

ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF γνῶθι σαυτόν

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The call to “know thyself” is neither a matter of presence and absence to self, nor the necessary or unnecessary possibility or impossibility of self-knowledge – rather it is a problem. And the oracle gives a sign of this problem by implying that which is neither spoken nor concealed. But if implication is the problem of the sign, it is because it suspends the self and the very possibility of self-knowledge.

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How is it possible for us to take up the Delphic oracle’s call to “know thyself,” γνῶθι σαυτόν? Not just in the history of Western philosophy as metaphysics, from the Greeks to us, but in any discourse determined thereby?

In fact, it is only by presupposing a particular concept of the ψυχή or *ego*, soul or subject – that is, a self that can know itself because it presents itself to itself, speaks to itself, whether aloud or in the silent self-presence of inner-monologue. As Augustine writes:

“Let it not therefore seek to discern itself as though absent, but take pains to discern itself as present. Nor let it take knowledge of itself as if it did not know itself, but let it distinguish itself from that which it knows to be another. For how will it take pains to obey that very precept which is given it, ‘know thyself’, if it knows not either what ‘know’ means or what ‘thyself’ means? But if it knows both, then it knows also itself. Since ‘know thyself’ is not so said to the mind as is ‘Know the cherubim and the seraphim’; for they are absent, and we believe concerning them, and according to that belief they are declared to be certain celestial powers. Nor yet again as it is said, Know the will of that man: for this it is not within our reach to perceive at all, either by sense or understanding, unless by corporeal signs actually set forth; and this in such a way that we rather believe than understand. Nor again as it is said to a man, Behold thy own face; which he can only do in a looking-glass. For even our own face itself is out of the reach of our own seeing it; because it is not there where our look can be directed. But when it is said to the mind, know thyself; then it knows itself by that very act by which it understands the word ‘thyself’; and this for no other reason than that it is present to itself. But if it does not understand what is said, then certainly it does not do as it is bid to do. And therefore it is bidden to do that thing which it does do, when it understands the very precept that bids it” (Augustine, 1887, X.9).

Then self-knowledge is the process by which I present myself to myself, bring my-

self to presence for myself, identify with myself (even as I differentiate myself from myself), take possession of myself as that which is proper to me (self-possession), whether as self-feeling or self-sensing, self-caring or self-killing, self-imagining or self-representing, self-conceptualizing or self-thinking. But if self-presence is the condition of the possibility of self-knowledge – in any philosophical discourse whatsoever, at least from the pre-Socratics to Husserl (just as presence is presupposed by any relation to self whatsoever, of any self-to-self, whatever that may be, whether ψυχή or *ego*, soul or subject, or some other understanding thereof) – it is easy enough to show its dependence upon non-presence, self-absence; or on the alternation or relation of presence and non-presence, presence-to-self and absence-therefrom, self and other. And yet, is there not another way in which one is neither self-present nor self-absent? This would be a self that neither speaks to itself, nor remains silent – but rather gives a sign, that is, implies what it can neither say nor not-say. Self-knowledge then, becomes a problem of how we are neither present to ourselves nor absent therefrom, but implied thereby – and so implicated therein. In other words, self-knowledge is far more self-implication – but is this still knowledge?

The Possibility of Self-Knowledge. In fact, Husserl ends the *Cartesian Meditations* with the following claim: „The Delphic motto, ‘know thyself’ has gained a new signification. Positive science is a science lost-in-the-world. One must lose the world by ἐποχή in order to regain it by universal self-examination. ‘Do not wish to go out’, says Augustine, ‘go back into yourself; truth dwells in inner man’ ” (Husserl, *Hu I*, §64).

In other words, phenomenology is not merely knowledge of the phenomenon of the self or self-phenomenology; it is universal self-examination. Indeed, for Husserl, the Delphic oracle’s call remains merely subjective – but phenomenology is science, the objective science of the subject. It is for this reason that the universality of phenomenology (like that of transcendental or critical philosophy) may begin *with* self-knowledge, but it cannot come *out* of it (Kant, 1990, B1).

But how can universal self-knowledge come *out* of subjective self-experience? As Husserl writes:

“*Adequacy and apodicticity* of evidence need *not* go hand in hand – perhaps this remark was made precisely with the case of transcendental self-experience in mind. In it the ego is originally accessible to itself. But at any particular time this experience offers only a core that is experienced with strict adequacy: namely the living self-presence, which the grammatical sense of the sentence, *ego cogito*, expresses” (Husserl, *Hu I*, §9).

