Common and Proper: An Attempt to Answer the Question 'What is Philosophy?'

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There is even a paradox in the name of philosophy.[1] Philosophy would rather love wisdom than have it. This is what exasperates those who interrogate it for answers and not questions. But this love must not be unhappy: being satisfied with unsatisfied love means loving love and at bottom feeling contempt for its object.[2] It *changes the object*, the beloved wisdom is not what one thought one had. Those who say they have wisdom do not doubt, what they have is dogma, but those who doubt whether they have it may gain another wisdom, knowledge. Wisdom seems to change according to its place: it is false wisdom at the beginning of the cognitive process, but may be true in one or other of its relative terms. Knowledge is a wisdom that one works towards and to gain it one must deny having it, *know that one does not know*. Thus, in order to grasp what philosophy is, we must ask what a knowledge of not-knowing can be – a Socratic question – and what kind of cognitive process it is that can start with what is false to reach what is true; and this is a question to which the answers might be Platonic or Aristotelian. From Plato to Aristotle the *ousia*, what truly *is*, which is translated as *essence* in Plato, and as *substance* in Aristotle, changes places in this process. And if every philosophy decides to see true being as the thought *essence* of things *or else* as their particular *substance*, it would be a good idea to formalize the difference – gnoseological, ontological, political – between the two philosophers. It is a tricky project because it will have to contravene the rules of interpretation to produce this formal reconstruction.

Knowledge of not-knowing

The paradox of *philo-sophia* has much to teach us. If I am a *sophos*, a wise man, then, by the very fact of positioning myself within the truth, I am not in it. We must know that we do not know, which not only defines Socrates, as we know, nor only the starting point of science, the initial shedding of 'preconceptions',[3] but rather describes all knowledge. We should include the whole gamut of philosophies and knowledge in this knowing to not know. So we should not be in a hurry to specify this matter by translating it into *one* philosophy. 'Knowing to not know' means rejecting authority, ideal entities, prejudices . . . in a given philosophy, but it is the nature of all of them that concerns us here, this essential paradox that lets them speak in this way. Though, as a general rule, philosophy, knowledge, requires *given* truth – myth, religion – to be abolished, though it comes out of 'nihilism', the 'speculative Good Friday',[4] that does not tell us *how knowing can be the way of being of not knowing*.

First of all the break between myth and knowledge defines its terms in a special manner. It is not given, or else it is associated with what it rejects and becomes yet another mythical wisdom. But if it is not given, it must emerge *from the terms it separates*, it must be internal to them: myth and reason must exist the one within the other. Myth is within reason because reason is a project, it has to be conquered in the struggle against myth, since there is no end to criticizing it and ridding it of its myths. On the other hand reason is within myth because it arises from it, even though reason is defined by opposition to myth, or rather in order to do so: reason distances itself from myth because myth makes reason possible.

But this does not mean that rational *ideas* are within myth. Indeed, although concepts only obtain their meaning through their inter-relatedness, which is not the same for the mythic and the rational, ideas are not comparable in each case. Thus it is because of its structure that myth makes reason possible. Mythic inter-relatedness must be able to reject as knowledge and itself not-knowing, identity itself with the rejection of myth. What is beyond apprehension in religion must be structured in such a way that it changes itself into an intelligible world.[5] In fact it is not really a question of structure. Before being combinatorial, thought is *a mutual donation of meaning* of its terms. This is what myth and *logos*, spontaneous thought and systematic thought, seem to have in common. If language in general is a system composed of differences, each term is *the other in relation to another term*, it contains the *others*, it is the product of the relationship between concepts. It is independent only insofar as it also *contains* the others.[6] Difference defines identity, and of course identity implies differences. But at this level of generality the network is empty and the differences between its nodes are formal. Difference that is not indifferent can only come from a multiplicity outside thought, outside this replication of interdependence. Which is not to be understood as empiricism if the structure is to be valid for any discourse, empirical or not. Thus the search for mythic premises for the rational becomes a search for *rational* premises for the rational and the mythic, a search for what can be called the *constitution of meaning*.[7]

In general philosophy would thus be defined as a secondary rational discourse, reconstituting in various ways (among them an empirical way) the intelligible character of all discourse. Its critique of myth would be a meta-critique inviting it to reformulate itself in order to fit its *own* premises as a discourse, a unique path between the nodes of a language that accepts a multiplicity not deducible from the network form. It would be a *valid* re-constitution of *meaning* claiming to be regulated according to the premises of the reconstituted object. And in this case the assumption of exteriority would be unproblematic because its object is already *discourse*. Nevertheless, this *immanent* reconstitution would have to *alter* the object's meaning in order to make it conform to its own premises, and this reworking, which makes philosophy not simply a reformulation of myth but the basis of knowledge, would be the meaning of Socratic ignorance that bases knowing on not-knowing. Knowing that we don't know would be not accepting the meaning of a term thought outside its differential relationship with its context, even if it can only be thought as a result of the multiplicity external to the network (which would be supposedly valid for all schools, including 'idealists'). Every term is *the other to another term* rather than self-defined, and Socrates *would play the idiot* since he does not claim to know the meaning of independent words. Doing philo-sophy would be not knowing it, and trying to discover

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how meaning is constituted in discourse, which always begins by being non-adequate to its *own* premises.

