

**Gianluigi Segalerba**

**IEF – Instituto de Estudos Filosóficos, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Coimbra**

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## TRANSCENDENCE AND IDEAS

Kathrin BOUVOT<sup>1</sup>, Gianluigi SEGALERBA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *In our analysis we deal with some interpretations of the concept of the idea in the history of philosophy. We concentrate our investigations on the following authors: Plato, Descartes, Locke and Berkeley. In particular,*

*- Throughout our analysis of Plato, we interpret ideas as the entities which pave the way to the discovery of transcendence. Ideas show, by virtue of their existence, that not only the sphere of the average life and not only the sphere of perception exist. Correspondingly, individuals cannot be reduced to the dimension of their sphere perception. Through the recollection of the ideas, the subject can acknowledge that there is a reality dimension which transcends the dimension of the senses.*

*- Descartes enables us to observe the search for the conditions of certainty regarding the activity of the minds. Descartes' strategy, through his inquiry into the innate idea of God and into the contents of this idea, is directed to the demonstration of the existence of God: the demonstration of the existence of God is functional to the foundation of the possibility of certainty of the mental and cognitive activities of the subject.*

*- Locke considers the dimension of the internal and external experience as the very root of the ideas: this position corresponds to Locke's refusal of any form of innatism whatsoever. Locke does not admit any innate idea, and sees the origins of the ideas only in the external and internal experience. Innatism of whichever ideas cannot be accepted; the subject is completely dependent on his experience.*

*- As regards Berkeley, we concentrate our investigation on Berkeley's strategy of refusal of materialism. In Berkeley's view, there is nothing else than ideas in the mind of the subject. All objects are equivalent to ideas. From the existence of the ideas the subject cannot legitimately infer the existence of a reality which is independent of his own mind. The investigation on the characteristics and sources of the ideas demonstrates that there is no independent existence of entities outside God's mind.*

**Keywords:** *Ideas, Plato, Phaedo, transcendence, perception, Descartes, God, certainty, Locke, intellect, innatism, Berkeley, materialism.*

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<sup>1</sup> Working Group of Cultural Analysis, University of Vienna, Austria.

## 1) Introduction

In our study, we shall be dealing with some interpretations of the concept of idea in western philosophy. We shall concentrate our attention on some aspects of the interpretations which Plato, Descartes, Locke and Berkeley<sup>2</sup> have given of the concept. In order to make the goals of our investigation clear, we are going to present a list of objectives inherent to our analysis. The intents which we are going to pursue in our study are the following ones:

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<sup>2</sup> We are aware that, for an investigation on ideas, other authors of the history of philosophy could have been chosen with the same legitimacy with which we proceeded to our choice. Our choice in favour of Plato, Descartes, Locke and Berkeley reflects our intention of showing the existence of a connection between the interpretation of the ideas, on the one hand, and the human condition, on the other hand. The interpretation of the ideas proposed by the mentioned thinkers is, among other things, functional to the interpretation of the condition of the subject in the world. In Plato, ideas introduce us to a dimension which transcends the average reality: individuals are led, through the acquaintance with the ideas, to a dimension which is beyond the individual life's average dimension represented by the sensible dimension. In Descartes, the idea of God as an innate idea which is the basis for the demonstration of God's existence is the first step towards the discovery of the guarantee of the possibility of the certainty of the mental and senses activities of the subject and, therewith, towards the subject's liberation from a condition of general doubt. Due to his strategy of a complete refusal of innatism, Locke sees the position of the subject within reality as completely dependent on the subject's own experience: there is nothing else – as a source of knowledge for the individual – than his own internal and external experience. Through his interpretation of the ideas, on the one hand, and his interpretation of the entities of the experience as being nothing other than the ideas of the mind, on the other hand, Berkeley arrives at the refusal of any form of interpretation of entities of reality as mind-independent entities: only minds (spirits) are substances in the reality. It can thereby be seen that the different interpretations of the ideas entail a different interpretation of the individuals in the reality. The difference in the interpretations of the ideas imply a different interpretation of both the mental and the objective reality.

Different interpretations of the thought of the thinkers to be discussed in this article are, of course, possible: ideas in Plato, in Descartes, in Locke and in Berkeley have actually found many interpretations. We shall of course propose our own interpretation, but we are nonetheless aware that alternative interpretations do exist. The responsibility for the interpretation which we present in our paper is, of course, ours alone.

- We aim to show that the interpretations of the concept of idea given by the mentioned authors – i.e. Plato, Descartes, Locke and Berkeley – is strictly connected to the interpretation of the individual condition in the world exposed by each author. The origin of ideas in the interpretation of the thinkers, the aims with which ideas are used by the different thinkers, the relations holding among mind, ideas and reality, and the ties linking ideas to the human condition can be correctly assessed only within the whole theory of the specific author that is dealing with the concept of idea. For instance,
  - o In Plato, ideas being connected to a dimension of alterity with respect to the average dimension of life opens – to any individual who is able to recognise the existence of ideas – the possibility of seeing the whole reality and one’s own life in a different way. The existence of ideas proves that the sensible dimension of reality, i.e. the dimension of reality which can be grasped, and is actually grasped, through the senses, is not the whole reality; correspondingly, the sensible life is not the whole life.
  - o In Descartes, the existence of innate ideas, i.e. of ideas which, since they are present in the mind of any individual at least from corporeal birth onwards, do not originate from the individual life experience, corresponds to a specific interpretation of the individual and of his relationship with the world: the subject is not completely dependent on experience and sensation for the formation of his own thought and of his capability to think. Furthermore, the idea of God as an innate idea is the factor which – through the connected demonstration of the existence of God – enables the individual to be certain of the existence of the external world.
  - o Locke, who regards the subject’s external and internal experience as the exclusive source of our ideas, sees the subject as being completely dependent on reality as regards the process of formation of his own concepts.
  - o In Berkeley, both the refutation of the existence of a reality which is independent of the thinking subject, on the one hand, and the presence of God as the entity that is the



authentic cause of all the ideas present in the individual mind, on the other hand, ought to turn away men from all the atheistic positions. The inquiry into objects, minds and ideas brings about a profound reform of the interpretation of the whole reality. There is no mind-independent reality; there is no possibility for the existence of a reality which is independent of the mind of God.

- Furthermore, we are going to show some aspects of the importance of the theological thought and of the transcendent perspective within the history of philosophy. In Plato, in Descartes and in Berkeley the meditation on ideas is connected, among other things<sup>3</sup>, to the acquaintance with a dimension existing beyond the sensible life. In spite of all the differences among the three authors, the thoughts of these authors bear witness, in our opinion, to the importance, in the history of philosophy, of the reference to transcendence, to theology and to God<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The interpretation of ideas in the mentioned thinkers is connected to many aspects; the connections that we propose are, of course, not the only possible ones.

<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of our analysis, we are going to mention the editions and the translations which we used throughout the survey of the authors chosen by us. For Plato's original texts we used *Platonis Opera. Recognovit Brevique Adnotatione Critica Instruxit Ioannes Burnet* (5 vols.). For Descartes, we utilised *Ouvres de Descartes Publiées par Charles Adam & Paul Tannery. Meditationes de Prima Philosophia. VII*. For Locke we used *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, edited with an introduction, critical apparatus and glossary by Peter H. Nidditch*. For Berkeley we referred to *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, in: The Works of George Berkeley. Volume I: Philosophical Works, 1705–1721. Edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser*, pp. 211–347, and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, in: The Works of George Berkeley. Volume I: Philosophical Works, 1705–1721. Edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser*, pp. 349–485. For Plato's translations we consulted *Plato. Complete Works. Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by John M. Cooper, Associate Editor D. S. Hutchinson; The Dialogues of Plato Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett, and Plato. Phaedo, Translated with Notes by David Gallop* (further translations which we used are listed in the bibliography). For Descartes' translations we consulted *The Method, Meditations and Philosophy of Descartes, translated from the Original Texts, with a new Introductory Essay, Historical and Critical by John Veitch and a Special Introduction by Frank Sewall*, and *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Volume II*. We consulted the mentioned translations of Plato's and of Descartes'

## 2) Programme

The programme of our analysis of the mentioned thinkers is as follows:

- Throughout our analysis of Plato, we shall concentrate our attention on the position of ideas as the entities paving the way to the discovery of transcendence. Ideas show, by virtue of their existence, that not only the sphere of average life and the sphere of perception exist: the existence of ideas, together with the difference of ideas from the entities of the sensible reality, proves that there is a dimension beyond the average life and beyond the sphere of perception. Consequently, no individual can be reduced to the dimension of perception and to his living in this dimension. For the individual, the recognition of the existence of ideas is the way to acknowledging a dimension transcending the dimension of the senses.
- Through Descartes, we shall be able to observe the search for the conditions of certainty regarding the activity of the minds. We shall be able to observe how Descartes' strategy, through his inquiry into the innate idea of God and into the contents of this idea, is directed to the demonstration of the existence of God, and how the demonstration of the existence of God is functional to the foundation of the possibility of certainty of the mental and cognitive activities of the subject.
- Locke will lead us to the dimension of the internal and external experience as the very root of the ideas and to the refusal of any form of innatism whatsoever. Locke does not admit innate ideas and sees the origins of the ideas only in the external and in the internal experience. Innatism of whichever ideas cannot be accepted; the subject is completely dependent on experience.
- As regards Berkeley, we shall concentrate our attention on his strategy of refusal of materialism. Berkeley's argument is based on the fact that in the mind of any subject there is nothing else than ideas, and that, from the existence of the ideas, the subject cannot legitimately infer the existence of a reality which is independent of his own mind; the investigation on the characteristics and sources of ideas demonstrates that there is no independent existence of entities outside the minds.

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texts without, however, entirely following any of them: we always tried to come up with our own translation of the passages of Plato and of Descartes quoted in our study. The use of italics in the original texts has been maintained in our quotations.

In our study, we shall not discuss the question whether different interpretations of ideas given by the authors chosen by us and the different demonstrations which can be found in these authors are right or wrong. We shall direct our attention exclusively to the reconstruction of some aspects of the authors' interpretations of ideas.

### 3) Plato: ideas as the way to transcendence

Beginning with Plato, we are of the opinion that the acquaintance with the ideas brings about a complete transformation of the individuals. Throughout the *Phaedo* – Plato's work which we mainly focus on here – ideas represent, among other things, the root of the intellectual growth of the individuals<sup>5</sup>. The existence of ideas is, in the *Phaedo*, functional to the demonstration of the immortality of the soul. The very existence of ideas shows that the sensible dimension does not correspond to the whole reality.

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<sup>5</sup> The mentioned passage will be quoted in separate parts. In short, we are interested in the following passages and connections of the whole reasoning which, in our opinion, constitutes one of the pillars of Plato's meditation throughout the *Phaedo*:

The kind of knowledge which comes about through the recollection of something already present in the soul is, actually, recollection → There are entities – apprehended by the soul –, which are constitutively different from the entities of sense perception → These entities are the ideas → The ideas exist → The dimension of ideas is different from the dimension of the sense perception → All the entities of the sense perception are inferior to the corresponding ideas → The sense experience cannot be the origin of the subject's acquaintance with the ideas, since the sense experience exclusively delivers sense data to the subject → Sense data remind the subject only of entities which the subject became acquainted with in a life period which is not the period of the sensible life → Ideas are not originally known during the sensible life. They are only recollected during the sensible life: they are already present in the souls from the beginning of the sensible life → Ideas are originally known in a dimension preceding the sensible life → There is a dimension of the soul which precedes the sensible life → Ideas introduce the subject to a different dimension of reality.

Throughout the section of the *Phaedo* 69e6–107b10, Plato's conception of the existence of a difference between the realms of Being, to which ideas belong, and the realm of the sensible concretisations often emerges. The soul as such is more similar to the realm of Being, whereas the body is more similar to the realm of the sensible concretisations (see especially *Phaedo* 78b4–84b8).

Ideas, in their own complex, constitute an alternative dimension in comparison with the dimension of the sensible reality. They belong to a dimension which is different from the dimension of the sensible reality. The contact with the dimension of ideas awakens, in the individual, the awareness that ideas belong to a different reality dimension in comparison with the dimension of the average experience.

Therewith, the contact with the dimension of the ideas awakens the awareness that there is a reality dimension which is alternative to the sensible dimension.

