, but its elements *are* also. It is *also* a dance of atoms, and it is *also* such as I see it. Just as the sun is the sun that I see and the sun of Copernicus. But how this being [*être*] that is everywhere, at every level of experience, can be a single experience, and finally a single ontological level, completely escapes me. Not only does it escape me, but the way in which it escapes me itself escapes me, perhaps well beyond my efforts to recognize it. Perhaps I affirm and deny without rhyme or reason, for example, when I affirm *the outside-of-me*:

“I thought I perceived very clearly although I perceived it not at all that there were things outside of me from which these ideas proceeded.”

And still Descartes is generous enough to say:

“It is in this that I was mistaken, or if perhaps I was judging truthfully, it wasn’t any knowledge that I had that was the cause of the truth of my judgment.”

One would even have to say, if one follows the necessities of appearance such as Kant describes them, that I am *absolutely* mistaken in ascribing existence, a real signification, to this concept of “outside.” However, it is because everything is given as being [*étant*], because that is its fabric [*éttoffe*], that all things are always seen in themselves and nowhere in consciousness, which is not for itself a level or an instance, but which is always defined simply as “in the real;” it is because of this evidence of the real that I think that the real is “outside of me.” But if it is outside the abstract supposition of a self, it is no more outside than it is inside me. The languages of inclusion and exclusion are both insufficient, false, because neither one nor the other permits one to account for the original commonality of the thought and the real. They do not in fact account for appearance, which is the form of this commonality [*cette communauté*].

The real is not outside me. Why isn’t it outside me? Because it would be necessary for it to penetrate *thuraten* into consciousness, that is to say from the exterior and through the door, through a break in, an invasion; and it is too big to go in there all at once, and because, in any case, it is quite necessary that I make the test of time “intervene,” this real

is going to dissolve into what, however, it never is, that is to say in the supposition of a pure diversity it will always be too late to engender appearance. It is not finally possible that the real be an exterior for an interior; in other words, the rejection of the interiority of the soul is as well the rejection of the exteriority of the world. It is in this sense that the refutation of idealism in Kant is insufficient, at least in its language, since it tries to prove that there are objects in space outside of me. No. Outside of a false me: yes. The real is quite outside of the supposition of a subjectivity, but it *is* not without thought, and it is not outside it either, no more than it is in itself, in its interiority, outside of its primitive link to appearing.

Therefore, you see that what “I believe I perceive,” according to Descartes’ words (and who doesn’t believe in this, doesn’t separate as into two regions of being world and self?), I do not truly perceive it. I “trick” myself. It is a way that the always ontological form of appearance carries me away, the fact that every essence is an indicator of existence and confiscates existence at its level. But this, it is important to withdraw from it by a tripling of doubt, because all the unbridled forms of metaphysics are possible here, all the fallings into the antinomies, the philosophical impossibilities and curiosities. Therefore, the withdrawal of opinion is here again a synonym for the retreat of being as truth. I do not know in what sense the being that is everywhere and at the same time nowhere is true. That is to say, how it can be thought actually as it is, in such a way that, based on this ontological truth, the traps that open up for rationality can be eluded. For there are not only traps for sense, appearance is not simply a structure of perception; appearance is a structure of the rational too. Which the Evil Genius signifies. It is really, one more time, the order of the questions that Descartes follows and without reproach. And so, after the sensible, the intelligible comes back:

“but when I was considering something so simple and so easy [...]

And soon the Evil Genius. Only this time the Evil Genius is Divine Veracity; it’s the Good Genius.

“[...] didn’t I conceive of them at least clearly enough to assume that they were true?”

Yes, but what I can no longer assure in this present case is the sense and the scope of my word “true.” Of course, these certitudes are true, if “true” is defined by certitude, that is to say by the internal adequacy of the representation. But “true” for man is always more. True is true and real, “true and existing” as Descartes says. When I want to say

mathematics are true, it is not so much through logical coherence, through the fact that they can be axiomatized; this internal correctness is not what interests me, but rather the *productivity* [*fécondité*] of mathematics as the form of all physical ideas. What fascinates us is mathematical physics; it is physics which deals with the real, borrows from mathematics its language, and sometimes is obliged to wait for mathematics to have developed its models so as to be able to pour into them its physical doctrine and understand itself; it is that mathematical ideas, which have “nothing to do” with the real, are the *matrices* of the real. So it is all the same to me that the greatest mathematician in the world knows no more than the primary school kid when each adds 3 and 2, that is to say that the intrinsic clarity of the operation is the same. The rigor of the procedural manoeuvre matters little to me. If mathematics were only a game of pick-up sticks or a game of Mah-jong, if it weren't the Ideas of the World, or at least the forms for physics' ideas of the world, it would not interest me. And this is not because I'm thinking “of results,” but because the real alone retains thought. Mathematics are true because they play on the same side as the world [*ont partie liée avec le monde*]; but this is not in the intrinsic certitude of their operation and does not show through in the results as such, which are not the productivity [*fécondité*] but only the fruit of mathematics. Their productivity [*fécondité*] demands a transcendental deduction, which Kant has tried in the exposition of space and time.