The process of knowing. An outline

I believe that concepts are constituted relative to one another and to their exterior as Plato or as Aristotle describe. And that, not content with determining the field of philosophical oppositions up to the seventeenth century, as we know, these thinkers offer – as *types* of thought, ways of posing the question about knowledge – two alternatives that run through the whole of what is called 'philosophy'. Knowing is discovering *thoughts through things,* as Plato has it, or else *things through thoughts,* as Aristotle says, subjecting the fact to the thought or the thought to the fact. But these two opposed types both seem essential. Hence there are syntheses: Plotinus reformulates the first to include the second, according to Kant we constitute the object with Aristotelian-type categories but regulate knowledge of it with Platonic-type ideas.[8] My intention will also be to show that discovering things through thoughts is discovering thoughts through things as well. But I would like to set out this thesis – which, within a Kantian framework, means that description must have norms – in a formal manner, by comparing the two types.

Given that the formulation with two terms – things-thoughts – does not express their complementarity, the model must be made more complex. We shall do this using the *common* and the *proper,* a bone of contention between Plato and Aristotle, by recasting these terms as relationships: that of *communication* – the fact of being or attribution of what is common – and that of *definition* – the fact of being or attribution of what is not-common.

Either we discover thoughts about things through them or else things through thoughts about them, either we rise from senses to thought or else we apprehend the *this* through what we think about it, and we finally attain either *the idea of* some set of *things* or *the thing as a bundle of properties.* The focus shifts: universal *essence* of phenomena or unique *substance* of accidents, either the genus is the essence of the individual or else the individual is the substance of the genus. According to modern thinkers, those who lean towards the genus are idealists or rationalists, and those who lean towards the individual are materialists or empiricists: *being* is idea or matter, I *acquire knowledge* through reason or senses. Thus Aristotle's criticism of Plato – that he made the predicate (thought) the subject (*ousia*) – was used again by Marx the materialist against Hegel the idealist.[9] But it is also possible to say that here the empiricist is opposed to the rationalist; one proceeds *according to reason* and the other *according to sensation.* 'In the logical order (*kata ton logon*) it is the universal that comes first; in the order of the senses (*kata tèn aisthèsin*) it is the individual,' Aristotle says. But he adds that both are necessary (*Met.* 1018 *b* 30). Indeed, our thought is always caught between these two "true beings": the common and the proper. It always takes a kind (genus) of things and the properties of a thing. I belong to humanity, I participate in it (or am *subsumed* in it), and it is part of me, it is one of my *inherent* properties. We presuppose sometimes the idea, the genus, the common, sometimes the sensible, the proper, the individual: communication or definition. Thus we must combine idealism and materialism, rationalism and empiricism. And since reason *exists,*

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no less than what is perceptible to the senses, as *discourse* or *language*, it is useful to go back beyond these modern oppositions, to Plato and Aristotle, but also to interrogate the meaning in their writings of the term that links these modern positions, *logos*, which in retrospect means reason and discourse or language for us.

There are two meanings to proper and common that correspond to the two positions, which also should be analysed as two relationships between terms and not as terms out of context. If the concept precedes the specific case, every time the common precedes the proper for us, the proper is not exclusive. The individual partakes of the general, its proper is inclusive. In Greek the word for this is *oikeion*, proper to the family, *oikos*. It is no coincidence that, according to Plato, the individual soul is *related* to ideas, *syn-genès*, has a common genus or the same lineage: essence is *a priori* familiar to us.[10] Nor is it a coincidence that he gives priority to the community over the individual, just as in the family. But if the proper precedes the common, it is exclusive, *idion*, which gives *idiotès*, the person who is private/deprived: deprived of participation, outside the community. Here the object is not familiar to us, we have to adapt our thoughts to the fact.[11] It is no coincidence that Aristotle, the thinker of definition and the *idion* that constitutes it,[12] upholds the individual and the *specific* family against the generalization of the family order in the *Republic*, that 'communism' that multiplies parents and children.

However, the particulars that are Aristotle's starting point would be isolated within what is proper to them if there were no community *in another register*, not on the object's side but on ours. The *logos* no longer designates the fact that objects partake in the common idea but its integration into the linguistic and political community, which in turn is the rational or speaking and political animal's *idion*. From a *communion* of individuals partaking in a term that is *self*-defined outside of them we move to a communication between speaking individuals in order to define the other. And if the community, communion, and communication come together in the same word *koinônia* (as reason, discourse, language do in *logos*), this is because the community is always in communion or in communication, *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft*.

