

THE DIALECTICAL CONDITIONS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF INTUITION¹
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The goal that we propose for ourselves in the following pages is to determine with exactitude the conditions under which a philosophy of intuition can be constituted. By philosophy of intuition, we mean every doctrine which affirms that being² can be reached only through intuition.³ Moreover, it matters little what exact character one assigns to this intuition. The very question of knowing whether to acknowledge intuition as a psychological fact or whether it is even possible to regard intuition as a psychological fact will not be posed over the course of the inquiry we undertake here.⁴ It is only necessary to concede the radical distinction between intuition and

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² *Translators' note:* When Marcel uses the term "being" (*l'être*) in this article, it means "neither substance nor representation [of an object]. It can only be conceived as that in which thought participates." Gabriel Marcel, "Notes, 1912-1913," *Philosophical Fragments, 1909-1914*, translated by Lionel A. Blain (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 84.

³ Perhaps a contemporary philosopher such as M. Bergson—all awash in nominalism—would not subscribe, without some reluctance, to such a formulation of the word being, accompanied as it is by such a retinue of scholastic associations. But it goes without saying that for us being is concrete and that, therefore, this reluctance is unjustified. It is permissible, moreover, to wonder if any metaphysician has ever meant by *being* anything other than the concrete. Besides, the use of the word does not lead obviously in any way to the negation of particular beings, and this would not contradict our claim that intuition is a pathway to *beings*. What would seem certain to us, and is alone essential to our view, is that the philosophy of intuition maintains, and moreover in a novel sense, the difference between that which is and that which might appear, between being and its expressions.

⁴ To this question we would respond without hesitation that from a purely psychological viewpoint, we could not even know how to question knowledge, all the more so with intuition. It is true that one can object, and with good reason it would seem, that it is perhaps not legitimate to consider intuition as knowledge (*connassiance*). But notice that if this knowledge is extra-psychological, then it is so through its *contents*, which constitute it as knowledge, just

discursive knowledge (*la connaissance discursive*).⁵ This distinction can certainly be interpreted in different ways depending on whether the philosophy one employs posits intuition as an empirical fact⁶ or as a supreme requirement of the mind. The distinction remains essentially the same: Intuition is always defined in opposition to discursive knowledge.

The problem that we pose here is that of knowing (*savoir*) the extent to which a philosophy of intuition so constituted is obliged to make appeal to dialectic. Also what value, from the viewpoint of this same philosophy, is to be properly attributed to dialectic or dialectics thus utilized? In other words, regarding the radical dissociation that certain philosophers would establish between intuition and dialectic, a dissociation that would amount to being only an elimination of the latter, pure and simple, is it possible that this same viewpoint would not carry along with it the negation of even the goal it sets up? Our examination will lead us to the apparently paradoxical result, at the risk of destroying the very value of the instruments that allow us to constitute it, that the philosophy of intuition must recognize an essential role for dialectic, or that it must assert that intuition, as independent of all dialectic, would necessarily deny thought—all thought—and therefore intuition itself, or at the very least deny every assertion about it. Once this first point is established, our task will consist of finding ways to avoid these contradictions; that is to say, we will ascertain the principles of a positive dialectic the intuition of which would, in an altogether novel sense, only be its necessary achievement. Hence, we will be led to establish that the philosophy of intuition can be constituted only through a rational critique of the idea of absolute knowledge and that the philosophy of intuition is bound up with this rational critique: if it can be proven that the idea of absolute knowledge (*savoir*) is contradictory, then it has to be renounced in constructing a philosophy of intuition. The horizon of our inquiry will be thus enlarged: it is no longer only a question of finding the conditions that make such a philosophy possible, but more profoundly *if it exists*.

The only conditions that can make a philosophy of intuition possible, at least at first, follow without difficulty from its very definition.

First of all, it would need to be established, or at least postulated, that being is in some general manner present to the mind or is at least accessible to it. This assertion must be taken in its maximum generality. The mode of exact relation existing between being and thought is not and must not yet be specified. We are restricted to supposing that there is a relation between being and thought, which we will call immanence in the general sense, and that being is not alien to thought. Likewise, the mode of relation, itself the process whereby one would succeed in formulating the assertion of immanence, remains as yet indeterminate.