The knowledge of the existence of ideas entails a plurality of aspects:

i) It is knowledge that ideas are the explanatory cause<sup>6</sup> due to which an entity or a plurality of entities have a property.

ii) It is knowledge and awareness that the ideas belong to a dimension which is different from the dimension perceptible through the senses. There is a dimension beyond the dimension which is experienced through the senses. Not all contents present in the soul have their origin in the sense perception.

iii) It is knowledge of the capacity which the soul has already in itself before having actual contacts with the sensible dimension: the soul is, as such, no empty container. On the contrary, the soul already has at its own disposal an apparatus of ideas like equal as such, beautiful as such, and so on, before the very beginning of its sensible experience<sup>7</sup>. The innate ideas steadily lead the mental and senses activity of the individual<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the attribute 'explanatory' connected to 'cause' is due to our aim of clarifying that ideas are not the efficient causes of the presence of a property in the sensible reality.

<sup>7</sup> For the presence in the soul of concepts which – like being and not-being, like and unlike, same and different, number, good and bad, beautiful and ugly – do not derive from perception, see *Theaetetus* 184b4–186e12.

<sup>8</sup> Ideas are, among other things, an instrument used for defeating the conception of a relativism of causes for the entities possessing a property: entities of the average reality have properties like equal and beautiful due to the existence of equal as such and beautiful as such. There is one precise cause for and in correspondence to any property – like beautiful and equal – possessed by sensible entities. There are, in the reality, entities which are independent of any subject and of any individual consideration. The subject discovers them, it does not create them. Ideas represent the proof of the falsity of any relativistic position: if there are ideas, there is no space for relativism.

The analysis of ideas in the *Phaedo* reveals the existence of entities which constitute the uniform causes of the presence of a property in a plurality of entities: for instance, all beautiful entities are beautiful due to the idea of beautiful<sup>9</sup>. Hence, the presence of beautiful in the plurality of things is not due to different causes corresponding to any case of beautiful: there is one, and only one explanatory cause for the fact that the plurality of the sensible concretisations of beautiful is beautiful. In other words, all the sensible concretisations of beautiful are beautiful due to one and only one explanatory cause. Moreover, ideas prove to be basic for the demonstration of the existence of a dimension which is different from the sensible dimension. Ideas have, therefore, at least a double function:

- a) they are the uniform cause for the presence of a property in a plurality of entities;
- b) they lead the individual to the awareness of the existence of a dimension which is different from the sensible dimension.

Ideas lead the subject to the knowledge of the uniformity of cause for a plurality possessing a property – for instance, the idea of beautiful brings the subject to the knowledge of the uniformity of cause for a plurality of beautiful things being beautiful –. As a consequence, the very existence of ideas defeats the hypothesis of a plurality of explanatory causes for the explanation of the possession of a property. Nonetheless, the knowledge that we reach through ideas entails not only the knowledge of the uniformity of cause for the different sensible concretisations: this knowledge constitutes the way to a transcending dimension. The knowledge of ideas directly leads the subject to the recognition of the existence of the transcendent dimension.

We are going to begin this analysis of some interpretations of ideas by taking into consideration some positions of Plato on the subject of ideas. In *Phaedo* 74a2–75d6<sup>10</sup> we find the following observations of Plato on knowledge, recollection and ideas. Plato is speaking of the relationships among knowledge, process of remembering and recollection. Throughout the sentences which precede the mentioned passage, Plato has exposed different ways in which the process of remembering takes place and has

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<sup>9</sup> See *Phaedo* 100c3–e4.

<sup>10</sup> We have divided the passage *Phaedo* 74a2–75d6 in different sections which will be quoted one after the other in the present text.

stated that the process of recollection can come about both from similar and from dissimilar things<sup>11</sup>:

‘In all these cases, then, does it not happen that the recollection comes about from similar things, on the one hand, but also from dissimilar things, on the other hand?

It happens.

But whenever one remembers something from the similar things, is it then not necessary that one also experiences this, i.e., to consider whether or not this entity, as regards the similarity, is inferior to that entity of which he was reminded<sup>12</sup>?

It is necessary.

Then consider whether this is the case. We say perhaps that there is something equal, – I do not mean a log to a log, or stone to a stone, or anything else of that kind, but some further entity beyond all these, the equal itself<sup>13</sup>: shall we say that there is something or nothing?

Indeed we shall say that it exists, by Zeus, said Simmias, most definitely.

And do we know what it is?

Certainly, he said.’ (*Phaedo*, 74a2–b3)

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<sup>11</sup> The ancient Greek words used by Plato which are translated with ‘idea’ are ‘ἰδέα’ and ‘εἶδος’. None of these ancient Greek words compare in the passage which we are going to quote. For occurrences of these words, we refer, as regards the *Phaedo*, to the following passages (further occurrences of the two words can of course be found in other dialogues): 102b1, 103e3, 104c7, 106d6 – for εἶδος – and 104b9, 104d2, 104d6, 104d9, 104e1, 105d13 – for ἰδέα –. Actually, both ancient Greek expressions have been translated in other translations with the word ‘form’. We shall not deal in this context with the question of the most appropriate translation; nonetheless, we would like to say that the discussion on the concept of ideas as it is used by Plato begins with the observations expressed by Aristotle on and against Plato and Platonism (see, for instance, *Metaphysics Alpha 6, Alpha 9, Zeta 6, Mu 4, Mu 5*), and then goes on throughout the whole history of philosophy. Therefore, we think that it is correct to consider Plato as the first to use and interpret the concept ‘idea’.

<sup>12</sup> The entity which serves to begin the process of recollection is inferior to the entity which the individual is reminded of through this entity.

<sup>13</sup> As we can see, the equal itself, i.e. the idea of equal is different from the sensible equals. The difference between equal itself and the sensible equals is often mentioned throughout this passage. Connected to this diversity is the diversity between ways of knowing the equal itself, on the one hand, and sensible equals, on the other hand.

As we can see, Plato introduces from the beginning a difference between

- i. sensible concretisations of equal, on the one hand,
- ii. and equal itself, on the other hand.

The existence of the equal itself is affirmed, but not directly demonstrated, even though the awareness of the difference between sensible concretisations of equal and equal itself attests to the existence of something beyond the sensible concretisations. The soul's way of becoming acquainted with the equal itself testifies that the equal itself does not belong to the dimension of the sensible concretisations of equal:

'Where did we acquire the knowledge of it?'<sup>14</sup> Did we not conceive that object from these entities which we were just mentioning, on seeing logs or stones or some other equal things, while this object is different from these? Or does not it seem different to you? Look at it also this way: do not equal

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<sup>14</sup> In our opinion, one of the difficulties of this passage is represented by Plato's changing, step after step, the consideration of the process of acquaintance with the equal itself. The initial impression originating from the text is that the equal itself is being known through the acquaintance with the sensible concretisations. Afterwards, the process of contact with the ideas, which initially seemed to be a process of acquisition of new knowledge, turns out to be, actually, a process of recollection. The individual has already in himself the equal as such; there is no new apprehension of an entity which previously was completely unknown to the subject. There is rather a process which changes the subject from the initial condition of unawareness of the presence of contents in his own soul to the condition of the awareness of the presence of these contents. Actually, the equal itself is not being known, but exclusively recollected by the soul. The process is therefore as follows:

Presence of an apparatus of ideas in the soul; soul's initial unawareness of this presence → Soul's contact with a sensible concretisation of an idea – for instance, contact with a sensible concretisation of the idea of equal – → Soul's recollection of the idea through the connection existing between sensible concretisation and idea → The subject reaches the awareness of the existence of ideas and the awareness of the presence of ideas in himself; the subject becomes therewith aware of the existence of a dimension which is other than the sensible dimension.

After becoming aware of the presence of ideas in his own soul and after becoming aware of the connection existing between ideas and sensible concretisations, the individual understands that his capacity to see and to classify the sensible concretisations as concretisations of an idea depends on his having previously met the ideas and their dimension. Without ideas, the individual would have no instrument to classify the objects of his own experience.

stones and equal logs, though they are the same entities, sometimes seem equal to one, but not to another?

Yes, certainly.

But what of the equals themselves? Did the equals themselves ever seem to you unequal, or equality inequality?

Never yet, Socrates.

Then these equals and the equal itself are not the same, he said.

It seems to me that they are in no wise the same, Socrates.' (*Phaedo*, 74b4–c6)

Through the sensible equals the subject arrives at conceiving the equal as such. Through the recognition that the sensible equals can seem, and actually seem, to be equal and unequal, whereas equality never seems to be inequality, the presence of a difference between the equality and the sensible equals is recognised too. Through this kind of recognition, the subject becomes able to understand the unbridgeable difference which holds between the equal itself and the sensible concretisations of equal. The sensible experience gives to the subject exclusively a kind of concretisations of equal which is inferior to the equal itself. These concretisations do not procure to the subject a direct acquaintance with the equal itself.

Since the sensible concretisations lead the subject to the equal itself, the subject must already have known the equal itself before coming in contact with the sensible concretisations. Equal as such has relationships with the sensible concretisations: the subject arrives at the recognition of the existence of the equal as such through the sensible experience, while this specific process of acquisition of knowledge proves to be, on a closer look, a recollection of contents which the subject already has in his own soul. The difference holding between equal itself and the sensible concretisations too is arrived at through this process. This difference holds for all ideas. Plato continues his exposition as follows:

'But still, from these equals, which are different from that equal, have you conceived and have you acquired the knowledge of it?

You tell perfectly true things, he said.

It being either similar to these or dissimilar?

Certainly.



Anyway, it makes no difference, he said; so long as, on seeing one thing, you, from this sight, think of another thing, whether it be similar or dissimilar, it is necessary that it has been recollection<sup>15</sup>, he said. Certainly.' (*Phaedo*, 74c7–d3)

The subject has already in his soul the image and the corresponding knowledge of the equal itself before the subject comes in contact with the sensible concretisations. Since the sensible equals are different from the equal itself, the subject cannot have originally apprehended the equal as such from the sensible equals. There is, for Plato, no direct way going from the apprehension of the sensible equals to the equal as such. The equal as such must already be inside the subject before the beginning of his sensible life.

Without the previous apprehension of the equal as such, the individual could not acknowledge the sensible equals as likenesses of the equal itself. The subject would not be able to classify those sensible entities as being actually likenesses of something (in this particular case, the subject would not be able to classify the sensible concretisations of equal as likenesses of the equal as such), if he did not have ideas steadily leading the activity of his soul.

For the individual who lives in the sensible dimension, the process of apprehending the equal itself is a discovery of what he, actually, already

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<sup>15</sup> This process, which could appear to have been acquisition of new knowledge, proves to be, on closer inspection, recollection. The recollection is recollection of an entity which, therefore, since it is exclusively recollected, is already present in the soul. The soul is exclusively recollecting this entity, the soul is not knowing this entity as if this entity were previously, for the soul, a complete unknown entity. In the particular case, sensible equals being connected to the equal itself by being both similar and dissimilar to the equal itself lead the soul to think of the equal itself. The equal itself does not coincide with the sensible equals: hence, the subject does not know the equal itself through the sensible equals. The subject exclusively recollects the equal itself through the sensible equals. As sensible equals are recognised by the subject in their being connected to the equal itself, the subject understands that the equal itself must already be in its soul. Thus, the process experienced by the subject consists in the passage, fulfilled by the subject, from the initial unawareness of the presence of the equal itself in his soul to the awareness of the presence of the equal itself in his soul. The general effect of the process of recollection, for the subject, consists in a new awareness of himself, of the reality constitution and of his own position in the reality.

has in the soul. The process experienced by the subject consists in returning to contents which have been already apprehended by the subject in another dimension and which, actually, always direct the mental and senses activity, even though the subject is not aware of the existence of ideas and even though the subject is not aware that any judgment involved in his classification of reality is always structured by his ideas.

The sensible experience gives to the subject, through the contact with the sensible concretisations of equal, the elements for the arising of the awareness, in the subject's soul, of the already present knowledge of the equal itself. Through the sensible concretisations the subject is able to recollect the equal itself. Thus, the sensible experience leads the subject to the recollection of the equal itself. The sensible experience cannot give to the subject, however, the direct contact with the equal itself, since the sensible experience only gives to the subject defective concretisations of the equal. The knowledge as such of the equal, which will be then awakened again in the subject through the sensible experience, must have taken place before the beginning of the sensible experience. Plato brings thereafter his own inquiry forward in the following way:

‘What now? – he said – Are we affected in such a way with regard to the instances in the logs and to the equals we mentioned just now? Do they seem to us to be equal in the same way as what it is itself<sup>16</sup>, or does something of that<sup>17</sup> lack for them to be such as the equal is, or does nothing lack<sup>18</sup>?’

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<sup>16</sup> I.e. the equal itself.

<sup>17</sup> I.e. something of the equal.