In one case the *logos* is the *proper-oikeion* of things of which they are a part and which forms the basis of their community by *communicating itself* to them. In the other it is the *proper-idion* of human beings, not the *ratio essendi* of things but a means of communication. Here human beings share with one another their opinions about what they perceive, the *definition of the other* of the *logos*. The affects that are expressed discursively,[13] produced by sensation which judges (perception), give rise to concepts.[14] Even the just, which is the basis of the political community, can be reduced to a perception, an other of the *logos* that defines it. My relatives and neighbours are those with whom I am in a community of perception or to whom I communicate my perceptions (*aistheseôn koinônia*).[15] Aristotle breaks away from the 'creation metaphysics that his teacher came to construct to account for the functions and nature of the *logos*'. In his view the validity of the generalization does not imply that thought produces what can be sensed. He simply makes use of 'language as a fact common to human beings, valid for that very reason'.[16] This 'common fact' is no other than the *community* that communicates *with itself*.

We shall therefore make our model more complex by adding *logos* and *koinônia*. As far as the *logos communicates* itself *to its other* (idea to sensible, archetype to copy, general to specific case, common to inclusive proper), it is first and foremost *self-definition*. But as far as the *logos defines its other* (what is perceived), this is to the extent that, far from being

PLATO	ARISTOTLE
1. The *logos* as a medium of self-definition as a medium for attributing an image to the idea and vice versa a genus to the individual	1. The *logos* as a medium of communication (with oneself) arising from: the identity of the signifieds (affects) from which is derived: the community family-city
2. The *logos* as a medium of communication with its other arising from: identity with itself – stability of the definition (1) from which is derived: the community of dialogue	3. The *logos* as a medium for the definition of its other (sensation) as a medium for attributing a predicate to a subject (accident to substance) and vice versa a 'principle of union' (*Met.* Z, 17) to the composite
1 and 2 follow each other	1 and 2 alternate

self-defined by itself, it is simply *communication to itself* by the community. The exclusive proper of human beings must give an account of the exclusive proper of the thing without having the guarantee of a presupposed familiarity.

In general, if concepts are constituted relative to one another it can be said that they are mutually defined within their community: that they are *self-defined* or else that they *communicate themselves* to one another. And if in addition they are always defined relative to what is external to them, then it can be said that they *define their other*, or that they *communicate themselves to it*. To this extent this typology is general. If what is self-defining communicates itself to the other, thought precedes what is sensible. Plato's community of dialogue, for example, does seem to depend on the stability of the definition searched for, which is assumed to exist. But if what can be used to communicate can also be used to define what is external to it, then the relationship with the other with whom I communicate in our community of perceptions and the relationship with the sensible interact, there is a *to-and-fro* between them. Hence the suggested model, which formalizes the opposition between the two types of relationship that the *logos* has with its other by means of the entries *communication-definition* and *self-other*. Here it will be noted that the Aristotelian side seems to combine the *reality* of dialogue with its *logical* presupposition, which is typically Platonic and is outlined on the left.

Defining the true being. Application of the model (*Met.* Z. 16)

Aristotle bases the *logos* outside itself. Plato bases it in itself, and makes dialogue arise from the definition of a meaning that is assumed to exist of itself. This is the model for deductive science: for Aristotle, for everyone including Euclid, a follower of Plato. Deduction leads on to the Platonic idea of being: the principle communicates itself to the consequence, being, which is the most *common*, to everything, even nothingness.[17] But definition, which states a first object, 'which has an object one, in the true sense of one', that is here, 'which corresponds to the different meanings of being', leads on to an

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Aristotelian point of view. Being allows communication, but definition focuses on the one. At least if the one, the intersection of the individual's properties, is not understood in the sense of a common characteristic, in the manner of being in Plato. Thus we read *Metaphysics* Z. 16,[18] where Aristotle contradicts Plato and shows that 'being' and the 'one' are not *ousia*, true being, to see how he approaches definition, being as a single substance and the one as exclusive, how he goes from common to proper, from meanings common to the community to the definition of the concept, through the semanticist's communication with oneself, that is, a to-and-fro between the aspects of meaning and between these aspects themselves and the definition searched for. Thus it will be this sort of model that will include dialogue as the communication between equals in the model of knowledge. For then science will be that rational discussion that does not assume anything that is defined by itself.

From the point of view of communication the two types are two stages. The second would base the *logos* outside itself, since the noiseless space for communication is already established, the space of science assured, whereas Plato had to produce this space,[19] thus base the *logos* within itself, make dialogue depend on the definition of a meaning assumed to exist *per se*. The scientific debate stage presupposes the dialogue stage, that ceases when faced with objective meaning, and it integrates both sides. One cannot proceed from deductive science to inductive science, but dialectical induction is included in a process where it precedes and monitors deduction.