Moreover, the philosophy of intuition demands a specification of the method or the instruments by which being is attained. And this specification is made by way of exclusion. The

as the *value* of intuition can only reside in its *contents*. Intuition can only be distinguished from knowledge in general (*connaissance en generale*) by the nature of the relation that links the content to the form ([content and form] could be considered as identical in the case of intuition and only in that case). But the existence of a content, of a value, is in this case, as in the other, the sign that we are no longer in the psychic domain, which in the final analysis is a world of events. It is evident that if one restricts oneself to regarding intuition as an event of this sort, it would be nonsense to assert that it is a pathway to being.

⁵ *Translators' note:* Throughout this translation, we have rendered the French term *connaissance* as “knowledge.” The reader should remember, however, that *connaissance* also could mean “consciousness” or “knowledge by acquaintance” in English. In the few places where *connaissance* means “consciousness,” we have translated it as such.

⁶ The question of knowing whether intuition can be taken to be empirical, for whatever reason, will thus be resolved in what follows.

second necessary condition is the demonstration that discursive thought is not in any position to attain being. Demonstration, we say, this is, in effect the indetermination, indicated earlier, that would not completely remain here. Perhaps it is legitimate to suggest that immanence in general is known by intuition. But it is obvious, on the contrary, that no intuition can reveal a flaw, a gap, an incapacity, an inadequacy. It can reveal it, at the very most, only by being associated, as an auxiliary, with a comparative and discursive thought. Nevertheless, the indetermination remains up to a certain point, because so far as this indetermination is affected by the very nature of the demonstration, it seems these divergences would appear. In effect, we can conceive of, at least superficially, on the one hand a rationalism that would demonstrate its ontological incapacity through the analysis of discursive thought—as exemplified in [William] Hamilton’s philosophy—and on the other hand we can conceive of an empirical doctrine such as that of M. Bergson which, by means of the historical study of intelligence, determines the function of intelligence and, consequently, its limits. We accept at least provisionally these two forms of demonstration, both of which would constitute the negative dialectic that we have come to view as the second necessary condition of a philosophy of intuition. What do they have in common, not only formally, but also fundamentally? What is their common presupposition?

It is evident that this presupposition is the idea of being itself: both types of demonstration are oriented toward an idea that they do not claim to engender or create, but which would instead be given to them. Even if the empirical doctrine could succeed in establishing the existence of a different function of intelligence—instinct,⁷ for example—this would only be so by an *a priori* (in the literal sense) demarcation of thought by which it would relate this function to being. The idea of being is logically and rationally prior to all demonstration, empirical or not, which claims to establish the metaphysical impotence of discursive thought. We note, then, that these demonstrations do not assume the first condition of the earlier definition; to assert the inadequacy of intelligence (of discursive thought) in relation to the idea of being, that is to say, its impossibility where it is converted to this idea in reality, does not imply the first presupposition, in virtue of which being itself would be present in the mind. Therefore, it does not seem to be a legitimate reproach of agnosticism that it posits being only to deny it. In other words, to posit being and posit the idea of being should not, at least in the first place, be regarded as identical acts, but rather as distinct moments. We will, moreover, ask ourselves what is the foundation and value of this distinction, which throughout this first part is presupposed, but has not been justified yet.

But if we delve deeply into the question, we will see that the idea of being is not the only necessary presupposition for the negative dialectic of the type that we have defined. This type [of negative dialectic] can be constituted only if one admits that it is possible to determine the limits of the capacity of intelligence, that is to say, if [one admits that] dialectical thought itself (metaphysical thought) is posited at least implicitly as transcendent in relation to intelligence, as rightly comprehensive of the latter. This thought, which we will call *pure* thought, would in no way be identified with intuition because the negative dialectic, set up earlier, clears the way for intuition, which cannot depend on itself, to be the work of the latter. A philosophy of intuition, to speak truly, would rather be disposed to see within the vicious circle of expression less a contradiction than an internal necessity. But it would not seem that the solution here is other than

⁷ The relation between intuition and instinct in Bergsonism is doubtlessly less simple than it would appear here, but it matters little from the point of view we are taking.

verbal, since intuition can only be defined as simple act, and [intuition] is distorted in the unfolding of the demonstration.