<sup>18</sup> To understand the difference between equal as such and sensible equals is the first step towards the comprehension that there is not only one reality dimension. The difference between reality dimensions is entailed and manifested by the difference between idea of equal and sensible equals. Since the idea of the equal can exclusively be recollected, but not originally known, by the senses activity – the data obtained through the senses activity are always inferior to the idea of equal, so that the knowledge of the idea of equal cannot derive from the senses activity –, and since the idea of equal is different from the data acquired from the senses activity, the idea of equal must belong to a dimension which the subject has experienced and with which the subject has become acquainted before the beginning of the individual sense experience. Furthermore, since the sense experience coincides with the sensible life, the acquaintance with the ideas must

It lacks very much, he said.

Then we agree that, whenever anyone, on seeing a thing, thinks to himself:

‘this thing that I now see seeks, on the one hand, to be such as another of the things that are is, but, on the other hand, it is deficient, and cannot be such as that thing is, but it is inferior’, it is necessary that the man who thinks this, happened to previously know the object to which he says that, on the one hand, that entity is like, but that<sup>19</sup>, on the other hand, that entity is inferior<sup>20</sup>? It is necessary.’ (*Phaedo*, 74d4–74e5)

The sensible concretisations are inferior to the equal itself. The unbridgeable difference between sensible concretisations and idea shows that knowledge of the ideas cannot be obtained through the sensible experience. Since the sensible experience can give to the subject only inferior concretisations, the subject would never be able to reach the acquaintance with the equal itself through the sense experience alone. Equal as such, in particular, and ideas, in general, are apprehended by the subject through another kind of experience. The subject must have become acquainted with the equal itself before the beginning of his sensible experience.

Sensible experience only awakens the recollection of entities which the subject has known in another dimension: it brings nothing new, but exclusively finds a connection with something already present in the soul of the subject.

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have occurred before the beginning of the sensible life, i.e. it must have taken place before the corporeal birth. Therefore, there is a life of the soul before the beginning of the corporeal existence, and there is a reality dimension independent of the dimension with which the subject is acquainted through his own senses and throughout his sensible life. The fact that ideas are unreachable through the sense perception of the subject, but are nonetheless in the soul of the subject, is the sign that a dimension exists beyond senses activity and sensible life: not all the contents of the soul come from the sensible experience; not everything is, or is reducible to, the sensible experience.

<sup>19</sup> I.e.: ‘... the object to which he says that, on the one hand, that entity is like, but to which he says that, on the other hand, that entity is inferior?’

<sup>20</sup> The sensible entity is similar to, but is nevertheless inferior to the entity which is not attainable through the senses.

The sensible experience cannot give, on its own, the knowledge of any idea. It cannot furnish the experience of the idea as such: it only gives the likeness of the idea and, therewith, paves the way for the process of recollection of the idea<sup>21</sup>. The dimension of ideas is already present in the dimension of the sense experience: if the subject did not have ideas, the subject could not interpret reality. Subjects experiencing sensible equals and acknowledging sensible equals as equal can recognise sensible equals as equal since they already possess the notion of equal before their actually applying this notion to the particular sensible cases of equal. Actually, everybody, knowingly or not, uses ideas during the process of classification of reality: the difference between individuals consists in the degree of awareness which the individuals are able to reach, of the existence of the ideas and of their own using ideas. Afterwards, Plato expresses the following positions:

‘What now? Have we too been affected in such a way, or not, with regard both to the equals and to the equal itself?

By all means.

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<sup>21</sup> One of the results of the whole reasoning of Plato throughout the *Phaedo* seems to be that the dimension of ideas cannot, under any circumstance, be arrived at through an inquiry into the sensible equals and through a consequent abstraction of the basic characters of the equal itself from the sensible dimension, unless the dimension of the ideas is already known to the subject before the beginning of the sensible life condition. Sensible equals are appropriate in order that the subject recollects the ideas; they are not sufficient for the subject to come to know previously completely unknown ideas. Plato does not seem to assign to the individual the capacity of an intellectual intuition of the equal itself when the individual is already living in the sensible dimension. Plato’s exposition gives the impression that, once the individual is in the corporeal life, the individual can only recollect entities existing beyond the dimension of the senses, whereas he has actually already met these entities before the beginning of the sensible life. Once the subject is in the corporeal life, he cannot autonomously achieve the acquaintance with the entities existing beyond the dimension of the senses. The dimension of the senses as such prejudices the free activity of the intellect and strongly limits the sphere of activity of the intellect itself during the sensible life.

Therefore it is necessary that we previously knew the equal before that time when we first, on seeing the equals, thought that all these, on the one hand, were striving to be like the equal but, on the other hand, were inferior to it<sup>22</sup>.

That is so.

Yet we also agree that we have not formed a notion of it, and that it is not possible to form a notion of it from anywhere but seeing or touching or some other of the senses – I say that all the senses are the same.

Yes, they are the same, Socrates, for what the argument aims to make manifest.

But from sense perceptions one has to think that all the entities in the sense perceptions both are striving for what equal is, and are inferior to it; or how do we express it?

Like that.' (*Phaedo*, 74e6–75b3)

If the subject did not know the equal itself before the beginning of the sensible experience, the subject would not be able to see the inferiority of the sensible concretisations in comparison with the equal itself. The subject must already know the equal itself before the beginning of his own sensible experience: otherwise, the subject would not be able to make a comparison between equal itself and sensible concretisations of the equal. The subject simply would not have the notion as such of the equal itself. Plato states that the subject has achieved the acquaintance with the equal itself in a life phase preceding the sensible dimension:

'Therefore, it must have been before we began to see and hear and use the other senses, that we happened to acquire knowledge of the equal itself, of what it is, if we were about to refer the equals coming from our sense perceptions to it, supposing that all entities strive to be like it, but are inferior to it.

That necessarily follows from what has been said before, Socrates.

Now we saw and heard and had all other senses, just as soon as we were born?

Certainly.

But we must, we are saying, have acquired our knowledge of the equal before these?

Yes.

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<sup>22</sup> Since there is an unbridgeable difference between equal as such and sensible equals, and since the equal as such can only be recollected, but not originally known, through the sense perception, the equal as such must have been known in a life dimension with precedes the senses activity and the life in the sensible dimension.

Therefore, as it seems, it is necessary that we have acquired it before we were born<sup>23</sup>.

It seems so.

Therefore, if we, having acquired this knowledge before birth, were born possessing this knowledge, we knew both before we were born, and straightway when we were born, not only the Equal, the Greater, the Smaller but also all such entities? Our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious and, as I say, about all the entities upon which we put the seal 'what it is', both when we are putting questions and when we are giving answers. So it is necessary that we have acquired the knowledge of all these entities before we were born.

That is so.' (*Phaedo*, 75b4–75d6)

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<sup>23</sup> The demonstration of the diversity between reality dimensions functions, in our opinion, as follows:

- i) Sensible equals and equal itself are different from each other.
- ii) After due reflection on this difference, the individual is aware of the difference between the sensible equals and the equal itself.
- iii) The knowledge of the equal itself cannot be attained through the knowledge of the sensible equals, since the sensible equals are imperfect. On the basis of his own experience and on the basis of the data acquired through this experience, the individual can exclusively recollect the equal itself, but he cannot arrive at the equal itself on the basis of experience alone, since there is no equal itself in the sensible dimension. There is no possibility of apprehending the equal itself in the sensible dimension. Ideas do not belong to the domain of the senses in spite of the fact that the sensible domain is connected to the ideas.
- iv) Since individuals live, from their own corporeal birth onwards, within the sensible dimension, the knowledge of the equal itself must have been gained before the very beginning of the corporeal birth. The equal itself is already in the soul of the individual at his corporeal birth.
- v) There is a dimension of existence which is beyond the sensible dimension. Ideas represent for the subject, among other things, the guides towards a different dimension of reality. Through ideas, the subject becomes aware of the existence of another dimension.

The sensible concretisations of equal are inferior to the equal itself since the sensible concretisations are always relative to the context: for instance, they can seem equal to something and not equal to something else. They are irremediably relative to the context in which they are. This does not hold for the equal as such: the equal as such is equal and nothing else; it can never appear to be unequal.

Many aspects of this passage are interesting. We are going to focus on the difference of dimension between ideas and perceptible entities. Here Plato is introducing both ideas and the difference between ideas and entities of the average reality: Plato clearly interprets ideas as constitutively different from the entities of the average reality<sup>24</sup>. For the subject, having innate ideas means being free from the relativity of the perceptible entities and of the whole sensible dimension.

The idea of equality is something absolute in its being equal: it is not, and it will never appear unequal. Particular equals are always relative: they will always appear unequal too; at least, there is always the possibility that a particular equal appears unequal. The particular concretisations of an idea will always appear to be something else than only equal.

Entities of the sensible dimension are relative entities: they exist in a dimension of relativity. On the contrary, ideas are not relative: they will never appear to be something different from what they are as such (the idea of equality will never appear to be unequal). They are absolute, that is, they are not affected by the dimension of relativity. Sensible concretisations of a property are relative since they are always relative to the context in which they are: for instance, sensible equals can appear equal to something and not equal to something else. The idea of equal is absolute since it cannot appear to be different from that which it is. The sensible concretisations of an idea, in general, and of the equal, in particular, are not the property as such, whereas any idea is the property as such – i.e. it is the property itself – and it is nothing other than the property – the idea of equal, for instance, is equal and nothing else –<sup>25</sup>. Sensible concretisations are affected by the relativity of the sensible dimension; ideas, on the contrary, are free from this relativity.

This point has precise effects on the subject: the subject who is aware of the existence of ideas is a subject who, at least as regards his being connected to the ideas, is absolute. Through the awareness of the existence

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<sup>24</sup> There is not a complete incompatibility between the dimension of ideas and the dimension of the average reality, but there is a clear difference between the two dimensions. Ideas have their own existence, independence and consistency. The fact that the knowledge is not gained through the senses means that the object of this knowledge belongs to a domain which is different from the dimension of the senses. The reality which is experienced through the senses is not the whole reality.

<sup>25</sup> The question regarding the possible interpretations of the difference between the ideas and their sensible concretisations would deserve as such a new study.

of ideas and through the knowledge of ideas, the individual acquires an outlook on reality which is not dependent on the relativity of the sensible dimension. Ideas are absolute, whereas sensible entities are always dependent on particular points of view and on the context in which they are: for instance, sensible concretisations of equal are equal to something, unequal to something else. Sensible concretisations are, therefore, never absolutely, but, on the contrary, always relatively equal. The individual who becomes aware of the existence of ideas will have a relation with the world which is different from the relation that a subject who is not aware of the existence of ideas has: the individual knowing ideas is not dependent on the dimension of sensibility (at least not entirely dependent). He is not imprisoned in the dimension of the sense data. Thus, the condition of the individual changes completely after his becoming aware of the existence of ideas<sup>26</sup>.

Ideas exist independently of the thinking subject. The dimension of ideas reveals to the subjects who are able to attain the acquaintance with the ideas, the existence of a dimension which is different from and – at least in a certain measure – alternative to the average dimension of life. The knowledge of ideas and of the dimension of ideas represents, among other things, the awareness that reality does not consist only of the sensible experience and of the entities connected to the sensible experience: to become acquainted with ideas is to become acquainted, first of all, with a reality different from the reality of the senses. Acquaintance with the ideas represents an immediate acquaintance with a dimension transcending the sensible life.

Hence, in our opinion, the contact with the dimension of ideas in Plato does not only regard the cognitive, the theoretical dimension of the

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<sup>26</sup> A subject without ideas would have no instrument to give an order and a uniform disposition to reality. Without ideas, a subject would only have spread appearances of reality without mutual connections. The individual would not be able to collect the entities of experience under a common concept. In the case of the equal, for instance, without the idea of equal, the sensible equals would have no mutual relationship, since the cause for their being equal would be different in each individual case and would be interpreted by the subject in each individual case in a different way. The relevance of ideas is all the clearer, the more we try to imagine what the subject would be without ideas: there is no organisation in the reality, and there is no organisation process fulfilled by the subject regarding the contents of the reality, without ideas.



individuals<sup>27</sup>; it regards, of course, this dimension too, but it entails, first of all, the acquaintance with a reality and a life dimension which is alternative to the average dimension of reality and life experienced by the individual, i.e. to the sensible dimension<sup>28</sup>. The soul acquires, through the contact with the ideas and throughout its experience within the dimension of the ideas, the clear awareness of the existence of a dimension which is different from that in which the individual lives his sensible life. This brings about, in the subject, a complete change of outlook on his own life condition and on the constitution of the whole reality.