'The one can be understood in the various senses of being.' According to our matrix that could mean that definition corresponds to the various meanings of communication. Indeed, on one hand the definition of a term is understood in the different senses the perceiving community gives it. On the other hand, though being is understood in several meanings (*Met.* 1003 a 33), it is always in relation to a single term. For this purpose Aristotle chooses one of the meanings, substance, the "properly" being (*kyriôs*), this time in the sense of eminently, what truly *is* because it is not common but unique to each being: 'it is substance that is absolutely primary', 'the primary object of our study must be being understood in this sense' (1028 *a-b*). Thus being is not substance since it does not express the reference to *some*-one. It is the same with the one, even if the definition of such a one states that it is and is one, even if substance is being *understood in the sense* of the one. What is one, the individual, is a substance, and what is is one if it has only one substance: 'the very substance of what is one is one, the beings whose substance is numerically one are numerically one'. But not everything that is said to be one is substance: multiple may be subsumed in one, as in Plato, and this is indeed a determination common to everything. The difference is probably that what is universal communication in Plato here is communication *with oneself*. So from speaking community to object the same structure is maintained.

Indeed if substance is what cannot be the predicate of something else (1029 *a*), it is what is common only to itself and only communicates itself – only attributes itself – to itself. Consider the question as to whether *man* and *musician* have the same substance. 'Neither the one nor being can be the substance of things' for, if the man is a musician, if the substance is and is one, it is because it gives its property to itself, because the man becomes a musician. It may be said that substance is in the position of the *idea* – Aristotle will say later that the idea is in the position of substance – of what communicates itself to the other, but that it is itself the other to which it gives itself: it is a founding principle.

The same is true of the one and being 'in this respect as is true of the element in general and the principle in general', for substance is principle but not every principle is substance. The one is common because it subsumes individuals, but it ceases to be so if it inheres in what is called one, if it is a concept that substance attributes to itself. The thinker of induction is also always, like Aristotle, the thinker of the *inherence* of property in the subject.

Element and principle are themselves two cases of definition where the movement from common to proper can be seen: 'the characteristic common to all senses of the term is that the *element* of each being is its founding and immanent principle' (1014 b), 'the characteristic common to all *principles* is to be the source from which being or generation or knowledge springs' (1013 a). In order to define we turn twice to the common: the *common* element of *common* meanings. But these communities of meaning and communication are downgraded in definition, which only retains what can be related to the one. This is the case with dialectics, which starts from a consensus ('those opinions are probable that are accepted by everyone, or most people', etc.) but ends up with the principles of science (*Top.* 100 b, 101 b). It corrects opinion in the light of science, but the latter, which is thus formally Platonic, is no longer so when it defines the *other*, when it includes its *empirical* origins. The element, like the cause next named, is itself a principle, a source first appearing in knowledge of the senses and then devalued. Movement takes place from the least knowable (substances perceived by the senses) to the most knowable. It starts out dialectically from the probable to 'make what is knowable in itself knowable for itself'. Then induction can become deduction: 'We ask *what principle?* so that we may be led towards a more knowable reality.' Paradoxically dialectics seems here to be part of science, and this to the extent that science aims here to define some other.

Aristotle's comparison is instructive: it is the same here as with duty, where we have to start out from a particular good, not only in order to rise to the general good but to *go back down* from there to the starting point and 'make the general good become everyone's individual good' (*Met.* 1029 b). If it were separate from individuals the general good would be unjust, like the destruction of the particular in the *Republic*. We should start out from the sensible and end up there. Principle is real if it is not separated from the sensible, but we have to go from sensible substance towards invisible substance and find it again in unique things, in each-ones (*kath' hekasta*). The general has to be *distributed* among the individual. We understand that true justice is distributive, and the *logos* is the calculation of a distribution. The latter records the form of substance – of each one's communication with itself – by marking the limit (*horos*) of it: 'there is only quiddity of things, the statement of which is definition', there is no durable being except that of which the *logos* is de-finition, de-termination: *horismos*. We leave the community for definition only in order to come back to it to single out its members. Substance is this form, the *horos* of the *idion*: communication with oneself is also the boundary that defines a thing by attributing to it what belongs to it.