So, if within the experience of self lies the possibility of both subjective-empirical and objective-transcendental self-knowledge, it is to the necessary adequacy of actual evidence that we must turn – for universal self-knowledge is only possible in the presentation of the self to itself. Indeed, with the experience of thinking and the “feeling of evidence” (Husserl, *Hu XVIII*, §49), the self presents itself as self-present – and it is for this reason that *ego cogito* is in the present tense. Thus self-knowledge comes out of self-presence; the ground of universal self-knowledge is the necessarily adequate experience of the universal-self (transcendental ego) in present time.

The decisive point – as Husserl notes in the eponymous section of the *Logical Investigations* – is this: the experience of self is actually lived, an *aktuelle Erlebnis*, because it is an immediate and apodeictic experience of primal givenness. In self-knowledge, the self does not just know itself; it has known itself – for its knowing is not just potential, but actual; not merely possible, but necessary. For the experience of self is that which continues to be necessarily given throughout any experience whatsoever. In other words, whether I adequately grasped myself or not, I have always adequately grasped that I am the one grasping; or, whether my knowledge of self actually corresponds to *who* I am, and *how* and *what* I am, it necessarily corresponds to the fact or state of affairs, *Sachverhalt*, *that* I am, existing *qua* knowing. The experience of self is an actual experience of self, and self-knowledge is the completely necessary actuality of knowing – that which Aristotle names ἐνεργεία, not just a movement toward self-knowing (Aristotle, 1957, 1048b18-34) – the experience of the presence of that which is given in any experience whatsoever, whether of knowledge or not. As Husserl writes: “Every experience generally (every really living one, so to speak) is ‘being present’ experience. It belongs to its essence that it can reflect upon the essence in which it is necessarily characterized as certain and present *being*” (Husserl, *Hu III*, §111). Thus the experience of the presence of self to itself, in the certainty of self-knowledge, is an experience of the necessary primal givenness of the self in the mode of being present, that is, experience as original knowledge of experience – for experience is always the experience of something, of the presence of some experience, just as what is meant always means something, whether it is understood or not; knowledge is always the knowledge of something, presentation always of what is present, expression always of something expressed, perception always of a perceived, adequately or not, a copy always of an original, a sign always of a referent, intentionality of an intended.

But how does the self come to presence in self-knowledge? In the experience of self that is actually lived? How can the self present itself as being primally given to itself?

Husserl is quite clear: if the grammatical sense of the *cogito* is in the present tense, that is, present time, it is because time is the form of any self, any intention or intentionality, any primal givenness; it is that which makes the structural unity of consciousness first possible, and so is constitutive for any kind self-knowledge whatsoever. Indeed, as the form of the self, temporality is the possibility of self-knowledge, that which constitutes experience by schematizing it in accordance with temporal determinations of past-retention, present-now-moment and future-protention. In other words, the self is present to itself, given to itself, presence-to-self, because it is in time, and continues to be so. And an atemporal or supra-temporal or non-temporal self (or self-knowledge), one of infinite or finite *duratio*, would still be temporal. As Heidegger writes: “the ‘atemporal’ and the ‘supratemporal’ are also ‘temporal’ with respect to their being; this not only by way of privation when compared to ‘temporal’ beings which are ‘in time,’ but in a positive...sense” (Heidegger, *GA2*, §5). In other words, the ground of the self is to be found in time as constitutive for the formal regularity of the flowing life of internal time-consciousness. And so temporality is that which necessarily makes the synthetic unity of

knowledge and self-knowledge, the noetic-noematic modes of givenness, first possible – as well as accounting for their compossibility or impossibility. For time is the universal-form, *Universalform*, of the genesis of every self; just as temporality is the universal-form of any kind of self-knowledge whatsoever (Husserl, *Hu I*, §§36, 37, 39).