Throughout further passages of the *Phaedo* we can see that ideas explain the cause of possession of a property from a plurality of entities. See, for instance, the following passage:

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<sup>27</sup> In other words, for the subject the contact with the ideas and with the reality dimension to which the ideas belong means acquiring the knowledge of the authentic constitution of a property which exists in a dimension different from the average life dimension and which is nonetheless present, through its sensible concretisations, in the sensible reality too. This contact, furthermore, is for the subject the acquaintance with another dimension of reality and with another dimension of life. Hence, the contact with the ideas does not only regard the theoretical dimension of the individuals, or, put another way, the theoretical dimension involves in Plato the contact with another dimension of reality and with another condition of life.

<sup>28</sup> Our standpoint can be expressed in a different way too: on the one hand, ideas represent, for the subject, the basis for the knowledge of the explanatory cause of the presence of a property in a plurality of entities. On the other hand, ideas represent, for the subject, the way to the knowledge of a reality dimension which is different from the reality dimension perceived by the senses: ideas are, for the subject, the instrument of his acquaintance with the existence of an alternative dimension of reality. The knowledge connected to the ideas has, therefore, many aspects: it is, on the one hand, knowledge of ideas, of the function of ideas in the reality, of the contents associated to the ideas; it is, on the other hand, knowledge of the dimension to which ideas, as entities, belong. Ideas extend the existential perspective as such of the subjects: the subjects become therewith aware of the existence of another dimension. The subject who becomes aware of the existence of ideas is aware of the existence of a dimension of reality which, on the contrary, is ignored by any individual who has no awareness of the existence of ideas. Thus, the cognitive life and the cognitive dimension of the individuals prove, on a closer look, to have many significances.

‘Consider then, he said, whether what comes next after that seems to you as it seems to me. For it seems to me that, if anything else is beautiful besides the beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than because it partakes of that beautiful; and I say so, in truth, with everything. Do you agree to this sort of cause?

I do.

Therefore I no longer understand nor can I recognise all these other wise causes; but if anyone gives me, as the reason why a given thing is beautiful, either its having a blooming colour, or its shape, or something else like that<sup>29</sup>, I dismiss those other things – for I am confused by all those other things – but in a plain, artless, and perhaps simpleminded way, I hold this close to myself, that nothing else makes it beautiful except either the presence of that beautiful, or the communion in that beautiful, however it accrued; for I do not affirm confidently this as yet, but I confidently affirm that all things are beautiful by the beautiful. For this seems to me to be the safest thing to answer both to myself and to another, and, if I cling to this, I believe I shall never fail, but I believe that it is safe to answer both to myself and to anyone else that the beautiful things are beautiful by the beautiful; or does it not seem to you too?

It seems to me<sup>30</sup>.’ (*Phaedo* 100c3–e4)

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<sup>29</sup> We can observe in this passage the effect, on the subject, of the absence of recognition of the existence of ideas: if the subject does not arrive at the awareness of the existence of ideas, he is not able to indicate a uniform and unique cause for the presence of the different sensible concretisations of beautiful. Likewise, the individual who has no awareness of the existence of the beautiful as such is not able to see the mutual connection existing between the different sensible concretisations of beautiful – the connection consists in their having all the same cause for their being beautiful –. The individual living in this condition of ignorance manages to see only a plurality of mutually disconnected concretisations of beautiful, any of which has a different cause for its being beautiful. Within an outlook on reality characterised by the absence of recognition of the ideas’ existence, the existence of any instance whatsoever of a property is each time referred to a different cause. Within this kind of outlook, there is no absolute structure: there is exclusively a relativity of causes.

<sup>30</sup> This passage clearly states, in our opinion, that ideas are the causes for a plurality’s possessing a property. This is, without doubt, an aspect of the position of ideas within reality. It is not, however, at least in our view, the whole sense which is to be connected to the ideas. Ideas also introduce the subject into a dimension which is not completely extraneous to the sensible dimension, since

As alluded to at the beginning of this paragraph, the existence of ideas is the cause of a plurality of entities possessing a property – the idea of beautiful is the cause of a plurality possessing the property of being beautiful and hereby explains why a plurality of beautiful things are beautiful –. There is a uniform explanation for the presence of properties in the sensible dimension, in spite of the imperfection of the entities of the sensible dimension. The presence of relative concretisations of a property is due to an absolute cause<sup>31</sup>: the foundation of a system of explanatory causes independent of any context has thereby been reached.

If the cause of the presence of a property were not uniform for all the entities possessing this property, i.e. if there were no uniform cause for the possession of a property from a plurality of entities, the individual could not classify the sensible concretisations of the property with the same name and under the same concept. If the sensible equals are equal due to different causes, there is no connection between the different sensible equals. Exclusively the uniformity of cause – in this particular case, the equal itself as uniform cause for all sensible concretisations of equal – legitimates the application of the concept of equal to all the sensible equals. This is, undoubtedly, a constitutive aspect of ideas. However, this is not the only aspect of ideas. Ideas are the way to the manifestation of the existence of an alternative dimension and to the demonstration of the immortality of the soul. Ideas open the outlook on another dimension: they are the proof that not only sensible things exist, and that reality does not consist exclusively of sensible things. In Plato's ideas, a compresence of different features for ideas can therefore be observed:

- Ideas are the uniform cause of the presence of a property in a plurality of entities.

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ideas are the cause of a plurality of sensible entities possessing a property. Ideas transcend, however, the sensible dimension since they cannot be reduced to it.

<sup>31</sup> If the subject remained only at the level of the sensible dimension, the subject could not have at its disposal correctly founded interpretations of reality. Since sensible equals are unequal too, if the subject had only the dimension of the sensible reality, the subject could not have instruments to possess the authentic concept of equal.

- Ideas belong to a dimension which, at least partially, is alternative to the average life dimension. The existence of the ideas shows that not only the dimension of sense perception exists<sup>32</sup>.

Ideas are present in the soul, but they exist outside the soul too. They can never be detached from the dimension of transcendence. The knowledge of the existence and of the constitution of ideas is not only knowledge of the uniformity of the cause of the presence of a property in a plurality of entities. This kind of knowledge is knowledge of the existence of a transcendent dimension too. Besides, the knowledge of the existence of a uniform cause is knowledge that not everything is relative to the subject: in the reality, there are contents and structures which hold independently of any subject. Whereas sensible equals can appear equal and unequal, this is not the case for the equal as such: the equal as such always appears to be equal<sup>33</sup>. The relativity belonging to the concretisations only regards the dimension of the senses. It does not regard the dimension of ideas.

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<sup>32</sup> In the passage *Phaedo* 76d7–77a5 Plato clearly states that, if ideas exist, then the souls exist too before the corporeal birth, since the souls must have become acquainted with the ideas in a dimension different from the sensible one. If ideas do not exist, the argument for the existence of the souls as preceding the corporeal birth of the subject cannot function. The connection between the existence of ideas and the existence of the souls before the corporeal birth is straightforward.

<sup>33</sup> In the section of the *Phaedo* dedicated to the different demonstrations of the immortality of the soul (see *Phaedo* 69e6–107b10), Plato exposes, among other things, the similarity of the soul to the dimension of ideas. The fact that the soul is similar, as regards its own constitution, to the dimension of the ideas represents, for the individual, an admonishment to educate his own soul to the ideas and to move away from the dimension of the body as much as possible – or it represents, at least, an admonishment, directed to the individual, to become aware that the reality does not consist only of the sensible dimension. The inquiry into the ideas and the demonstration of the immortality of the soul is connected, in Plato, to the statement and to the determination of the dimension to which the soul, as such, belongs. The investigation on ideas is functional to the discovery and description of the authentic dimension of the soul, which is the dimension existing beyond the senses.

In the myth of the souls of the *Phaedrus*<sup>34</sup>, the education power of the realm of Being and of the truths is clearly expressed: without the contemplation of justice, temperance, knowledge and of all the entities which really are, the individual soul will fall and, as a consequence, will be condemned to the incarnation. The entities which are to be contemplated are entities independent of any subject: they are over and above the subjects knowing them. In the myth of the *Phaedrus*, it is expressed that all living beings, herein including gods, need the contemplation of these entities: men need the contemplation of specific entities in order to attain and to maintain the correct moral formation<sup>35</sup>. Correspondingly, the insufficient contemplation of these entities brings about an insufficient moral formation<sup>36</sup>. The dimension of men is a dimension of constitutive limitation. Men are, as such, limited entities; they are both intellectually and morally limited entities. They cannot constitutively reach the same contemplation of the realm of Being which gods can achieve. Men are constitutively limited within the dimension preceding the corporeal birth and are then limited in the earthen dimension. The inferior degree of the kind of knowledge which individuals are able to attain is a sign and, at the same time, a consequence of the constitutive inferiority of the nature of all human individuals in comparison with the constitution of the gods.

The relevance of the education to the dimension of Being and of ideas is expressed by Plato in the *Republic* too. Throughout the *Republic* we can see that the condition of the absence of education at least increases the risk of degeneration of soul and of society. Individuals are born in a condition of absence of education, which corresponds to the imprisonment of the cave: this corresponds to a condition of instability. The condition in which individuals usually live, described through the image of the cave, corresponds to a dimension in which there is no awareness of ideas and of the realm of being: it is a condition of enslavement in the dimension of the

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<sup>34</sup> See *Phaedrus* 245–250. The entities which are the object of the contemplation can, in our opinion, be regarded as ideas, even though they are not expressly classified as ideas: there are at least partial similarities between the description of these entities within the passage of the *Phaedrus* and the description of ideas in different passages of the *Phaedo*.

<sup>35</sup> The realm of contemplation comes before, all the subjects come after.

<sup>36</sup> Within the mentioned passage of the *Phaedrus*, i.e. *Phaedrus* 245–250, Plato clearly states that the soul is nourished by the beautiful, the wise, the good and all the entities like these, whereas it is destroyed by the shameful and the evil.

sensible life and in the instability characterising the sensible life. If individuals have no awareness of the ideas and of a dimension which is beyond the mere perception, they have no stable outlook on reality. The condition alternative to the cave is a condition of liberty, i.e. the liberty from the exclusive influence of the senses. The way out of the cave corresponds to the way of liberation from their relativity: the way to ideas and towards the realm of being, exposed in *Republic* VI and VII, represents the way to freedom, i.e. to a condition of at least relative independence of all limitations represented by the dimension of the senses. To sum up, in Plato

- a. ideas introduce the individual to the recognition of a transcendent dimension and to the awareness that not everything is reducible to the dimension of the senses; besides,
- b. ideas are the explanatory cause of the presence of a property in a plurality of entities: therewith they constitute absolute structures of reality which give an organisation to the sensible concretisations.

#### **4) Descartes: the idea of God as the way to the foundation of certainty**

Our intent through the analysis of Descartes consists in showing some aspects of Descartes's theological foundation of the possibility of the certainty of the mental and senses activities of the subject<sup>37</sup>. Thus, we shall be able to see that the idea of God as an innate idea has an indispensable position within the process of finding the foundations of certainty<sup>38</sup>: Descartes' idea of God – which for Descartes is, as we shall see, an innate

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<sup>37</sup> Throughout his investigation, Descartes aims to exclude the possibility that any sense perception and any mind activity is false. Of course, each particular sense perception and each particular mind activity can be false because of mistakes made by the subject. Descartes' goal consists in demonstrating that the subject does not need to have doubts on his mind and sense instruments as such in the sense that these instruments are already – before their actual use – compromised by factors of uncertainty and unreliability like, for instance, the operations fulfilled by the malignant demon against the individual mind. Descartes needs to save and justify the reliability of the individual instruments of thinking and of perceiving as such: he needs to defeat the hypothesis that these instruments as such are not reliable right before the beginning of any investigation and not because of particular mistakes made during an investigation.

<sup>38</sup> For Descartes' statement concerning his attempt at knowing something certain through his own investigations, see *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 23-24.

idea – represents the indispensable condition for the demonstration of God’s existence and, as a consequence, for the foundation of the very possibility of the certainty of at least some of the mental and senses activities of the subject. Correspondingly, without the idea of God there would be no possibility of finding a foundation for the possibility of certainty: any mind activity or any sense perception of the subject would be affected by the possibility of being false or, at least, always compromised by the suspicion of being false. As a consequence, the centrality of the concept of idea and of the content of innate idea, in general, and of the idea of God, in particular, becomes evident.