A difficulty springs up on another point, though: how can something like the intuitive affirmation of pure thought be attained, given the negation of the ontological value of discursive thought? Apart from the necessity of demonstrating that being is present in the mind, which we will return to later, pure thought still needs to establish, apart from intelligence, that intuition alone remains as the agent of knowledge; and here again, for the reason earlier indicated, [this] cannot be established by intuition itself. But that is not all: Can intuition, strictly speaking, become an object of pure thought? One cannot admit it without burdening oneself with still more grave difficulties, because this would, evidently, make intuition a distinct function of pure thought and a function that nevertheless remains subordinated to pure thought in some manner. In asserting that intuition attains being, and, if this assertion is put forward as an objective judgment, pure thought would indeed be itself defined implicitly as transcendent in relation to being, as independent of its own essence—and by implication it seems that it denies being as absolute. The extreme seriousness of this question will only appear later; however, it is obvious right now that one would resolve this difficulty only in the following way: It must be admitted that pure thought is in a position to posit intuition itself as that which is other than intelligence⁸—as that which *remains* in pure thought, when the discursive and intellectual element is removed from it. Is this reduction in itself, this internal discrimination, possible? And in what sense can one think it? Perhaps we are now allowed to catch a glimpse of the results of this study. But one can henceforth assert, in virtue of what has gone before, that a philosophy of intuition implies:

1. pure thought;
2. the possibility for pure thought to eliminate its own discursive element and to be captured in its purity as intuition.

We must now turn our efforts to the nature of the first assertion, according to which being as such is, in some general manner, present to the mind. What kind of assertion is this? And, from the start, would it not be correct to say that this assertion itself is an intuition? It must be concluded that intuition (which attains being) presupposes an intuition (which asserts immanence). But as we have already said before, the vicious circle cannot be a sign of contradiction for a philosophy of intuition, but it is rather an internal necessity. The objection that we ourselves emphasized against the interpretation, according to which the negative dialectic is founded upon intuition, no longer applies, since it is possible that it would not be proper here to speak of demonstration.

To this one can respond that a philosophy cannot be consciously constituted around a vicious circle unless one absolutely denies the value of thought, defined as logical or dialectical progress. From this point of view, intuition (which manifests immanence) and intuition (asserted as exclusively capable of attaining *being*) is the one and only act by which the metaphysical life of the mind is completely exhausted. Thought would ruin this act in searching for its justification, since this justification would suppose a series of logical demarcations from which the philosophy of intuition should not and cannot recognize any value.

A remarkable contradiction then arises between our latest conclusions and the results of our preceding investigations. Have we not established that intuition absolutely implies pure thought?⁹ And here it now appears that if the first assertion is traced back to an intuition, the

⁸ In thus defining intuition, it is evident and will become increasingly clear that pure thought has absolutely prohibited itself from positing being, that is to say, from making being into an object.

⁹ More exactly, only pure thought can establish the exclusive ontological value of intuition.

philosophy upon which it is based is contrary to thought and negates itself in the thinking.¹⁰ Asserting that intuition is thought is therefore the destruction of the meaning we gave to intuition. Such a philosophy, of necessity, could not be refuted because it is below the level where refutation can reach (the latter [i.e., refutation] could only pertain to thought). Such a philosophy assumes the complete negation of all thought.¹¹ It is therefore obvious that intuition excludes even the possibility of the negative dialectic that we have tried to define earlier or, rather, excludes such a dialectic (absolutely assuming the validity of thought) and would not make any contribution to such a doctrine. Yet, one can conjecture, inversely, that a philosophy such as Bergsonism, which utilizes a dialectic of this type, would not be willingly reconciled to adopting the preceding attitude and would be accordingly obliged to seek to establish immanence otherwise.

Now we must therefore ask ourselves by what dialectic is it possible for thought to establish that being itself is present or accessible, which amounts to the same thing. This dialectic must not be brought to bear on the idea of being, but on being itself. Undoubtedly, this distinction between being and the idea of being can only have an ideal (that is to say, purely abstract) character. However, from the very fact that we have logically distinguished a negative dialectic from a positive dialectic, we are obliged to maintain that distinction at least provisionally. The negative dialectic has established that thought is powerless to convert the *idea of being* into *being*. But for the power of intuition to be exercised supposes that being is given (and not given by the negative dialectic). It is necessary therefore, or so it seems, that a philosophy could be built around intuition as capable of [attaining] being prior to establishing that being is given to dialectic.¹² Can intuition establish that? Is not every dialectic at bottom generative? It seems that the given [*le donné*]¹³ is able to be at the very most a point of departure for dialectic, not an object and an end. What is obvious *a priori* is that for thought it can only be a fact, only a given: just itself. Thought can, in effect, engender itself only ideally. Hence, being can be for [thought] a given only if it is connected to thought itself, only if it is therefore, so to speak, contained in [thought]. But the question that someone will pose to us is that of knowing whether it is indeed being which is implied in [thought], and not [just] the idea of being. Consequently, the moment has come to delve deeply into the