But not just time, not just presence and the present – for Husserl must also explain the possibility of the persistence of the self, and the persisting ‘aspect’ of self-knowledge. And not only is knowledge always the knowing of something that comes to presence in the present, perception always the perception of the presence of something, or intuition the intuition of an intuited, *cogitatio* always of a *cogitatum*; there must be a knower (ego-pole) that continues to do so as an identical ego-substrate (*habitus*, *Charakter*) throughout all temporal changes, that is constituted as the continuous unity-of-identity of the ego as a concrete whole (Husserl, *Hu I*, §32). In other words, the self that knows itself must not only be and be one in time, it must continue to be so, preserve and conserve itself, even as it changes in relation to itself as known – for regardless of whether I am aware of it or not, in becoming known to myself, in varying my knowledge (from natural to empirically scientific or eidetic, or in any way whatsoever), I have “varied myself too” (Husserl, *Hu I*, §36). But the persisting or continuing or conserving, *Sich-erhalten*, of the self and its knowledge (Husserl, *Hu I*, §39) – this is precisely not a temporal determination, not a mode of time – it is rather far more the way in which I know myself at any time whatsoever, that which the linguists call ‘aspect’ (Comrie, 1976). For the difference between ‘I know myself’ and ‘I am knowing myself’ is not one of temporality, at least insofar as they are both in the present; nor simply one of mode or modality or mood, indicative-subjunctive-optative (Palmer, 2001) – it is an aspectual difference, or one of aspectuality, and so a matter of its completeness or incompleteness.

For Husserl then, phenomenology seeks to illuminate the possibility of self-knowledge as an eidetic science of a two-fold *a priori* form-system, temporal-aspectual: *ego cogito cogitatum* means that I am the one who knows myself, in the present and continuously. And if the self may know itself as it presents itself in every intuition, whether of itself or another, if it is necessarily implied by self-knowledge, by that which gives itself primordially to us, at least if we have any primordial data with regards to ourselves at all; then it is because the self is understood as a being constituted as continuously present. Insofar as I know, I must be present as knower; insofar as I think or mean, experience or intend, I am there as thinker or meaner, experiencer or intender. If consciousness is always consciousness of an object – not simply a physical object, but any object whatsoever, whether physical or mental, real or imaginary, possible or impossible – then “any perceiving consciousness has the peculiarity that it is consciousness of the *corporal self-presence of an individual Object*, which for its part, is either an individuum in the purely logical sense or a logico-categorical variant of such an individuum” (Husserl, *Hu III*, §39). Thus there is no *cogito sans cogitatum*, no consciousness that is not consciousness of something – and likewise, no *cogitatum sans cogito*, no deed without the continuous presence of a doer (Levinas, 1994, 76).

Self-knowledge then, for Husserl, is only possible on the basis of a self that show it-

self as continuously present to itself, temporally and aspectually. And if I do not somehow come to presence, it would obviously be impossible for me to know myself in anyway whatsoever – for that which ‘is not present’ (as philosophy has known from the time of Parmenides, or at least from the original understanding of being as presence) ‘is not.’ But for Husserl, self-knowledge is a possibility for us precisely because we necessarily come to presence in every experience – and so it is completely possible for us to turn our attention to ourselves, make ourselves the object of knowledge, or turn our experience of an object into an object of experience. Thus in giving ourselves to ourselves in self-knowing, we are merely uncovering or unfolding the way in which we have always already been given to ourselves, the primordial intuition of original self-giveness, the necessary absolute beginning that establishes the foundation upon which γνῶθι σαυτόν is first possible – and about this, Husserl has no doubt:

“But enough of topsy-turvy theories. No conceivable theory can mislead us *with regard to the principle of all principles*: that every originally given intuition is a source-of-authority for knowledge, that everything which presents itself to us in ‘intuition’ as original (as it were in its bodily actuality), is simply to be accepted as it presents itself, though only within the limits in which it then presents itself. We must see that the theory itself in its turn could only derive its truth from original givenness. Every statement which simply gives expression to such givenness by just explicating their meaning and adjusting it accurately is thus actually...an *absolute beginning*, a *principium* which is called in a genuine sense to provide a foundation” (Husserl, *Hu III*, §24).

The Impossibility of Self-Knowledge. And yet, it would certainly be misleading to claim that Husserl is merely a philosopher of presence, or that philosophy as a whole – or that which Heidegger understands as the history of philosophy as metaphysics, the onto-theological interpretation of being, *ousia*, *parousia*, as presence, *Anwesenheit* (Heidegger, *GA2*, §6) – is “always philosophy of presence” (Derrida, 1967, 70, 115), or that phenomenology is simply a philosophy of the present, or that it presupposes an understanding of being and truth as presence, or that the original givenness of the transcendental ego is always present, or that the possibility of phenomenological self-knowledge lies in that which presents itself, self-presence and presence-to-self (and if not, then not). For Husserl is just as much a philosopher of essential non-presence (which is not to say that the always somehow motivated deconstruction of phenomenology is invalid, incorrect, false or wrong); the phenomenological self and self-knowledge necessarily implies absence, absence-from-self and absence-of-knowledge – and phenomenology is always also “a thinking of non-presence” (Derrida, 1967, 70). Indeed, it is precisely out of non-presence that presence comes – and vice versa – just as the present comes out of the absent-past and goes off into the absent-future, just as self-knowledge comes out of ignorance, knowing out of not-knowing, perception of self out of non-perception, sameness out of otherness, truth out of the absence of truth, whether the false or the untruth, evidence out of non-evidence, continuity out of discontinuity, completeness out of incompleteness (and vice versa). As Husserl writes: “perception and non-perception continually go over into