Approaching definition, going up to that boundary does involve paradox. 'Among these ideas being and the one are more truly substance than principle, element, and cause, and yet they are not substances, since nothing of what is common is substance.' This is a paradoxical statement, since it puts the more and the less in the absolute. The common excludes substance, and yet being and the one, common things, are *more* substance than other things, principle, element, cause. Only the to-and-fro between intended definition

and communication can explain these typically Aristotelian comparisons. Approaching a definition is *always* paradoxical, since the definition eliminates near and far, more and less, and changes them into yes and no, inclusion and exclusion. Every groping attempt is consciously wrong, yet it has the virtue of not prejudging what the desired definition will be. Compared with Plato's dialogue, which is essentially apparent, where dialectic between one equal and another is transformed into *communication-to*, Socrates *to* his interlocutor like the idea to the copy, the *Corpus*, that lecture that ought to exclude equality, implies, in the answers the teacher gives himself, the back-and-forth from communication to definition. He does not presuppose any definition, he approaches it by constructing it. He communicates with the other as with himself in order to define a third entity together. Of course this knowledge can only devalue its sensible origin in favour of definition, but this definition does not stop defining *an other*, the sensible remains the referent, deduction consists in turning back to the individual at the outset. – And this gnoseological inversion is political as well. In the City there is no *oikeion* without a head of household, no *idion* without distribution among equals. The most communist and dialectical of the two is not the expected one.

'Nothing of what is common is substance.' We must rise from the common to the delimitation of the substance, or wealth – another meaning of *ousia* – of each one. But starting from common meanings, opinion, and in order to define something else, that is to say, starting out from and aiming at the empirical level. Paradox will not spare the relationship to the external-to-thought either. 'Indeed, substance only ever attributes itself to itself and to the [subject] to which it belongs and of which it is the substance'; to what has it (*tô echonti autèn*). What relationship links that which does not attribute itself to anything else and that which *has* it? Why does the former *nevertheless* attribute itself to the latter? It has to do with the *difference between being and discourse*: the subject–predicate relation corresponds to the substance–accident relation. 'The subject is what everything else depends on and what does not itself depend on anything else' (1028 *b*). Among its meanings Aristotle prefers form, which is anterior, 'more' real, and he states at once that substance, which itself will be revealed as form (Z, 17), is that to which 'everything else is predicate' (1029 *a*). The difference between being and discourse is not really a difference of *having*: the subject *has* everything, including substance, which also has everything. This difference designates the one as the mode of *being* of the other: the subject-form has substance-form insofar as it *is* it, *discourse* is a mode of having what *is* by *being* it. Knowledge is 'somehow' identical with its content (*On the Soul* 430 *a*-431 *a*).

If 'to have in a certain way' is 'to be so' in Greek – whence *hexis*, *habitus*, mode of being that is a way of having (*Met.* 1023 a), a specific qualified power[20] – that coincidence is no accident: the subject *is* the predicate if its substance has that property. But this is only if the predicate turns out to express substance, contradictorily, that the relationship appears between the parallel orders of being and discourse. Here too paradox comes from the refusal to define *in advance* in order to approach the meaning: the contradiction of the meaning forces us to reformulate it. Definition of concepts is like an internal dialectic, constitutive of meaning. Indeed, if what does not attribute itself to anything attributes itself to the subject, it means that, without this attribution to *what is being talked about*, we could say nothing about it. But then speaking is abolishing the division created for speaking's own purposes, restoring the *synolon*, the whole, the reality spoken of.[21] Thus communication with oneself is in a way invested in the object: as if substance were the idea in

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which communication with oneself, the activity of defining, constituting an idea, were included. By attributing substance to the subject it can be seen that it cannot be attributed to anything but *itself as subject*, and that it is not common. The paradox makes us reconsider the attribution, step back from definition of the other to communication with oneself. But now the *with oneself* is *like another*.

The one is not common: 'Furthermore what is one cannot be in several places at the same time, whereas what is common is in several places at the same time.' Considering the one as common always means setting up *the other as oneself*, reducing communication to definition by restricting it to a having-from (*metechein*). Defining the one as individual means considering *oneself as other*, performing in every respect a *return from definition to communication*, in other words, a *distribution*. Seen in this way, reducing the proper to the common is not only absurd but also contrary to justice.

'Therefore it is clear that none of the universals exists outside individuals in their separate state.' Existing here, and attributing oneself earlier, are both translations of *hyparchô*, 'starting from below'. But if attributing oneself is existing for another, here existing is existing *for oneself*: the universal does not exist for itself, it is attributed to another that exists for itself. In its two meanings *hyparxis* condenses typical Aristotelian thought as I have attempted to define it. Starting out or governing from below: Aristotle's politics too can be summarized in this reversal.

The form of true being. Dialectics of the model (*Met. Z. 16*, continued)

The direct comparison of the two authors in the continuation of Z. 16, where Aristotle sets out his classic critique of Platonism, tends to blur their differences. The foregoing reading, which would have been overstated if it had been a question of interpreting rather than constructing types, is justified here because it allows us to re-read the Aristotelian 'inversion' of Platonism as a restatement of Plato's type of thought in a wider context, which, as we suggested, puts dialogue into the idea, communication into self-definition.