¹⁰ It is important to understand that what is contrary in virtue of the previous demonstration is not the proposition according to which intuition established immanence (if this proposition is taken in itself), but the coexistence of this proposition alongside the assertion about the exclusive ontological capacity of intuition, since the latter can be established only by a dialectic. Perhaps, then, it is allowable that such intuition manifests immanence. In fact, we will see that it is not so that real immanence, that is to say, immanence in the spirit of being *qua* being, can only be established by a positive dialectic which is based upon a critique of the idea of absolute knowledge; but, this [absolute knowledge] cannot be at the same time [the intuition] that attains being.

¹¹ The incompatibility of these two theses undoubtedly suffices to refute realism, of whatever kind, because all realism supposes both theses. Materialism, for example, implies on one hand the assertion that being in-itself is accessible to thought (this assertion would not be in any way dialectical); it supposes on the other hand an equally immediate act by which being comes to be known as identical to a given (matter) arbitrarily isolated and posited in itself. More generally, all realism, that is to say, every doctrine that claims to identify whatever is given as being (that which is given is a material element – whether that is movement, life, or society) immediately ends, and thereby ceases to be thought. Accordingly, one can wonder if, as we shall see, this argument is not worthwhile, although to a lesser degree, against an absolute idealism, which is only epistemological realism.

¹² We leave aside the question of knowing whether this dialectic is identical to discursive thought. But even if it is, the philosophy we define cannot fall into contradiction inasmuch as discursive thought would establish immanence in general without being in a position to attain being (it would not be in a position to exceed the indeterminate assertion of being, this *assertion* being already radically different from the *idea* of being).

¹³ It is regrettable that our [French] language does not permit us to express this exactly: that the object of the dialectic is not the *Gegebene* [the given], but *Gegebeneseyn* [givenness].

meaning of and inquiry into the foundation of the very distinction between being and the idea of being.

As we have said earlier, we are obliged to introduce the very terms of the problem, but without needing again to explain their significance. We will see, in effect, that negative dialectic supposes a certain idea of being and is oriented to this idea of being. On the other hand, intuition applies to being itself, not only to the idea of being. The distinction remains no less obscure, and as a result its legitimacy can, it seems, be placed in doubt. This is precisely why we have to ask whether this distinction between being and the idea of being¹⁴ is possible in this sense and under these conditions.

Suppose that this distinction were not legitimate and that it were proper to identify being with the idea of being. What would be the consequences of this identification? What will become of negative dialectic? Does it still have a meaning? Having finally established the impossibility for discursive thought to attain being, what forbids discursive thought from being applied to an idea? Yet, that is not all: positive dialectic loses all specific character; it is merely reduced to the same position as the idea of being, and is inevitably presumed by negative dialectic, or rather these two dialectics, at bottom, amount to the just one dialectic. It is, therefore, obvious that intuition is possible and has an object, an assignable function, only under the condition that there would be a difference, a distance, between being and the idea of being. How, in effect, would it make sense to say that intuition works by its own capacity to convert the idea of being into being, if there were not a gap between the idea of being and being?

One sees therefore that the philosophy of intuition supposes, in a still unspecified sense, a difference between being and the idea of being. But this difference must be for thought, since thought must, it seems, be in a position to distinguish between being and the idea of being. Can we further clarify the nature of this distinction?

It is clear that this distinction must not be reduced to the distinction between the real (*du réel*) and the unreal (*l'irréel*)—otherwise, intuition would be reduced to only the apprehension of the imaginary. Accordingly, it can be established without difficulty that this distinction between the real and the unreal is fundamentally equivocal and devoid of metaphysical value. In the broad sense of the word real [*le réel*], the fictional is still real because it involves psychological processes of elaboration (of which [the fictional] is the fixed product) which, as such, have a reality. Outside of psychology, the fictional seems not to have any reality at all. Strictly speaking, there is no possible intuition of nothingness because, as we have said before, intuition can be treated only as knowledge (*connaissance*) or as creation, and in neither of these two cases can nothingness fall into their grip.