“Certainly, if I have since judged that one could doubt these things, it is not for any other reason than because it came to my mind, that perhaps some God had been able to give me such a nature that I might deceive myself even while touching things that seem the most obvious to me.”

And certainly I would really be deceived, if I took simple certitude and operational rigor for the truth. What interests the mind (in the sense that Kant speaks of the “interests” of Reason) in its logic, is that its logic has the power to give birth to the world itself, to give birth to the appearance of its true, real structure; it is that “while it calculates” the world is made, or in any case science is made, and is made upon the world. This is strictly speaking divine: “*Dum Deus calculat, fit Mundus*” (Leibniz). Man has something of the divine: he is only interested in his logic as transcendental logic; but that is in no way given in the internal evidence of representation, a representation which has lost precisely the world and the sense of presence.

“But all the times that this idea previously conceived of the sovereign power of a god [...] even in the things that I believe I know with very great evidence.”

What example is there of this risk? This one, which is striking: that there may be a cultural abuse of mathematics. To imagine mathematics “elevate the mind,” that in themselves they prepare thought. Which has lingered everywhere since Plato. “Let no one enter here who is not a geometer.” Damn!

The mathematical passes for the Truth, it passes for the type of the truth, and in this respect it informed, dominated the whole appearance of metaphysics in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was necessary that Kant arouse himself from it once and for all by discovering space and time; it was purely intuitive and, so to speak, something artisanal, concrete, irreducible to abstract rationality. The non-superimposition in space of two mathematical sets whose definition is the same, that is the pure difference of existing. But it is essential. It is a matter of knowing where the true type of the true is; is it in the intrinsic coherence of the representation or in the possibility of existing? It is quite possible, therefore, that I am deceived, certainly not in the interior of the coherence of the mathematical system, but in the interior of the cultural system, in the opinions that I have of what happens in this mathematics.

“And certainly, since I have no reason to believe that there may be some God who is a trickster, and even because I have not yet considered those who prove that there is a God, the reason for doubting that depends solely on this opinion is indeed light, and so to speak metaphysical.”

Famous sentence, wherein metaphysics is at first considered as a sort of lightness, an added scruple, and wherein its proper name has become for it so strange that it has preceded by a “so to speak.” In truth, this question of the precedence of God over clear and distinct ideas -- or that a doctrine of being must precede a doctrine of representation – this is not only metaphysics itself, but the putting into question of metaphysics based on what is the most “metaphysical” in it. That is to say, metaphysics in its very genre (*metaphysica generalis*): the question of being as being [*de l'étant en tant qu'étant*].

But this question (and for a long time) is reintroduced into Descartes from the outside. First of all, God is the exterior figure of being [*être*]. But we are never told in Descartes that God functions as being. That belongs to the level of interpretation. He is rather, among all beings, the most elevated being who supports the others “in their being,” but he is not being. If he is it, it is in an “ontological” sense that only belongs to him. He is the God of the Christians. He does not appear at all as the most thinking instance of

thought. He appears rather as the object of a thought. He does not appear as the name of philosophy, but rather as the object of faith that philosophy in its turn would have to “prove” in order to reconcile the thinker and the believer in Descartes.

This text permits us to measure to what point in its actual becoming philosophy can be exterior to what it is. To what point what is in question in the texts and what is actually thought by the great philosophers is always different, and sometimes extremely different, from the consciousness they have of what they are in the process of doing. Descartes believes he is in the process of “proving God,” and what is more, he apologizes for it as for a very remote question. Remote in relation to what? In relation to the order of the questions, in relation to philosophical order. While, on the contrary, it is the preeminence of the question of God over clear and distinct ideas that is the most philosophical thing in the *Meditations*. It is the Method reduced to itself that would be “quite light and so to speak metaphysical.”

What is important, in fact, is not that I play in the mirror with the clarity and distinction of representation; what is important is that thought becomes sure of itself as Stable, or as participating in the Stability of the Real. That is the only thing that interests man, not because he is a glutton for reality, but because reality *as such* is his first definition, and consequently the reason for all his projects.

NOTE

The notes concerning the third lesson on God are in fact completely missing. It was a question of showing that thought has, in what is at issue at the heart of the question of God, its place as thought, in opposition to what Nietzsche calls *die Bienenkorbe unserer Erkenntniss* (the beehives of our consciousness).