Against the 'supporters of ideas' (*hoi ta eidè legontes*), those stating the forms – that is, in accordance with our typology, those who first assume definition as self-definition by the *logos* and thus definition of the other as self – Aristotle states that *eidos* is not *ousia*. Then he says *ousia* is *eidos* (1041 b). The difference, which is bewildering, is concealed by the fact that *eidos* is translated as *idea* in Plato and by *form* in Aristotle (elsewhere: *species*), as *ousia* is translated by *essence* in the former and *substance* in the latter. It is true that, in order to make a link between opposites, the French translator Tricot here keeps *substance* for both. He should also have retained *form*, to show the complete opposition, which – as in all semantic oppositions – is structured in two inverse relationships between the same terms. Either *ousia* is subsumed in *eidos*: idea is essence, that is, form is substance, what is form is also substance, or else *eidos* is subsumed in *ousia*: substance is form, that is, essence is idea, or what is 'existing essence' is also 'visible idea', we might say.

This permutation starts to mean something if we note that *eidos* is the apparent, the visible. From this point of view Plato reduces the visible to the invisible, as *the visible of the invisible* (phenomenon), instead of bringing the invisible in to the visible, as *the invisible of*

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the visible, non-existent outside it ('none of the universals exists outside individuals and in a separate state'). Plato's error is to separate the thinkable from the sensible by *confusing* the *status* of thought, by contrast, with that of the sensible: 'The cause of their error is their inability to explain the nature of these substances, substances that are incorruptible and outside individual things perceptible to the senses. So they make these ideas specifically (*tô eidei*) identical to corruptible beings (for we know these substances): man in himself and horse in itself are men and horses perceptible to the senses, to which they have simply added the word *in itself*.' Plato confuses the *eidos* of the idea and that of the sensible, the paradoxical invisible *eidos* and the visible one, which paradoxically is not *eidos*. When we reflect on the act of thought on a second, metalinguistic level, we realize that reducing visible to invisible is the reverse, maintaining it inside the invisible, giving the invisible the status of visible, for instance that of an *eidos*. So in order to bring the invisible into contact with the visible we must define the invisible on a second level as far as its status is concerned. Thus we find here the to-and-fro, but between models, between the subsuming *eidos/ousia* and its apparent inversion *ousia/eidos*.

Indeed Aristotle has just said that ideas are in the position of substances, but of substances that communicate themselves wrongly to many things: 'However, the supporters of ideas are correct, in a sense, to give ideas a separate existence, since they tried to make them into substances, but in another sense they are wrong to make the idea a unity of multiplicity.' If form is substance, it is separate, but because it is *ousia* in another sense than form, because it is not essence as idea, because it is not subsumed under form, because it is one and not common: 'substance does seem to have above all the character of being separable and being an individual thing' (1029 *a*). For to say form is substance is to say that form is primary, which is *one above several* (*to hen epi pollôn*) and, *at the same time*, that several are one before being several, thus *are not several*. This contradiction appears each time definition takes precedence over communication: the former is then always definition *of itself* (the *eidos* is first of all its own *horos*) and is accompanied by communication of itself to *the other* (the *eidos* as *ousia*, in every sense, is *separate*), in other words by a *false* communication.

The *eidos* becomes invisible again. Not having any longer this assumed total difference, which is not in fact any difference at all, it can at last have one of its own that does not contain this contradiction. 'However, even if we had never seen the stars, they would, I think, be eternal substances, distinct from those we know; thus, in the present case as well, even if we do not know what non-sensible substances exist, it may be necessary at least to accept that such things exist.' We should no longer think of the visible firstly as visible of the invisible, as *phenomenon*, we should not downgrade it *a priori*. We should start from the visible in order to find its invisible and return to something visible. The invisible is that star, in itself visible, that we have not seen. What it 'may be necessary' to assume exists, without having seen it, remains a unique substance.

Plato does indeed start out from the visible but repeats it in the invisible (a criticism similar to the etymology of *eidos* and *idea*) in that he does not reflect that extraction ('there is nothing at all that is separable outside the entities perceptible to the senses . . . it is in sensible forms that the intelligibles are to be found', *On the Soul* 432 *a*). Anyone who claims the discursive universal for themselves can only find as substance that which is said in general, about everything, *ta katholou legomena*. Being is then only what is said in communication to the other, which is now simply a copy.

'And so we have just demonstrated that none of the universals is substance.' But substance is form: 'Looking for the why is looking for the cause, and this cause is form (*eidos*) by virtue of which matter is a determined thing, and that is what substance is.' Substance is form, not as universal communication but as what makes *ba* more than *b* plus *a*, the why of *this* individual whole. Thus Aristotle makes the same criticism of Plato as the young Marx did of Hegel: 'it is not the logic of facts but the fact of logic.'[22] And they draw similar political conclusions, on the side of the individual and against the state as the development of an 'idea'.