Descartes’ mastery consists, in our opinion, among other things, in achieving the demonstration of God’s existence exclusively through the inquiry into the contents of the idea of God. The whole process of the demonstration of God’s existence is founded on the principle that a cause cannot have a minor degree of reality than its effect<sup>39</sup>; since the idea of God, being the idea of a perfect entity, cannot have been produced by the subject, the entity too which is the cause of the idea must possess a perfect degree of reality. Only God can be the cause of this idea: therefore, God exists.

Since the ideas are the subjects of our study, we shall focus on Descartes’s investigation on the ideas. We shall therefore direct our analysis to Descartes’ survey of the different kinds of ideas and to his scrutiny of the innate ideas. In particular, we shall explore Descartes’s inquiry into the innate idea of God<sup>40</sup>. The structure of Descartes’ reasoning

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<sup>39</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 40-41.

<sup>40</sup> In short, our interest is directed to the following strategy of Descartes:

Search for a foundation of the possibility of the certainty of the mind activity and of the sense perception of the subject → General doubt regarding the trustworthiness of all the mental and senses activities of the subject → Recognition by the subject of his ‘I am’, which cannot be doubted → Recognition of the presence of ideas in the individual mind → Analysis of the different kinds of ideas → Existence of innate ideas → Idea of God as an innate idea → Demonstration of the existence of God → Inquiry into the attributes of God → God, as a perfect entity, does not deceive → Possibility of the certainty of the subject’s mind activity and of the subject’s sense perception since God does not deceive → The certainty of the correct result of an investigation can be attained provided appropriate method conditions are accomplished → The condition of general doubt is defeated → Theological foundation of the possibility of the knowledge and of the possibility of science.

as regards ideas can be synthesised in the following way:

i. From the innate idea<sup>41</sup> of God Descartes proceeds to the demonstration of God's existence<sup>42</sup>.

ii. Through the demonstration of God's existence Descartes reaches the guarantee of the possibility of certainty of the mental and senses activities of the subject. This guarantee is represented by God, since God, due to his perfection, cannot deceive the subject. Furthermore, God represents the guarantee of the certainty for the subject due to the following ground: since God has given to the subject the faculty of judgment, and since God does not deceive the subject, it cannot be the case that God has given the faculty of judgment so that the subject makes mistakes in any operation involving the use of this faculty. Provided the subject correctly uses his faculty of judgment, he will not make mistakes<sup>43</sup>.

iii. Before the demonstration of the existence of God and the connected refusal of the existence of a malignant demon, the subject can never be certain that the malignant demon is not deceiving him. After the demonstration of the existence of God, the subject knows that any mistake is due to his own responsibility. Besides, the subject knows that his faculty of judgment is, as such, reliable. Since God exists and, due to His perfect essence, does not deceive the subject, the faculty of judgment cannot be false as such. Mistakes are not the consequence of a faculty of judgment which, as such, cannot function; mistakes are the effect of the inappropriate use of the faculty of judgment which, as such, can function.

Throughout Descartes' exposition, we can see that the subject goes away – because of the uncertainty connected to any aspect of the external dimension – from the external dimension itself to the internal dimension. After the demonstration of the existence of God, the subject returns to the external dimension. Within the *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, Descartes is searching for a stable foundation of the certainty of the mental and senses

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The centrality of the idea of God, of its contents and of its being indispensable for the demonstration of the existence of God should be, in our view, underlined: without this idea there is no possibility of founding the basis of the possibility of certainty of the subject's mental and senses activities.

<sup>41</sup> As we shall see, the existence of innate ideas is, as such, indispensable: without innate ideas there would be no possibility of finding a way to the foundation of certainty, since all other kinds of ideas are affected by the general doubt.

<sup>42</sup> See Descartes' third Meditation.

<sup>43</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 53-54.



activities of the subject. The problem which we find in Descartes is the problem of certainty and of its foundation: Descartes shows that the mental and senses activities of the subject can be affected by any kind of doubt as regards their own validity. Individuals cannot be sure that their mental and senses activities, herein including the simple perceptions, are true. On a closer look, even that which seems to be absolutely certain can, actually, be put in doubt: there is no certainty on anything. The hypothesis of the malignant demon, who deceives the subject on everything, is the culmination of a process of general doubt. This hypothesis represents the synthesis of all grounds for doubt by which the individual is affected, or can be affected; it serves to introduce a general doubt on the mental and senses activities of any subject<sup>44</sup>.

Descartes must therefore find a foundation for the certainty of the knowledge: he needs a basis which shows that we do not need necessarily to doubt of all the mental and senses activities of the subject. A foundation of certainty is, at least at first sight, not easy to be found. At the beginning and throughout the first phases of the investigation, the chances of finding a foundation are rather negative, provided that any certainty really exists. Indeed, we can see, first of all, a destruction of all certainties. The subject must start his inquiry into the possible foundations of certainty from a condition of absence of certainty, in order to arrive at a certainty, provided that any certainty really exists<sup>45</sup>. The reconstruction manoeuvre of certainty<sup>46</sup> begins with the 'I am, I exist', which cannot be put in doubt. The

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<sup>44</sup> For the hypothesis of the malignant demon, see *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 22–23. The existence of God and the incompatibility between God and deception are indispensable in order that the very possibility of certainty can be founded. One of the purposes of Descartes within the *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* consists in finding a demonstration of God's existence and in showing the incompatibility between God's essence, on the one hand, and all forms of badness like deception, on the other hand. This will be the centre of the whole process aiming at the re-establishment of the possibility of certainty.

<sup>45</sup> For Descartes' statement of the absolute absence of certainty see *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 24: the initial position of the individual consists in his being compelled to acknowledge that nothing is, for him, certain. The subject should find a way to re-establish a basis for certainty, provided that this basis exists.

<sup>46</sup> In *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 24 Descartes states that he is going to start his search for the foundation of certainty from the assumption that everything

subject cannot be deceived, unless the subject exists: any mistake made by the subject presuppose the subject's being, the subject's existence. In order to be deceived, the subject must exist<sup>47</sup>.

The further step for the investigating subject consists in the exam of his own ideas. This leads to finding the innate ideas, in general, and the innate idea of God, in particular. From the subsequent demonstration of the existence of God, the guarantee of the possibility of certainty, on the one hand, and the guarantee of the elimination of a generalised doubt directed to the mental and senses activities of the subject, on the other hand, are attained. Descartes says about the recognition of the existence of the 'I':

'But there is I know not which deceiver, supremely powerful, supremely shrewd, who, purposely, always dupes me. Doubtless, therefore, I exist too, if he dupes me; and, let him dupe me as he may, he, nevertheless, will never bring it about that I am nothing, as long as I shall think that I am something. So that let it, in fine, be stated, after all things have been considered enough and more than enough, that this proposition *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true as often as it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind.'<sup>48</sup>

The 'I' is present in all mental activities, independent of their truth or falsity. Hence there are limits to the range of deception to which the subject can be affected because of the action of the malignant demon. The subject can be deceived on anything but on his own existence<sup>49</sup>. In spite of the possibility that a malignant demon exists who deceives the subject on anything, the subject cannot be deceived on the fact that he exists: the proposition 'I exist' is true every time it is expressed by the subject<sup>50</sup>. Descartes proceeds to the

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which he sees is false. From this point onwards, Descartes is bound to find and to go the whole path towards the foundation of certainty, provided that this path actually exists. The relevant aspect for our investigation is that the notion of idea turns out to have a central position throughout Descartes' strategy.

<sup>47</sup> The 'I' transcends both the external and the internal experience.

<sup>48</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 25.

<sup>49</sup> In order to be deceived on everything, the subject must exist. If the subject does not exist, the subject cannot be deceived at all. At least the subject's existence must be out of doubt in order that the subject could be deceived on everything else: the 'I', with its mental and senses activities, must exist, if it is deceived by the malignant demon.

<sup>50</sup> See Descartes' statements on the nature of the 'I':

investigation of the 'I', whose certainty has been reached, then to the inquiry into the mental activities of the 'I', and thereafter to the inspection of the ideas present in the mind of the 'I'. Descartes introduces ideas in the following way:

'Of my thoughts some are, as it were, images of things, to which alone the name Idea properly suits<sup>51</sup>: as when I think a man, or a Chimera, or the Sky, or an Angel, or God. Others, besides, have, on the contrary, certain other forms: as when I will, when I fear, when I affirm, when I deny, I always, indeed, apprehend something as the subject of my thought, but I also embrace in thought something more than the likeness of this thing; and of these thoughts some are called volitions, or affections, and others are called judgments.'<sup>52</sup>

Descartes differentiates then ideas in factitious, adventitious and innate<sup>53</sup>:

'But among these ideas, some seem to me to be innate<sup>54</sup>, others adventitious<sup>55</sup>, and others to be made by myself<sup>56</sup>: for it seems to me that I have from no other source than from my own nature my understanding what a thing is, or what the truth is, or what a thought is; I judged thus far, on the other hand, that my hearing a noise, my seeing the sun, my feeling heat, proceed from certain objects put outside me; and, in fine, sirens, hippogryphs, and the like, are imagined by myself. But I may perhaps even think that all my ideas are

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'But what, then, am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives.' (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 28).

Descartes is therewith showing the activities of the thought.

<sup>51</sup> In the original text: *Ideae nomen*.

<sup>52</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 37.

<sup>53</sup> A conception of ideas limited to the ideas which the subject is able to produce and to the ideas coming from the external world would not have enabled Descartes to find a guarantee for the foundation of the knowledge. The discovery of the innate idea of God opens the field to God as not being a deceiving God but, on the contrary, as being the very guarantee of the knowledge. Without the guarantee represented by God, there cannot be a guarantee for the existence as such of the knowledge.

<sup>54</sup> In the original text: *innatae*.

<sup>55</sup> In the original text: *adventitiae*.

<sup>56</sup> In the original text: *a me ipso factae*.

adventitious, or that they are all innate, or that they are all factitious: for I did not yet clearly ascertain their true origin.<sup>57</sup>

There is, up to now, no possibility of seeing whether ideas derive from the internal activity of the subject's mind or from further causes. The search for the foundation of certainty, if any foundation of certainty exists, should still be found. The further scrutiny of the different ideas demonstrates that at least the idea of God is an innate idea, since – due to its own characteristics – this idea cannot have been produced by the individual mind and does not originate in the sensible experience.

The foundation of certainty cannot be found either through the ideas which are made by the subject or through the ideas which seemingly come from the outside dimension: for instance, all the ideas coming from the senses can be false. The subject is able to recognise that he can be deceived, and is actually deceived, by his own senses, so that the subject can understand that he cannot have absolute trust in his sense data. Furthermore, all the ideas that the subject has could actually be his own product and, as a consequence, have no actual correspondence in the external world. An idea needs to be found which is not the product of the individual.

In spite of the fact that the subject has arrived at the certainty of the existence of the 'I', the subject does not have, up to now, any certainty as regards the existence of the external world, in the sense that all the data coming from the external world could be false: the subject has no certainty that the data coming from the external world are not false. The subject does not yet have a reliable way for going from the 'I' to the external world. The existence of the 'I' is certain; all the rest, however, remains uncertain, since there is no foundation for the certainty of further mind and sense data – at least not yet –. The individual has at his disposal no proof of the existence of something else besides and outside himself, since he cannot yet exclude that all his ideas which seem to come from the external world are, actually, his own product. The ideas analysed up to now are not appropriate in order to find a basis which can represent the foundation of certainty. Moreover, the general doubt concerning the truth of all the subject's mental and senses activities involves the actual correspondence too between his own ideas and the existence of the external world. Up to this point, the

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<sup>57</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 37–38.

subject is still imprisoned by the uncertainty regarding the actual correspondence of his own ideas with the external world.

The idea of God, which the subject can find in himself, is the solution to the problem. Only the idea of God, which is an innate idea, can represent an idea beyond doubt: the idea of God cannot originate from the subject. As the idea of God manifests contents which cannot have been thought out by the subject, the idea cannot have been produced by the subject<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, the idea of God must be an innate idea<sup>59</sup>. It must come from God himself, who has put this idea into the subject.

From the idea of God, whose contents describing a perfect entity cannot have been put inside the subject by the subject himself, who has a limited nature, but only by a perfect entity, the existence of God is demonstrated. Since the contents of the idea representing the essence of a perfect entity could have been put into the subject's mind only by a perfect entity, the existence of this perfect entity is demonstrated. God exists<sup>60</sup>. Herewith, the

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<sup>58</sup> The idea of God cannot come from the senses either, since the senses deliver to the subject no apprehension of an entity possessing the properties of God.

<sup>59</sup> For the inquiry into God as an innate idea, see *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 51.