one another” (Husserl, *Hu X*, §16) – and even the “now is not something *toto coelo* different from the not-now, but continually mediated thereby” (Husserl, *Hu X*, §16). So Derrida admits:

“One sees then very quickly that the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only insofar as it is *continuously composed* with a non-presence and non-perception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention). These non-perceptions are neither added to, nor do they *occasionally* accompany the actually perceived now; they indispensably and essentially participate in its possibility” (Derrida, 1967, 72).

Thus, in the blink-of-an-eye, an *Augenblick* or *clin d’œil*, Husserl (and the phenomenology of any possible presence and evidence) insists upon the necessity of “non-presence and non-evidence” (Derrida, 1967, 73).

But even further: not only does phenomenology argue for the possibility of non-presence for presence, of ignorance for knowledge, and non-self-knowledge for self-knowledge – or at least that non-presence and non-evidence and non-knowledge (i.e., negation, otherness) are possible – it shows that alterity necessarily conditions presence and absence, knowledge and ignorance, and so self-presence and self-absence, knowing and not-knowing thyself. In other words, presence does not simply come to presence because of absence, self-knowledge does not merely grow out of ignorance – for the difference between presence and absence conditions both: non-presence and otherness are intimately entwined with presence and identity, self-identity, self-identification, self-knowledge (Derrida, 1967, 74). And it is this difference that originally conditions knowledge and ignorance alike.

Is difference then, the difference between presence and absence, knowing thyself and not – is this difference the condition of the possibility of coming-to-presence and going-out-into-absence? Is otherness or alterity that which makes it possible for the self to present itself to itself in self-knowledge, before it goes out into absence? And so is phenomenology (and deconstruction) merely a kind of transcendental philosophy?

Derrida is quite clear: difference is not ‘the condition of the possibility’ of presence and knowledge (and so, self-knowledge)—it is only ‘the condition’ of presence (Derrida, 1967, 73, 92), the necessary condition of representation in general, perception and non-perception, evidence and non-evidence. Difference is constitutive for the truth and untruth of knowledge and ignorance, self-knowing and self-non-knowing: for the self, it is “the very condition of its self-presence” (Derrida, 1967, 77) – but it is not that which makes it possible. Or more precisely: it is the movement of the difference of presence and absence – or even further, the difference that conditions their difference, that which Derrida names *différance* (Derrida, 1967, 75, 92) – knowledge and ignorance, self-knowledge and non-self-knowledge, evidence and inevidence, that necessarily constitutes the very difference it introduces.

But then what about the possibility of knowledge and self-knowledge? Of self and presence-to-self?

Again Derrida is clear: any possibility of simple presence, knowledge or self-knowledge, has been radically destroyed or destructured, deconstituted or deconstructed.

But then what is the status of phenomenological self-knowledge? Of the presence (and absence), primordial evidence (and non-evidence) through which phenomenology thinks the necessary possibility of self-knowledge? The phenomenal experience of being present to oneself, the subject of one's own thoughts, speaking to oneself in inner-monologue, originally given to oneself?

For Derrida, all this is not possible, but far more impossible – and the response to its impossibility is the construction of a fiction, a “*fiction conceptuelle*” (Derrida, 1967; Haas, 2003) or a “*fiction théorique*” (Derrida, 1968). Indeed, phenomenology as a whole is a piece of theatre, *une scène*, a stage designed for the production of fictional experience and knowledge (and self-knowledge), and the constitution of “perfectly fictive meaning” (Derrida, 1967, 81). But if primordial evidence and phenomenological knowledge, presence and self-presence, nevertheless appear to be possible, necessarily come to presence, temporally and aspectually, and go out into absence – whether they, in fact, are or are not possible – it is because “their possibility is their impossibility” (Derrida, 1967, 113; Derrida, 1994; cf. Heidegger, *GA2*, §50). Or, the reality of phenomenology is its unreality, just as the presentation of its truth is a representation thereof. In other words, self-knowledge is – in truth – a fiction, no self-knowledge at all; it is impossible, that is, necessarily possible only as necessarily impossible.