Community and property

It is as if Aristotle's kind of thought was inserting into theory the main character of Plato's dialogues, Socrates. As if what was happening here was a reflection on Plato's model of thought, putting his conditions into it, reintroducing his particular declarative context into philosophy. For example, in Plato, Socrates, who knows he knows nothing, maintains, as regards content, that knowledge is remembering, that everyone knows everything without knowing it. Here, by contrast, the soul is a clean slate (*On the Soul* 430 *a*), it is known to know nothing, it is a 'Socrates', and this nature of the philosophical speaker, transforms the content of the philosophical thesis in which he is included. The 'remembering' of what knows nothing no longer concerns the content but rather the cognitive process: rational discourse gets its fixed point starting from a point without content – from 'nihilism', so to say. Thought, the *noûs*, which is identical to the content it knows (430 *a*-431 *a*), could thus acquire it by the very act of getting rid of the content it is *given*.

According to Hegel, because Plato was afraid of the 'free infinite personality' appearing in the City, he sought assistance against it *from* itself, from Socrates, who embodied that 'right of singularity'[23], 'personal interest', as Dodds says in the same spirit.[24] This ambiguity should not surprise us if it is really Aristotle who is introducing someone like Socrates into his theory, however paradoxical it may seem. And that is why the *idiotès*, the private individual, and the *idion*, its exclusive proper, have a place in his 'polity' (*politeia*), but not in Plato's *Republic* (*politeia*). For him the 'idiot' is everyone.

If the citizenship of the individual is no longer linked as directly to his function as in the *Republic*, it is probably because his proper defines each person as the other for another and for his proper, as *neighbour*. Because he only partakes of the common if he benefits from its distribution. In him we might say that the immanent common, not presupposed, here called communication, precedes definition of terms. Thus Aristotle advocates distributing things as parcels of private property, exclusive proper (*idias tas ktèseis*), but retaining community of use (*tè de chrèsei poiein koinas*). And we should note that here the philosopher gives up his claims to legislate in favour of the lawmaker, whose 'proper work', *idion*, is to combine property and community of goods (*Pol.* 1263 *a*).

The movement from common to proper, distribution or attribution of property, is formally the same, in definition and in justice. If the politician weaves the individuals in order to invest them with self-defined common law, he ends up with a family that is both absurd and unjust and that goes beyond the boundary defining it (*horos*): 'if it goes too far on the road to unity, a city will no longer be one ... from being a city it returns to the

state of a family, and from being a family to that of an individual.' But 'the city has it in its nature to be a certain sort of multiplicity' (1261 *a*). Thus the politician should always deliberate, communicate with himself, in order to decide, arbitrate, define the good of each one, give each his own, in short, judge. He should say what is in order to dictate what should be, describe and introduce differences, with a view to rescuing difference as equality, the proper as particularity. Assimilating the proper, losing it in similarity, in being part of the identical, is unjust in politics and wrong in logic. It was illogical to separate sensible from thinkable in order to restore it inside the latter; it is unjust, on the other hand, not to separate the proper from the common and to end, by means of a new reversal, with a political division of professions. The other can only be defined *as oneself* with accuracy and justice, therefore *as equal*, if this 'self' is *first defined as the other of another*, as *neighbour*, in a sphere of coexisting differences, and not as *self-defined*, in other words, not as *similar*, in accordance with an 'excessive' unification inevitably accompanied by another division, much deeper, like the one there is in the *Republic* between the lower class, which has only individual interests, and its masters.

Here what is in a modern sense dialectical is that identity is defined as difference from difference. This was how Hegel defined the singular, both as an object of knowledge (particular) and as an individual free to determine his particularity.[25] I think that this is the model of thought reworked by Marx, and that we ought to read him as a thinker of the individual rather than a thinker of the whole exterior to him, 'holistic'.[26] Both of them wish to think of a community of *idiots*, like Socrates, repeating Aristotle's act and taking as their object the unjust denegation of particularity.

However, what shows them to be enemies of the individual, and nostalgic for the *Republic*, in the view of many 'individualistic' readers, is their rejection of the opposite reduction, promoted by strictly bourgeois, empirical, utilitarian thought, whose symmetrical absurdity, formally identical to the Platonic variety, is that individuals *define themselves separate from the community* and then, as sovereign wills, *communicate themselves to their things*. If the free individual is other for another – just as a concept is what differs from other concepts – he is neither swallowed up by the community which is self-defined without him, nor what defines itself instead of defunct communication–communion. The wise plays the idiot, he does not reject the idiotism of everyone, quite the reverse. But he is also careful not to turn this idiotism into wisdom. Wisdom is knowing that one identifies with 'personal interest' at the same time he is 'spitting on it', as Dodds says of Socrates.[27] Wisdom is not 'inverting Platonism', which always means denying community, both scientific and political, but rather including in it its constitutive conditions, which seem to be dialectics itself – and so seeking refuge in Plato against platonism, following Plato, who sought refuge in Socrates against the principle Socrates embodied.