<sup>60</sup> The process of demonstration, which is developed in different passages of the third and the fourth Meditation, functions, in our opinion, in the following way:

i. In the efficient cause there must be so much reality as in the effect of the cause (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 40).

ii. The formal – i.e. actual – reality which is contained by the cause of the idea must be equal to the objective reality – i.e., exposing the sense of Descartes' use of the attribute 'objective', to the reality in form of representation of something – which is contained by the idea (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 40). The degree of the reality as representation of something possessed by the idea must correspond to the degree of actual reality possessed by the entity which the idea represents (in case of the idea of God, the degree of reality possessed by the idea of God as representation of God must correspond to the degree of reality possessed by the entity represented by the idea of God, i.e. God). The basic structure of the demonstration consists in the correspondence between the degree of reality contained in the idea and the degree of reality which the cause of the idea must possess in order to be the adequate cause of that idea itself.

iii. If the objective reality of an idea – i.e. the reality of the idea in form of the representation of something – is such that the subject cannot be the actual cause of it, this is the proof that the subject is not alone in the world; an entity which is the cause of the idea must exist (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 42). If the

subject is able to demonstrate and to have the certainty that he is not the

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subject is not the cause of the representative content of the idea, something else, i.e. an external entity, must be the cause of it.

iv. The idea of God cannot have been made by the subject. This impossibility is due to the kind of properties of the idea of God: God is an infinite, independent, supremely knowing, supremely powerful substance (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 45). These properties do not derive from the mind of the subject: hence, the idea of God cannot have been made by the subject. God Himself is the entity who has put the idea of God into the mind of the subject: therefore God necessarily exists (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 45, see also *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 51).

v. The idea of an infinite substance derives from an infinite substance (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 45).

vi. God cannot be a deceiver since to deceive is the sign of the presence of a defect, it is a sign of imperfection (*Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 52). The possibility of the certainty of the subject's mental and senses activities exists, since God is not a malignant demon. There is no reason for a general doubt originating in the possibility that a malignant demon deceives the subject every time.

Descartes' strategy in finding the foundation of certainty proceeds from the investigation on the idea of God to the acknowledgement that only the idea of God, which is, as such, an innate idea, can have been put in the subject as innate by a perfect entity and is not the product of the imagination of the subject or of the senses of the subject. Moreover, the principle of correspondence between the degree of objective reality of the idea of God, i.e. the correspondence between the degree of reality of the idea of God as a representation of the entity God, on the one hand, and the degree of actual reality of the entity God, on the other hand, brings about the conclusion of the necessary existence of God. The incompatibility between God as perfect entity and the possibility of Him being a deceiver – which is due to the incompatibility between perfection, on the one hand, and deception, which is a sign of defect, on the other hand – leads to the impossibility that God deceives the subject and, hence, to the foundation of the possibility of the certainty of the mental and senses activities of the subject. Descartes clearly states in *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 69-71 that the certainty and the truth of any science whatsoever depends on the subject arriving at the knowledge of God and of His essence. Before knowing God, it is not possible, for the individual, to know anything of any other issue except for his own existence: without the guarantee represented by the existence of a non-deceiving God, the hypothesis of the existence of the malignant demon cannot be refused. The certainty of the contents of the individual's mental and senses activities depends on God's existence. The subject can demonstrate this existence only through the idea of God. Therefore, the idea of God proves to be decisive for the foundation of certainty.

only entity of the reality: a further entity, i.e. God has put into the subject the idea of itself, therefore there is a plurality of entities in the reality. The idea of God, therefore, turns out to be indispensable in order to demonstrate the existence of the external world and in order to direct one's own attention to the external world with a founded trust in the very existence of the external world.

'There only remains, therefore, the idea of God, in which I must consider whether there is anything that could not originate from myself. By the name God, I understand a substance infinite, independent, supremely knowing, supremely powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if anything else exists, were created. But all these properties are such that, the more attentively I consider them, the less it seems that they could have originated from me alone. And therefore, it must be concluded, from what was said before, that God necessarily exists.'<sup>61</sup>

Only the idea of God can represent an idea beyond doubt: the idea of God cannot originate from the subject. From the idea, the existence of God is demonstrated: through the analysis of the contents of the idea of God, Descartes manages to show that the idea of God cannot be an idea produced by the subject, and therefore must have been caused by an entity which actually exists. The idea of God cannot have been made by the individual and cannot come from his own sensible experience. The idea of God, due to the perfection of the attributes of God which are in the idea, can come only from God. Since the idea of God is an idea which manifests the properties of a perfect entity, it cannot have been created by the subject. The entity which is the cause of the idea must be as perfect as the idea is: hence, God Himself has put the idea into the subject's mind.

Through the demonstration of the existence of God, Descartes can reach the guarantee for the possibility of the validity of the sciences: since God cannot be bad, and, therefore, cannot deceive, Descartes can obtain the guarantee that there is no bad potency which steadily deceives men.

'For, in the first place, I acknowledge that it is impossible that he ever dupes me; for in all trick or deception a certain imperfection is contained: and although to be able to dupe seems to be some proof of cunning or of power,

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<sup>61</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 45.

without doubt the will to dupe gives evidence of malice or of weakness, and this, accordingly, does not become God.<sup>62</sup>

The presence of the idea of God opens the way to the demonstration of the existence of God. The existence of God together with the consequent analysis of the essence of God will then show that God cannot as such deceive and that, therefore, the hypothesis of general doubt should be abandoned. God cannot deceive, since deceiving is incompatible with the perfection of the essence of God: deception is, as such, a sign of imperfection, so that deception proves to be incompatible with a perfect entity.

Descartes' next step is to show that the existence of a non-deceiving God legitimates the subject's faculty of judgment. Before the demonstration of the existence of God, it was correct to doubt the activity as such of the faculty of judgment of the subject; thereafter, through the demonstration of the existence of God, the foundation of certainty against the general doubt has been found. The existence of God, who, as He is a perfect entity, cannot be a deceiving entity, gives the guarantee of the possibility of the correctness of the subject's faculty of judgment:

'Afterwards, I find out that a certain faculty of judging is in me, which, like everything else too which is in me, I doubtless received from God; and since he does not want to dupe me, certainly he did not give me such a faculty in order that I can ever make a mistake, as long as I properly use it.'<sup>63</sup>

The existence of God as a non-deceiving entity enables the subject to be certain that at least some ideas arrived at through the meditation and at least some ideas of the sense data are true. The attitude of doubt does not need to be extended to all ideas. God as a guarantee of the possibility of certainty enables the subject to have a confidence in all the activities of sense perception and in all the mind activities which are conducted with the right method. The existence and the essence of God give the possibility of the trust in all the results of mental and senses activities, provided that these are conducted with the correct method.

The subject does not know yet the scientific laws of reality. He does not know yet how the natural laws are, but, at least, he knows that the

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<sup>62</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 53.

<sup>63</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 53–54.



possibility that his faculty of judgment is always false has no real basis. The subject comes to know – through the demonstration of the existence of God obtained thanks to the idea of God and its contents – that certainty is possible. The subject can arrive at the truth: the way to the truth is not a priori hindered or blocked. Furthermore, through the idea of God and the subsequent demonstration of God's existence, anyone can acknowledge that something besides him does exist. Therefore, the fact that God does not deceive the subject is the guarantee both for the application of the faculty of judging of the subject and for the actual existence of the external world.

Since the traditional sceptical doubts and, in general, the hypothesis of a malignant demon who always deceives the subject have destroyed the possibility of being certain of anything, Descartes needs to find a new foundation for certainty. The arrival at the existence of God who, as a perfect entity, cannot deceive the subject represents the foundation of the possibility of certainty or, in other words, the possibility that any sense perception and any mind activity whatsoever do not need to be subjected to doubt. Sense perception and mind activities must not necessarily be false a priori: the doubt of falsity does not regard a priori any sense perception and mind activity. Sense perception and mind activities can be true, provided that they are conducted in the right way.

The subject has therewith reached a foundation for his sense perception and for his mind activity: at least, the subject knows that there is no danger that a malignant demon is deceiving him, or can deceive him, on anything. Of course, this whole process does not eliminate the possibility as such of the mistake made within the research activity: this process gives to the subject the certainty that his sense perception and mind activity are not constantly menaced by the deception of a malignant demon. It represents, therefore, a kind of general assurance against the hypothesis of being steadily deceived. If Descartes did not reach the foundation of the possibility of certainty, any mind activity and any sense perception could be false: the attitude of the general doubt would involve any activity independently of the correctness of the research method.

God's existence and essence open the way to the possibility of achieving the certainty of any research activity. Before the recognition of the existence of the idea of God and of the existence of God, the subject is prisoner of the doubt: he can never exclude the possibility that any of his mental and senses activities is false. After the recognition of the existence of God, the subject knows that – provided that he follows the correct methods

– he can arrive at the knowledge of sectors of the reality. The subject knows that at least the innate idea of God corresponds to an entity which actually exists. Due to the properties of God, which is a non-deceiving entity, specific criteria for the acquisition of the knowledge can be applied to reality. As a consequence, the individual is free from the doubt that any of his mental and senses activities can be false. The subject can make the due steps towards the knowledge of reality. The idea of God proves to be indispensable in order to find a foundation for the certainty of every activity of thought (with the exception of the awareness of the Cogito). Since God does not deceive, the subject has the certainty that everything which is clearly and distinctly perceived is true.

Without finding God who, due to His very essence, does not deceive, any sense perception and any activity of thought would remain uncertain and could never be free from doubt: the subject would be always compelled to have doubts about the validity as such of his mind activity and of his sense perception, since he would have no foundation of the possibility of certainty at his disposal. The certainty and the truth of every science depend on the subject's knowledge of God: without a previous knowledge of God, there is no possibility for the knowledge of anything else<sup>64</sup>.

To summarise,

a. Descartes attains a theological foundation for the possibility of certainty of the mental and senses activities of the subject<sup>65</sup>.

b. The process of the search for a foundation of the certainty of the subject's mental and senses activities finds a factor which is above any doubt: this factor is God.

c. The acknowledgment of the presence in the subject's minds of the innate idea of God opens the way for the demonstration of God's existence.

d. The existence of God proves to be central for the foundation of the possibility of certainty regarding the mental and senses activities of the subject.

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<sup>64</sup> See *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, AT VII 71.

<sup>65</sup> This, of course, does not mean that the mental and senses activities of the subject are always true; it only means that they are not necessarily false, since there is no malignant demon.

### 5) Locke: every idea is the result of the experience

We are now going to analyse some passages of Locke in order to find a position which is alternative to any position pleading for the existence of innate ideas. In Locke we find exclusively ideas coming from experience: the position of Locke proves to be, therefore, completely different from the position of Descartes. The concept of ideas is introduced by Locke in the following way:

'This much I thought necessary to say concerning the Occasion of this Enquiry into humane Understanding. But, before I proceed on to what I have thought on this Subject, I must here in the Entrance beg pardon of my Reader, for the frequent use of the Word *Idea*, which he will find in the following Treatise. It being that Term, which, I think, serves best to understand for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by Phantasm, Notion, Species, or whatever it is, which the Mind can be employ'd about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it.

I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such *Ideas* in Men's minds; every one is conscious of them in himself, and Men's Words and Actions will satisfy him, that they are in others.'<sup>66</sup>

Phantasm, notions, species, i.e. everything within the mind used throughout the activity of thought, is an idea. It should be noted that Locke's ideas include any content of thought.

'Whatever the Mind perceives in it self, or is the immediate object of Perception, Thought, or Understanding, that I call *Ideas*; and the Power to produce any *Idea* in our mind, I call *Quality* of the Subject wherein that power is. Thus a Snow-ball having the power to produce in us the *Ideas* of *White*, *Cold*, and *Round*, the Powers to produce those *Ideas* in us, as they are in the Snow-ball, I call *Qualities*; and as they are Sensations, or Perceptions, in Our Understandings, I call them *Ideas*: which *Ideas*, if I speak of sometimes, as in the things themselves, I would be understood to mean those *Qualities* in the Objects which produce them in us.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, I, I, 8.

<sup>67</sup> See *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, II, VIII, 8.