And yet, if the possibility (and so too, therefore any Husserlian claim to the necessity) of presence and absence, knowledge and self-knowledge, is their impossibility; then is *im*-possibility not necessarily a negation or privation of possibility, the impossible *qua* other or opposite of the possible – and so not merely a form of possibility (just as atemporality or non-temporality, supra-temporality or eternity, is a kind of temporality) – but of necessity? In other words, is Derrida not simply thinking the Narcissistic other (like some kind of perverse twin, mirror-image, or inverted world, albeit *sans* Hegelian *Aufhebung* – of course) of Husserlian necessity, a necessity to which, perhaps, the history of philosophy as metaphysics has always tried to be true? And does deconstruction's impossible self-knowing (or the necessary impossibility of non-self-knowing) then, not belong to the necessary possibility of phenomenology's self-knowing? For if their possibility is necessarily their impossibility, and/or their impossibility their possibility – then *tertium non datur*.

The Problem of Self-Knowledge. Indeed self-knowledge is either possible (the possibility out of which comes what is necessary, or contingent, about the self and its knowledge), or it is impossible – and there is no third. Or is there?

A fragment from Heraclitus perhaps provides a hint: ὁ ἄναξ, οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει (DK22B93). Diels translates: “*Der Herr, der das Orakel in Delphi besitzt, sagt nichts und birgt nichts, sondern er deutet an*” (Diels 1903, 79). Kirk and Raven translate: “The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither speaks out nor conceals, but gives a sign” (Kirk and Raven 1957, 211).

So could it be that the call to “know thyself” is neither simply speaking nor hiding, but signing? And if so, then a sign of what? Is it a sign that self-knowledge is possible or

impossible, necessary or unnecessary – or something else?

Maybe Heidegger's translation will help: "The height, which is the place of the wise sage that is in Delphi, neither (only) reveals, nor (only) conceals, but gives signs" (Heidegger, *GA55*, §8). For here, λέγειν (not just speaking, but the letting-shine or letting-illuminate, making-open or manifesting of that which is present, being as presence, the unity of being and the being of unity which is gathered and held together, and so shows itself completely in the present, prior to the onto-henological objectification of possible knowledge or self-knowledge) is taken as the opposite of κρύπτειν – but both events are possible only on the ground of the giving of signs, signing or signifying (for σημαίνειν is a verb as well, and so has time and aspect). But that which is signed, for Heidegger, must be opposed to what is not-signed, *ein Nichtgezeigt* – at least insofar as signing means: uncovering something, allowing that which is non-present (whether hidden or secret, absent or unknown) to come to presence – for "the essence of the sign is revealing concealing" (Heidegger, *GA55*, §8). But a sign, insofar as it signs, either (1) indicates or points to that which is referenced, both reveals and conceals its referent, represents what it presents, brings to light and lets appear that which it is not, showing not itself, but another; or (2) lets the referent show itself in the phenomenon of self-showing, brings to light the phenomena of phenomenology, what shows itself in itself (Heidegger, *GA2*, §7). And for Heidegger, if the Delphic oracle gives a sign, the task of self-knowledge is to let it show itself, and so to let us show ourselves to ourselves.

And yet, if self-knowledge is a matter of signing or self-signing (understood as revealing and concealing the unity of our being, how we are and are one, temporally and aspectually; and not merely a question of the necessity or contingency, possibility or impossibility, of self-presence or self-absence) – are we any closer to understanding how the sign "know thyself" comes to signify? In other words, if every sign relates to something (refers or relates to, or indicates, a referent – and relates to the context within which it signifies; Heidegger, *GA2*, §17) – well then, how might we illuminate the relation out of which the necessity and possibility of signs (and the sign of self-knowledge) comes to be?