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Notes

1. The question discussed here owes much to the unpublished lectures given by Pierre Osmo at the University of Paris X-Nanterre between 1980 and 1984 on 'Proper, property, appropriation'.

2. See the poem *Eleusis*, in Hegel (1969), *Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), vol. 2, pp. 231–2: 'in vain / the seeker's curiosity looks for more than love / of wisdom (it is love the seekers have and / you they hold in contempt) . . . .'

3. See E. Durkheim (1937), *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: PUF), p. 31.

4. See Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 432.

5. See my book (2001), *Auto to pragma* (Athens: Nisos), chap. 9.

6. Serres makes this connection between the structuralist idea and that of Leibniz's monadology. See, among others, M. Serres (1968), *Le système de Leibniz* (Paris: PUF).

7. See my article, 'Donation mutuelle de sens et raisonnement par l'absurde', in F. Dagognet and P. Osmo (2000), *Autour de Hegel. Hommage à B. Bourgeois* (Paris: Vrin).

8. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 81, B 107; A 313, B 370.

9. *Critique de la philosophie de Hegel, Oeuvres III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982) p. 878.

10. On the subject of this family-mythic trope in Plato, see E. des Places (1964), *La parenté de l'homme avec Dieu d'Homère à la Patristique* (Paris: Klincksieck), pp. 63–128. See also pp. 71 et seq. on the *Phaedo.*

11. 'It was based on experience that Aristotle built up the logical framework of oppositions, and that he later corrected it, to the detriment of abstract accuracy, in order to adapt its distinctions to the requirements of reality'; L. Robin (1923, 1973), *La pensée grecque* (Paris: Albin Michel), p. 289.

12. The *idion* is divided into definition and *idion* in the narrow sense of the term, *Top.* 101 b 20.

13. 'The sounds produced by the voice are symbols of states of mind': *pathèmata, Herm.* 16 a 3.

14. 'All animals . . . have an innate ability to discriminate (*kritikèn*) that we call sense perception (*aisthèsin*)', and those that retain a trace of it in their memory form notions based on what they sense (*Anal. post.* 99 b).

15. 'It is clear that man is more of a political animal than any bee and any social animal . . . alone among the animals man has a language (*logon*). It is true that the voice expresses pain and pleasure and this is also found among animals . . . but language exists to make clear what is beneficial and harmful, and consequently what is just and unjust as well. Indeed there is only one thing that is peculiar to humans compared with the other animals: the fact that they alone are able to perceive good, evil, just, unjust, and other [notions of this kind]. And having such [notions] in common (*hè toutôn koinônia*) is what makes a family and a city (*oikian kai polin*)' (*Pol.* 1253 a 7, from the French translation by P. Pellegrin (1990), Paris: Garnier-Flammarion).

16. B. Parain (1942), *Recherches sur la nature et les fonctions du langage* (Paris: Gallimard), Idées, p. 64.

17. Plato, *Soph.* 254, and Aristotle, *Met.* 1003. b, state that 'non-being is'.

18. All quotations whose source is not indicated are taken from this chapter.

19. M. Serres (1968), *La communication* (Paris: Minuit), pp. 41 et seq., 96.

20. L. Robin, op. cit., p. 287.

21. J.-P. Dumont (1986), *Introduction à la méthode d'Aristote* (Paris: Vrin), pp. 37–8.

22. Marx, op. cit., p. 886.

23. Hegel (1969), *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Werke in 20 Bänden* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp), vol. 7, p. 24; French translation (1972), *Principes de la philosophie du droit* (Paris: Vrin), pp. 54–5; and §124, *Rem.* Furthermore the 'distinctive nature' of the 'idea' as he conceives it contains this new principle: dissolution of all fixed oppositions. In my view this 'distinctive nature' corresponds to the 'idea' as it is defined in the *Parmenides* and not in the *Republic* (cf. Donation mutuelle de sens . . . , op. cit. and *Hegel's Theory of Knowledge and Method* [in Greek] (Athens: Hestia, 2000), chap. 3. For this reason I think the French translator R. Derathé is wrong to supply 'his idea (of the state)' (pp. 54–5).

24. E.R. Dodds (1959), *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press), chap. VII; French translation (1965, 2nd ed. 1977), *Les Grecs et l'irrationnel* (Paris, Flammarion), p. 207.

25. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke*, op. cit., vol. 6, p. 296; French translation (1981), *Science de la logique* (Paris: Aubier), p. 92. *Grundlinien*, op. cit., §§ 7–12.

26. On this point see M. Henry (1987), *Marx* (Paris: Gallimard); B. Bourgeois (1990), *Philosophie et droits de l'homme* (Paris: PUF), chap. 5; and earlier G. Simmel (1892), *Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, French translation (1984), *Problèmes de la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: PUF), pp. 130–1.

27. Dodds, loc. cit.