Ideas are objects of perception, of thought and of understanding. In the above quote we can see again that idea covers every content of thought. Locke expresses clearly that the mind is void without the experience-data:

'Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*; How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this answer, in one word, From *Experience*: In that, all our Knowledge is founded: and from that it ultimately derives it self. Our Observation employ'd either about *external, sensible Objects*; or about the *internal Operations of our Minds, perceived and reflected on by our selves*, is that, which supplies our Understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the Ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.'<sup>68</sup>

External sensible objects and internal operations of mind turn out to be the sources of the knowledge. There are no other contents in the mind. Ideas having their origin in the experience is functional to Locke's programme of putting precise limits to the possibility and to the range of the forms of knowledge<sup>69</sup>. Since the limits of the extension of knowledge are dictated by the experience and by the internal operations of the mind, any form whatsoever of knowledge of the external world has as its own limits the experience possessed by the subject. The knowledge of the external world has precise limits: the subject completely depends on the experience as regards the contents of his own mind<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> See *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* II, I, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Locke clearly states in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, I, 1 that he aims to explore and define the capacity and the limits of the knowledge.

<sup>70</sup> Locke's refusal of innate ideas and principles is exposed in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I, II-IV. In particular, in the paragraph I, IV, 24 Locke gives an interesting explanation of the grounds why the thesis of the existence of innate principles finds support in some thinkers: the strategy concealed in presenting a principle as innate actually aims to avoid any inquiry on the principle itself and on its validity. If a principle is innate, it cannot be criticised or even only discussed. In the view of those who claim the existence of innate principles, people should accept the innate principles without discussion. If a principle is innate, it cannot be put in doubt; an innate principle cannot be questioned. The goal of this way of proceeding consists in transmitting an attitude of blind credulity to the people

To summarise,

- a. through the derivation of all ideas from the experience of the individuals, Locke shows the limits connected to the mental and senses activities of the individuals. The fact that ideas can only come from the individual experience excludes the possibility of the existence of innate ideas.
- b. Ideas are in Locke the contents of knowledge. Furthermore, they represent the limits of the possibilities of knowledge since they derive only from the internal or external experience of the subject.

### 6) **Berkeley: objects of reality are ideas**

Berkeley's main purpose consists in the refutation of the position that there are entities which exist independently of the mind perceiving them or, at least, that, from the ideas present in his mind, the subject can legitimately infer the independent existence of entities outside his own mind. Furthermore, Berkeley refuses all positions pleading for the legitimacy of concepts like matter, or corporeal substance, or material substance, or material substratum. Berkeley's strategy, correspondingly, consists, on the one hand, in interpreting material entities as entities which – in the opinion of those who plead for their existence – should be mind-independent, and in showing that – contrary to the mentioned opinion – no world object which is apprehended by the mind can possess the feature of being mind-independent, on the other hand, since any world object apprehended by the mind is, actually, nothing else than the ideas which the subject has of this object.

All objects of the external world, are, on closer inspection, the ideas that the subject has within his own mind: these objects are equivalent with the ideas present in the mind of the subject<sup>71</sup>. Within the subject's mind,

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accepting the existence of principles which are to be accepted without inquiry or discussion. People who have absorbed the attitude of blind credulity will then be easily governed by those who have leading capacities. Locke points out that those who become dictators of principles and teachers of unquestionable truths acquire an enormous power over those who are ready to accept the existence of unquestionable principles, on the one hand, and ready to accept the authority of those who announce these principles, on the other hand.

<sup>71</sup> Berkeley states that if there were material objects as mind-independent entities, the subject could not know whether they exist or not, since the subject can know

there is not, and there cannot be any connection whatsoever between ideas, on the one hand, and objects which should independently exist outside the mind, on the other hand. In the subject's mind there is actually nothing else than ideas – in other words, in the mind, there are only mental entities –. Moreover, Berkeley refuses the notion of matter as an inert, senseless, unthinking substance in which the properties of the objects like extension, figure and motion subsist. This inert, senseless, unthinking substance exists – in the view of all those who claim for its existence – independently of the perceiving subject. In Berkeley's view, this position has, on closer inspection, no legitimacy at all, since the mentioned properties are nothing else than ideas existing in the mind. Since these properties are ideas of the mind, these properties cannot exist in an unperceiving entity like matter<sup>72</sup>. As a consequence, there is no legitimacy for the position asserting the existence of an entity with the mentioned features of matter<sup>73</sup>.

In Berkeley's view, the reality is composed by things (beings): things or beings are, for Berkeley,

- i. either spirits, which are active and have, therefore, the status of substance,
- ii. or ideas, which are dependent, inactive beings, not subsisting by themselves, but existing in the minds<sup>74</sup>.

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the existence only of the objects which he perceives (see *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 20).

<sup>72</sup> Any idea, being, as such, a content of thought, can exist only in a mind. Hence, the notion of an unperceiving entity which should be the substratum of ideas is, as such, meaningless.

<sup>73</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 9. In our opinion, the structure of Berkeley's whole argument consists in the equivalence which holds between material entities and mind-independent objects. Since, in Berkeley's interpretation, mind-independent objects cannot exist, the notion of material entities proves to be meaningless.

<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraphs 1-2, Paragraphs 89–90.

Ideas correspond for Berkeley to the objects of mind<sup>75</sup>: they can be either imprinted on the senses, or perceived as a result of the passions and operations of the mind, or formed through memory and imagination<sup>76</sup>. The concept of idea is interpreted and used by Berkeley so that a complete modification of the habitual way of interpreting the reality can be promoted. The modification comes about through Berkeley stating a complete equivalence between entities of reality and ideas: the being of the entities of reality consists in their being perceived. Entities are, on a closer look, the ideas which the subject has. The subject does not have, actually, any contact with any entity other than his own ideas: entities of reality are nothing else than the mental entities of the subject. The subject does not have anything else than ideas. Inactive entities are nothing else than ideas or sensations: they exist only in a mind perceiving them<sup>77</sup>. There is no inactive entity existing independently of a mind perceiving it, so that there cannot be any independent existence of inactive entities.

Berkeley clearly states that he uses the word 'idea' for the objects of the senses, since to use 'thing' for the sense data could give the impression

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<sup>75</sup> It is in our view interesting that ideas, in spite of their commonly being interpreted as contents of consciousness, can be inserted into systems which turn out to be opposite to each other. In Locke, the ideas are always dependent on experience. Ideas being connected to external experience bear witness to the existence of mind-independent entities; the ideas of external objects confirm the mind-independent position of the external objects. The ideas of external objects depend on the experience of external objects. In Berkeley, objects are interpreted as ideas or as collections of ideas, thus being reduced to entities which, as such, cannot be considered as being mind-independent. Ideas of external objects show that those which, seemingly, are mind-independent external objects are, actually, nothing else than collections of the ideas of the mind, so that they cannot be regarded as being mind-independent. External objects are reduced to ideas. Thereby we can see that the same concept, if used within different systems of interpretation, can directly lead to or can contribute to leading to opposite results.

<sup>76</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 1: 'It is evident to any one who takes a survey of the *objects* of the human knowledge, that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses; or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination – either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways.'

<sup>77</sup> See, for instance, *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 78.

that sense data are connected to entities which are independent of the mind. The choice of the word 'idea' is therefore as such functional to Berkeley's purpose of showing that the sense data do not correspond to mind-independent objects<sup>78</sup>. Since the subject has only ideas, and ideas are contents of thought, the subject cannot say that there is a dimension of external entities independent of the subject who perceives these entities. Since the subject has exclusively ideas in his own mind and, therefore, has no connection with something else than his ideas, there is no way of demonstrating that there is something which exists independently of ideas, to which ideas are referred, as though they were only representations of entities which independently exist<sup>79</sup>.

The equivalence between sensible things and ideas demonstrates that there is no independent existence of an external world outside the subject. Since the objects of the senses are equivalent to the ideas present in the mind and are, actually nothing else than these ideas, a mind-independent existence of the external world would amount to a contradiction, since it would mean that entities like ideas, which, as such, are objects of perception, can exist without being perceived<sup>80</sup>. No mind-independent entity can be admitted in a correct interpretation of reality<sup>81</sup>. The only

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<sup>78</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 39 on the difference between ideas and things. Berkeley states that a thing is, in the usual comprehension of the term, an entity which exists independently of its being perceived or of its being thought by a subject. We can attribute to things the status of mind-independent entities.

<sup>79</sup> In short, we think that the argument of Berkeley is the following one: Objects of reality turn out to be, on closer inspection, ideas of mind → Ideas exist since they are perceived → There cannot be something whose way of existence consists in its being perceived, which exists without being perceived → The existence of the inactive entities consists in their being perceived.

Berkeley clearly states that, even though external bodies actually existed, the subject would nonetheless not be able to know this. Actually, in Berkeley's view, the materialists cannot explain how ideas are produced; they cannot explain how the body can act upon the spirit, or how the body can imprint any idea in the mind (see *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 19-20).

<sup>80</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 4.

<sup>81</sup> For a direct criticism of the notion of matter as a contradictory and meaningless notion see, for instance, *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraphs 9, 11, 17; see also *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, *The Second Dialogue*, pp. 308–320. Berkeley's programme as such in *A Treatise*



existing substances are spirits, since they are active entities. Since ideas are inactive entities, they cannot be regarded as substances<sup>82</sup>.

Reality consists of spirits (minds) and ideas: spirits are active entities, ideas are inactive entities. Berkeley introduces as follows the notion of the way of being which is peculiar to the inactive entities, the notion of Spirit and the notion of idea:

‘Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, viz. that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any substance without a mind; that their *being* is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind, or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit<sup>83</sup>: it

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*Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge* consists in the inquiry into the main causes of the mistakes made by the sciences which lead to scepticism, atheism and irreligion: Berkeley’s programme aims to be a confutation of the positions leading to irreligious conclusions and attitudes on the basis of the existence of entities which exist independently of their being perceived.

<sup>82</sup> The kernel of Berkeley’s interpretation strategy of reality can be synthesised in entities of reality either perceiving or being perceived. For an entity, to exist is either to be perceived or to perceive. The notion of being is interpreted either as being perceived or as perceiving: only entities which perceive or are perceived exist; no entity exists which does not perceive or is not perceived (exclusively ideas, as perceived entities, or spirits, as perceiving entities, exist; see, for instance, *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 71). Thus, the conception of entities which exist without perceiving or without being perceived has no place in Berkeley’s interpretation of reality. In particular, there is no space, in Berkeley’s interpretation of reality, for entities which exist independently of their being perceived. The position of materialism as the interpretation of reality asserting that mind-independent entities exist is always refused by Berkeley. Inactive entities are, as such, ideas or collection of ideas. For Berkeley’s introduction of ideas as perceived entities – on the one hand – and mind, spirit, soul, or myself as perceiving, active beings – on the other hand –, see *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraphs 1 and 2.

<sup>83</sup> The Eternal Spirit, through his continuously perceiving the entities of the world, is, for these entities, the guarantee of their own existence. The condition of existence, for these entities, consists in their being perceived by a mind: if these entities are not perceived at least by a mind, they do not exist. God, who

being perfectly unintelligible, and involving all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. To be convinced of which, the reader need only reflect, and try to separate in his own thoughts the *being* of a sensible thing from its *being perceived*.

From what has been said it is evident that there is not any other Substance than *Spirit*, or that which perceives. But, for the fuller proof of this point, let it be considered the sensible qualities are colour, figure, motion, smell, taste, and such like, that is, the ideas perceived by sense. Now, for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing is a manifest contradiction; for to have an idea is all one has to perceive: that therefore wherein colour, figure, and the like qualities exist must perceive them. Hence it is clear there can be no unthinking substance or *substratum* of those ideas.<sup>84</sup>

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continuously perceives the entities of the world, constitutes, therefore, the guarantee for the existence of these entities. If God did not exist, there would be no guarantee that the entities of the world are thought by at least a mind. The following schema could be useful to express the aspects of Berkeley's reasoning: Inactive entities need to be perceived in order to exist → No created mind can think continuously, since it is not eternal → Only God perceives the entities continuously, since God is eternal → Hence, God exists.

Furthermore, God is the cause of the sensory ideas which the finite spirits like men have: on the one hand, since ideas are only inactive entities, ideas cannot be the cause of the fact that the subject has them; on the other hand, the subject cannot produce his sensory ideas. Hence, only God can be the cause of the sensory ideas we have ( see *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraphs 25–33; see also *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, *The Second Dialogue*, pp. 306–308). It could be said, in our view, that Locke aims to investigate the limits of the subject, since the subject depends on experience and, therefore, on external reality for his experience of the external entities, whereas Berkeley, criticising all positions like that of Locke, aims to show the limits of the external world in the sense that the world which seems to be external to the mind, actually, exclusively consists of the ideas contained in the subject's mind. On closer inspection, the external world turns out to be nothing else than the ideas of the subject.