The question thus arises about how knowledge (*savoir*) as the dualism of being and the idea of being can be thought; how it is possible to differentiate the one from the other. Here the positive dialectic would thus appear, at least in the first instance, to be transformed into a criteriology of being. In other words, the problem that we pose here seems to be the following: To determine the criterion of being considered as such, of being insofar as it is distinct from its idea and even as it can be opposed to its idea. But upon reflection this [notion that positive dialectic can be converted into a criteriology] vanishes because specifying a criteriology of being would be

¹⁴ One might now ask whether this distinction we appear to have established will force us to overcome idealism, because from the idealist point of view the distinction between the object and the idea of the object is present only in its ideal and provisional character. It goes without saying that if we believe we must restore this distinction beyond idealism, this will not be a relapse into the errors of a naive theory which sees in the idea as an image or a reflection of the ideal.

possible only if it were an idea, [only if it] could be recognized as having a certain character and distinguished from other ideas. How can one establish a criterion which is not an idea (or, what comes to the same thing, which does not coincide with its idea)? If a metaphysics such as Leibniz's metaphysics is based on a criteriology of being—in our view the theory of substance can be nothing other than this—then it absolutely presupposes this identity of being and the idea of being, where [the identity of] the ideal and the real later comes to be asserted in a more explicit manner in the case of a Schelling¹⁵ or a Hegel.

But, then, if there is no criterion of being, how can the problem we have posed be solved? The question even seems to lose all significance: If being is not defined by any criterion, it seems that it is not identifiable in any way or is only identified with its idea [i.e., the idea of being]. These two alternatives are not actually distinct. To deny (*Nier*) being is only to deny (*nier*) it as being distinct from thought. It is to assert that [being] is identical to the act which posits it. Could we then stop at such an assertion? It necessarily leads to the ruin of the philosophy of intuition, whose conditions we have decided to seek, but this does not necessarily constitute an argument against it. Perhaps, when taken to its conclusion, this doctrine leads to a contradiction, to a thought that is not a thought. We must therefore consider the act that posits the identity of being and the idea of being. If this act destroys itself in being thought, then we have to see under what conditions a philosophy of intuition can still survive.

The terrain on which we must place ourselves is thus no longer the same as before. Our earlier inquiries had a hypothetical character, in the strict sense of the word, insofar as they held in suspension the very existence of a philosophy of intuition. The validity of such a philosophy was not even placed in question. Rather, on the contrary, apart from all of the conditions previously set up, we have to ask of ourselves whether or not the identity of being and the idea of being, and the solution at which we have arrived, will depend upon our response to the question of knowing (*savoir*) whether a philosophy of intuition in general is possible (not only what the conditions of it would be).

The problem of the identity of being is nothing other than the problem of absolute knowledge. If, in effect, being is reduced to its idea and is exhausted in it, it follows that thought, insofar as it is conscious (of the idea), is absolutely autonomous; that it is autonomous implies the perfection of every idea, in the end. It is this that constitutes an absolute system which is being and which exhausts the totality of the determinations of the real. It is obvious that, insofar as we speak of a perfect system, the question remains open whether this system can be perfectly realized and in detail by an empirical thought. Here one wants to say that empirical thought is obliged to posit the idea of this system, that [empirical thought] is situated in all particular acts of consciousness (*connaissance*) within the ideally constituted system, and that truth lies, for it, in the possibility of bringing into relation a consciousness (*connaissance*) of the aggregate and of integrating it into [the ideal system]. We believe that we can easily demonstrate that every intellectualist doctrine presupposes such an assertion, and indeed it seems, from the viewpoint of identity, that one can deny the completed character of the system only by confounding reality in itself of (rational)

¹⁵ A problem belonging to both the historical order and the philosophical order could be posed here. We argue in effect that intuition absolutely implies a distinction between being and the idea of being, while the metaphysics of Schelling, based entirely upon intellectual intuition, asserts that the ideal and the real are identical. It seems that this either constitutes an objection against our thesis or indicates an internal contradiction in Schelling's philosophy. Though, without exploring the question in any further depth, we want to respond that Schelling's intellectual intuition is not strictly speaking an intuition, but quite to the contrary, is reason taking hold of itself in itself (*la raison se saisissant soit en elle-meme*) or [doing so] in certain of its objects (art, for example).

knowledge (*savoir*) with its contingent realization (for an empirical thought). The metaphysical problem of intuition thus brings us back to another problem: Is absolute knowledge itself truly thinkable? Is it truly a thought? In the cases where one responds affirmatively to this question, it seems one must absolutely renounce having viewed intuition as anything other than an instance of psychological experience and a confused consciousness (*connaissance*), wholly devoid of all metaphysical significance.

The ontological significance of the doctrine of absolute knowledge is extremely clear: being (that is to say, the idea of being) will simply be the Idea (that is to say, the very system that we intend to define). It is true thought taken in its totality. It [the Idea] is the truth, and simultaneously it is beyond truth, since it is only by relating to [the Idea] that there is any truth at all.

The positive dialectic, which alone can clear the way to see a philosophy of intuition, must therefore now be converted into a critique of absolute knowledge. It is obvious that such a critique cannot and must not be in any way empirical, for it is never evident in experience, never the total field of knowledge (*savoir*), nor can it be an obstacle for the idea of absolute knowledge. Quite to the contrary, absolute knowledge, being essentially capable of assimilation and ideal reduction, will absorb and comprehend in itself everything that claims to oppose it in its development.¹⁶

It is therefore not from a factual viewpoint that we are in a position to criticize the doctrine of absolute knowledge. There is only one viewpoint from which the critique can be engaged. In order to destroy the doctrine it will be necessary to establish dialectically that the idea of absolute knowledge, conceived as the condition of all thought, is itself contradictory and spreads to all *idees* the fatal germ of contradiction that it contains within itself (*communiqué à toutes les <idees> d'elle le germe de contradiction et de mort qui est en elle*). It seems that such a demonstration is not impossible. We cannot consider giving even a sketch of metaphysical methodology in this brief study. We will limit ourselves to showing what should be, according to us, the main points of the argument.

It is appropriate at this moment to wonder whether such an idea, in which one claims to embrace all the determinations of real thought (that is to say, of being) is totally free of this subjectivity which Kant sees, along with reason, as being the necessary condition for all objective knowledge. One can, it seems, be free [of this subjectivity] only by renouncing [the idea of absolute knowledge] as an object of knowledge. One will, then, have to have recourse to some expedient such as intuition,¹⁷ or to some instrument made for the circumstance (a thought that would be objective without being a consciousness [*connaissance*]). But if it is impossible truly to separate [being from knowledge], if it remains really an object suspended from a creative or constructive thought, how can we declare that it is *being*, that it exhausts all determinations? There must here again be recourse to a verbal expedient and one that allows, for example, a substrate (*sur-etre*), an ideal principle that would be the transcendent condition of being. But this ideal principle in posing itself and becoming an idea either is housed entirely within what we earlier called being, and the difficulty springs up for the new system, or it remains outside of what we earlier called being, and

¹⁶ One sees without difficulty that absolute knowledge, considered dynamically and no longer as a world of Ideas, is pure freedom and accordingly the very soul of science. Contemporary critiques, in easing the rigid rationalism of the past, allow us to comprehend marvelously this vibrant and assimilative function of knowing.

¹⁷ To make absolute knowledge dependent on intuition is after all to deny it as a prior idea, and thereby cancel the identity it is intended to guarantee.

being is no longer the total system of ideas. Shortly, we will know the capital importance¹⁸ of this moment when it is doubtlessly possible to see the transition to a theory of being. But it is a completely different order of difficulties inherent to the idea of absolute knowledge, and it is very important to at least note it.

We believe that it will be possible, in effect, to establish¹⁹ that, under any form, the *system* cannot be thought; that it can neither be realized as ideal nor as the continuation of absolute thought. It seems to us that one can, on the other hand, demonstrate that it [the system] must by definition fulfill two rationally contradictory requirements: the first [requirement] being formal perfection, as it were (corresponding to what Kant calls *formelle Zweckmässigkeit* [namely, formal finality]), the other [requirement] being a totality in some broad way, that it is to say, one which must encompass in itself all finite perspectives, all possible errors; but there is a way, we believe, to demonstrate that it [the system] does not answer to this latter requirement without becoming a chaotic set deprived of all order, and the truth of which can no longer be defined.²⁰ As for the solution according to which error would be a simple privation of being, [that is,] pure negation, it appears to us exclusively verbal, because error can never be only a determined negation—and this determination itself shows the limit of a certain power, doubtlessly restricted, but which is defined, so to speak, qualitatively by these limits themselves, and that the mind can reduce being only to a fragment of its total power solely by abstraction. It will not be possible to account for the appearance of reality that belongs to error, which involves the subjective character of finite thought, for which error only seems to exist. But it is to finite thought itself that it would then return. One should ask whether finite thought²¹ is itself, as such, an illusion and how the integration of finite thoughts into absolute knowledge is possible: One can establish without difficulty that such integration is possible only by the elimination of the specific characteristics of finite thoughts, and if absolute knowledge supposes this elimination, it therefore cannot exhaust all modes of thought. It is one [mode of] knowledge alongside other [modes] of knowledge, not absolute.