<sup>84</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraphs 6–7. See also this passage (*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraphs 3–4):

'That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist without the mind, is what everybody will allow. And to me it is no less

In the quoted passage we can see, for example, the following points:

- No entity of the world has any substance without a mind; entities of the world need at least a mind that perceives them. The existential dependence of the entities of the world on the mind is clearly stated.
- Being, for inactive entities, means to be perceived or known. The condition of existence for inactive entities consists in their being perceived or known: it follows that these entities are nothing without a mind. A mind is necessary for them to exist<sup>85</sup>.

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evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them. – I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this by any one that shall attend to what is meant by the term exist when applied to sensible things. The table I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed – meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelt; there was a sound, that is, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that is to me perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse is percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, which is different from their being perceived by the understanding. But, with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world, yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For, what are the aforementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? and is not plainly repugnant that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived?

As we can read, all sensible objects are nothing else than what the subject perceives; moreover, the subject perceives nothing else than the ideas of the subject. Therefore, the sensible objects, since they are ideas and combinations of ideas, cannot exist unperceived. They cannot be mind-independent. An idea which exists without being perceived is a manifest contradiction; hence, an object which exists without being perceived is a contradiction.

<sup>85</sup> Berkeley specifies that the fact that bodies are mind-dependent does not mean that bodies are dependent on a particular mind. On the one hand, bodies have no existence if there are no minds at all; on the other hand, they do not need the

- Since ideas are entities whose existence consists in their being perceived, they cannot exist in a substratum which does not perceive. Their existence basis must be a perceiving entity, i.e. a mind.
- If entities are not perceived by any mind, they must be perceived, in order to exist, at least by an eternal mind. To attribute an independent existence to ideas would be absurd precisely because they are ideas. If objects are collections of ideas, and ideas exist since a subject thinks them, then there cannot be objects without a mind perceiving them.
- There is, therefore, no other substance than Spirit: the only substance is the Spirit, i.e. it is that which perceives.

Berkeley specifies that ideas are exclusively inactive<sup>86</sup>:

‘All our ideas, sensations, notions, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive: there is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that one idea or object of thought cannot produce or make any alteration in another. To be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas. For, since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived: but whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is, therefore, no such thing contained in them. A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, insomuch that it is impossible for an idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything: neither can it be the resemblance or pattern of any active being.’<sup>87</sup>

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existence of a particular finite mind in order to exist (see *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 48).

<sup>86</sup> This feature of Berkeley’s ideas differentiates, in our opinion, Berkeley’s position from, for instance, Plato’s position: in the previously mentioned myth of the *Phaedrus*, ideas seem to exercise an influence on the subject which is able to achieve the acquaintance with them. Ideas bring about a modification in the individual who comes in contact with them. As Berkeley is not ready to concede an independent existence to other entities than to the spirits, he reserves the feature of being active exclusively to the spirits. In Plato, ideas open the way to the subject’s recognition that not only the sensible dimension exist. Berkeley, through the reduction of entities or reality to ideas, refuses the hypothesis of materialism.

<sup>87</sup> See *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 25.

Ideas are inactive: there is no power or agency in them. This interpretation of ideas is functional to Berkeley's notion that no entity whatsoever exists and can exist independently of mind. To attribute any power to ideas would amount to giving ideas a status independent of the mind, or could be read as the purpose of giving ideas a status independent of the mind. Therefore, the dependent position of whichever content of the mind must be always stated and pointed out. The fact that ideas do not have power or agency is connected to and directly derives from Berkeley's assumption that there are no independent entities except for the thinking entities. If ideas possessed agency, they would possess a kind of independence that Berkeley wishes to acknowledge only to the thinking subjects.

'When I deny sensible things an existence out of the mind, I do not mean my mind in particular, but all minds. Now, it is plain they have an existence exterior; since I find them by experience to be independent of it. There is therefore some other Mind wherein they exist, during the intervals between the times of my perceiving them: as likewise they did before my birth, and would do after my supposed annihilation. And, as the same is true with regard to all other finite created spirits, it necessarily follows there is an *omnipresent eternal Mind*, which knows and comprehends all things, and exhibits them to our view in such a manner, and according to such rules, as He Himself hath ordained, and are by us termed the *laws of nature*.'<sup>88</sup>

The ideas in Berkeley show the existence of an eternal mind. If ideas exist independently of the existence of a particular individual, but are not independent of any mind, they are dependent on at least one mind, an eternal entity which thinks all ideas. Ideas are eternal since an eternal mind thinks them.

Berkeley distinguishes between ideas imprinted on the senses by God, which are real things, and ideas as images of things which are the copy of representations of the real things<sup>89</sup>. Real entities are real, in Berkeley's view,

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<sup>88</sup> See *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, The Third Dialogue*, p. 325. A part of the subtitle of Berkeley's book clearly describes Berkeley's goals in the book: *The Design of Which is Plainly to Demonstrate the Reality and Perfection of Human Knowledge, the Incorporeal Nature of the Soul, and the Immediate Providence of a Deity: in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists*.

<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, *A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge*, Part I., Paragraph 33

since they are impressed on the senses directly by God. God's action on the senses represents, therefore, the criterion for the reality of the ideas: the presence of God's action is the cause of the difference between what is real, since it is the product of God's action, on the one hand, and what is simply an image of the real entities, on the other hand. Both real things and images of things do not exist without a mind perceiving them; both real things and images of things are ideas, even though only the first ones are God's products<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> Berkeley argues in the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, *The Second Dialogue*, pp. 303–305 (see also *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, *The Third Dialogue*, p. 325), that an infinite mind, God, who steadily perceives the entities of reality, exists. The argumentation functions, in our opinion, as follows:

- i. Sensible things exist.
- ii. Sensible things do not have an absolute existence outside the minds. Sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind. Their existence is not different from their being perceived.
- iii. Sensible things exist only since they are perceived by a mind.
- iv. Sensible things have an existence which is different from being perceived by a particular finite mind (i.e. sensible things must be perceived by at least one mind in order to exist; their existence does not depend, however, on their being perceived by a particular finite mind: to be perceived by at least one mind – not to be perceived by a particular finite mind – is the necessary condition for their existence).
- v. Since sensible things have an existence which is different from their being perceived by finite minds, and since sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind, there must be an infinite mind by which they are steadily perceived (otherwise it could be the case that sensible things do not exist, if they are not thought by any finite mind).
- vi. Therefore there is an infinite mind: this infinite mind is God.

The passage demonstrates the existence of God. It points out, too, that, since sensible things exist, an infinite mind which perceives them exists. If this infinite mind did not exist, it could be the case that entities which need to be perceived in order to exist would be unperceived. These entities would therefore not exist.

It is interesting, in our opinion, the way in which Berkeley differentiates his position regarding the relations between God and sensible things from other positions dealing with the same question:

‘Men commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God, because they believe the being of a God; whereas I, on the other side, immediately and necessarily conclude the being of a God, because all sensible things must be

To summarise,

- a. investigating the contents of the mind, Berkeley sees that there is no ground and no legitimation to assign to the inactive entities an existence which is independent of the individual minds.
- b. The subject has exclusively ideas as entities of reality.
- c. No inference from the existence of the ideas to the existence of objects which correspond to the ideas, and which are independent of the mind is legitimate.
- d. In Berkeley's view, the existence of the inactive entities of the experience consists in their being perceived by the individual mind: to be, for these entities, means to be perceived by an individual mind. Hence, inactive entities are, on closer inspection, ideas or collections of ideas. They consist in ideas or in collections of ideas.

## 7) Conclusions

The interpretations of ideas we have been dealing with in our study are always connected to the interpretation of the human condition. They have precise implications for the anthropology of the different thinkers and for the position in the reality which the different thinkers assign to the individuals.

- Plato contends that ideas can open the outlook of the individual on a dimension of reality which is different from the sensible dimension of reality. Existence of ideas means that not every content of the soul is sense perception. To become aware of the existence of ideas represents, for the individual who arrives at this kind of awareness, a complete transformation of the individual as such.

The peculiarity of Plato, in comparison with the other thinkers that we have chosen for our analysis, consists, in our opinion, in his pleading for ideas belonging to a transcendent dimension and for the ideas possessing a transcendent value: the recognition and recollection of ideas introduce the subject to the transcendent dimension. The subject reaches a dimension which is different from the dimension of the senses. He has already in himself the trace of his previous contact with this dimension, even though he is not aware of this aspect.

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perceived by Him.' (see *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, The Second Dialogue*, p. 304).

The soul – the rational part of the soul – ought to be educated towards the dimension of ideas. The average reality, i.e. the reality of sense perception, should be recognised by the individuals as constituting only a part of the whole reality.

The individual who has arrived at the awareness of the existence of ideas and at the awareness of the existence of the transcendent dimension connected to the ideas is no more the same person as the individual who had not yet attained this awareness: the contact with the transcendent dimension represents a complete change of the individuals. The individuals that are able to recognise the existence of ideas and find therefore the dimension to which ideas belong are no longer the same individuals who were not acquainted with the ideas and the ideas dimension. The knowledge of the existence of ideas proves to be a transformative knowledge of the individual.

- Descartes finds the possibility and the guarantee for the individual knowledge in the innate idea of God and in the demonstration of the existence of God, thereby liberating individuals from the absolute doubt concerning the trustworthiness of their own ideas. The demonstration of the existence of God is central for the solution of the problem of certainty: without this demonstration there is no way out of the generalised doubt, and there is no way out of the hypothesis of a malignant demon who could always deceive the subject.

The demonstration of the existence of God represents the way to the theological foundation of the certainty. The demonstration of the existence of God proves, therefore, to be an indispensable step in Descartes' search for the possibility of certainty within the sphere of the mental and senses activities of the subject. The idea of God and the demonstration of God's existence are, moreover, the necessary conditions for bringing the individual beyond the sphere of the 'I': they enable the subject to have the due certainty of the existence of an external world.

- Locke aims to show the powers and the limits of individual minds: subjects are always dependent on their own internal and external experience in order to have contents for their own minds. The hypothesis of the existence of innate ideas is refused. Ideas exclusively refer and are connected to data of experience or to aggregations of data of experience. Minds are empty without internal or external experience.

- Berkeley wishes to show, through the denial of an independent existence for the inactive entities, – i.e. the entities which have no mind



activity – the falsity of any materialistic theory. After being examined in their own constitution, the objects that seem to have an objective external position in the reality turn out to be nothing else than ideas or collections of ideas. Actually, the only contents of the mind are ideas. Therefore, there is no way of inferring external objects which exist independently of the mind itself from the ideas which the subject has in his mind. Hence, the subject cannot have any proof of the independent existence of inactive entities.

- God as the entity who always thinks all the ideas is the guarantee that ideas are always thought, i.e. that there is no interruption in ideas' being thought and, therefore, in ideas' existence. The existence of the external objects should be translated into the subject thinking or perceiving them: to be, to exist means, for the objects, to be perceived. The way of existence of external objects consists in their being perceived. Since the objects of experience are exclusively the ideas of these objects, the subject does not have anything else in the mind than his own ideas. The subject cannot have any proof whatsoever of any independent existence of the external reality if he bases his proof on the contents of the mind, which are the only contents he possesses.

The analysis of God's attributes for Descartes, the inquiry into the dimension of transcendence for Plato, and the conception of God as author of the ideas in Berkeley attest the importance of the theological thought in the history of philosophy. In particular, the relevance of the interpretation of the ideas for the concepts of transcendence, of Divinity and of the reality's dimensions may not be ignored within a survey of the concept of ideas. In the view of the authors that we have chosen for our investigation, ideas prove to constitute a field which is directly connected to the individual position in the reality. They are functional to the interpretation of the human condition in the reality proposed by each author.

Ideas certainly fulfil, in the four thinkers chosen by us, different functions and are used for different purposes. However, in spite of all differences, a common point as regards the four thinkers' use of ideas can be found in the connection holding between ideas and knowledge: ideas are indispensable for the acquisition of knowledge in Plato, since ideas are, among other things, the cause of the presence of a property in a plurality of entities. They enable the individual to know the cause of the presence of a property. The idea of God represents, in Descartes, the condition for and the foundation of the demonstration of God's existence: therewith, the idea of God represents the basis of the possibility of certainty of the mental and

senses activities of the subject, herein including any process of knowledge. In Locke, ideas are the contents of the subject's experience of the internal and external reality: hence, they are the elements of the knowledge of reality. In Berkeley's view, ideas are, for the individual, the only contents of the reality. Any entity which seems to be external to the subject turns out, on closer inspection, to be nothing else than an idea, or a collection of the ideas which are present in the mind of the subject: the knowledge of the structure of reality consists, therefore, in the knowledge of the origin of the ideas as entities put by God into the individual minds.

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