We shall confine ourselves to giving these brief indications as to where our critique of absolute knowledge might lead. It would permit us to understand that absolute knowledge is powerless to constitute itself, that it is *only* an idea, that is to say, a requirement of the mind that can indeed give an impetus to every scientific inquiry, but which could not in any way express the nature of being. Thought annihilates itself in asserting the identity of being and the idea of being, since the absolute autonomy of consciousness cannot be asserted without contradiction. But this autonomy must not be limited in favor of an unknowable (*inconnaissable*) objective, such as that of [Herbert] Spencer[’s philosophy]; in the world of objects, as we have said, nothing at all can be opaque to the Idea. There is nothing unknowable (*inconnaissable*) beyond consciousness. To postulate an object impenetrable to knowledge (*savior*) is to postulate a knowing beyond knowledge. If there is then a remainder—and we have seen that there necessarily is one, since thought cannot be absorbed completely into absolute knowledge—this remainder can exist only

¹⁸ We will end with the conclusion that thought must be asserted (not just postulated) as in itself irreducible to any objectification which will convert it into an idea or a system of ideas.

¹⁹ We expect to develop these necessarily very brief summary indications in a later work.

²⁰ It is because the truth can only be defined in relation to it that the system must be perfectly ordered. It is one requirement to speak logically of mind; the other requirement would be more metaphysical in character.

²¹ It seems possible to demonstrate also that the absolute system can be ideally constituted only in opposition to finite thought; that accordingly it [the system] presupposes [finite thought] as its correlative and cannot therefore really assimilate it. One could conclude that finite thought and absolute knowledge are simply moments of a dialectic that can be reached only beyond consciousness, or more precisely below it.

beside thought. There is in thought something that absolutely cannot be idea and that is obviously thought itself at its most intimate. It is thought insofar as it posits (no more so than when it is posited, that is to say, it is *idea*). Would one say that thought in this sense is only form, an empty unity? But is it not evident that thought as it posits (please pardon this barbarism) only becomes form immediately by a new act of self-objectification where it converts itself into idea? The formal character of the product reveals the essential insignificance of the act of objectification that engenders it.

Thought taken in this sense appears to correspond well to what we have called being. At the very least, [thought] necessarily has some affinities with being, because it differentiates itself from the idea of being (of absolute knowledge) without it being possible, however, to give a criterion for it, for this would require it to convert itself into an idea beforehand. On the other hand, it is obvious that being in this sense cannot fall under the grasp of discursive thought (that is, thought conceived of as objective), and what we have called negative dialectic appears as an element or an immediate consequence of positive dialectic.

What will intuition now be? It cannot be, strictly speaking, a type of consciousness. In this sense intuition remains a creation, or, more exactly, an act of transcendence by which thought—conveying an awareness of the distorted character of every objectification—asserts itself as irreducible to any conversion of that kind. And in this sense, intuition affirms itself, if not identical to being, then as at least participating in being. And, in this sense, it is identical to being, if such an affirmation would not make thought fall back into the world of ideas, at least when it is participating in being.²²

Therefore, we gladly summarize our conclusions this way: A philosophy of intuition can constitute itself only on the basis of a dialectic that would allow it to establish the immanence of being insofar as being is in the mind. Such a dialectic itself presupposes a critique of absolute knowledge that manifests the transcendence of thought in relation to knowledge, and intuition is reduced essentially to the act by which thought asserts that it itself is transcendent over what is only pure objectivity. It is all in all an act of faith, and its contents can be made explicit only in a practical dialectic of participation, in which thought, exceeding the world of knowledge, would approach closer by successive steps of creation to the center where it must freely renounce itself, in order to make room for—The One who is (*Celui qui est*).

²² One will understand exactly what we mean by participation if one considers that, on the one hand, being is necessarily immanent in thought and that, on the other hand, thought cannot be identical to being, with such an identity supposing a judgment that only can be about objects.