And here, we may have to pick up on a clue from Kant – not simply from his claim in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that the first duty of all duties is to "know (investigate, found) yourself," which is the descent-into-hell that paves the way to godliness (*AA VI*, 441) – but far more from the "The Clue to the Discovery of All Pure Concepts of the Understanding" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (§9): knowing (and so self-knowing, self-showing, self-signing) has three modes or modalities of relating (apodeictic, assertoric, problematic). In apodeictic knowledge, sign and referent, or concept and object, are related necessarily, judged and affirmed as *a priori*, expressing logical necessity; in assertoric knowledge, they are related as possible, and judged to be either true and real or false and unreal – but problematic knowledge is neither. Rather, as Kant writes: "one first judges something problematically, then maintains it as true assertorically, and finally affirms it as inseparably united with the understanding, that is, as necessary and apodeictic" (Kant, *KrV*, A76/B101). In other words, problematic knowledge is that out of which the possible and necessary come – for the problem is the origin of both.

If self-knowledge then, is originally problematic, before it takes the form of assertion or apodeiction, it is because it is a problem. The Delphic oracle gives a sign of the problem of knowing thyself. The sign can be neither spoken nor hidden, revealed nor concealed – for it is neither possible nor necessary, nor necessarily impossible, to do so – rather it is a problem that is signed problematically.

But what is so problematic about the problem of self-knowledge? And if the sign perhaps signifies that which is neither necessary nor possible (nor impossible) – well then, does it signify anything at all? Or is it far more a sign of that which is neither something nor nothing (nor anything and everything), that which signification can neither bring to presence nor leave in absence, that which can neither show itself nor not – and *tertium dador*?

In fact, the problem of self-knowledge, of the self and knowledge, of the sign and signification, that which is problematic therewith, is precisely its ‘way of being’ neither necessary nor possible, neither present nor absent, nor some combination or permutation thereof. Husserl calls this *implicite*, that which cannot be represented, nor show itself in itself, because it is never simply originally present, nor simply absent; and so a problem that cannot be experienced or reproduced because it is neither produced or experienced in the first place, that which cannot be reconstituted – or constitutive – because it fails to happen or be constituted (Husserl, *Hu X*, §25). The *implicit* is the problem that the sign implies, that is, the problem of implication, of *implicare*, and the implications thereof.

So what is the implicit? That which neither comes to presence, nor simply remains absent as a non-event (which is not to say that it is just a phantasy or fiction), but might still be implied.

And what is implication? That which is neither necessary nor possible (nor impossible), but rather – suspending both – is perhaps problematic, at least with regards to what is implied.

But then not only knowledge or the self or self-knowledge or signs thereof – indeed being itself would probably be just as problematic, and no longer merely subject to determinations of presence and absence, nor the onto-theology (or onto-henology) that dominates the history of philosophy as metaphysics. And this is perhaps why, in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says:

“ἐγὼ δέ, ὦ Φαῖδρε, ἄλλως μὲν τὰ τοιαῦτα χαρίεντα ἡγοῦμαι, λίαν δὲ δεινοῦ καὶ ἐπιπόνου καὶ οὐ πάνυ εὐτυχοῦς ἀνδρός, κατ’ ἄλλο μὲν οὐδέν, ὅτι δ’ αὐτῶ ἀνάγκη μετὰ τοῦτο τὸ τῶν Ἴπποκενταύρων εἶδος ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, καὶ αὐθις τὸ τῆς Χιμαίρας, καὶ ἐπιρρεῖ δὲ ὄχλος τοιοῦτων Γοργόνων καὶ Πηγάσων καὶ ἄλλων ἀμηγάνων πλήθη τε καὶ ἀτοπίαι τερατολόγων τινῶν φύσεων: αἷς εἴ τις ἀπιστῶν προσβιβᾷ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἕκαστον, ἅτε ἀγροίκῳ τινὶ σοφία χρώμενος, πολλῆς αὐτῶ σχολῆς δεήσει. ἐμοὶ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὰ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶ σχολή: τὸ δὲ αἴτιον, ὦ φίλε, τούτου τόδε. οὐ δύναμαί πω κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γνῶναι ἑμαυτόν: γελοῖον δὲ μοι φαίνεται τοῦτο ἔτι ἀγνοοῦντα τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν” (Plato, 1903, 229d-230a).

So Nehamas and Woodruff translate:

„Now, Phaedrus, such explanations [clever stories or traditional myths of abduction

and murder, or death in particular – but also irrational or non-rational or invented opinions regarding truth and being in general, and so too of knowledge and self-knowledge] are amusing enough, but they are a job for a man I cannot envy at all. He'd have to be far too ingenious and work too hard – mainly because after that he will have to go on and give a rational account of the form of the Hippocentaurs, and then of the Chimera; and a whole flood of Gorgons and Pegasuses and other monsters, in large numbers and absurd forms, will overwhelm him. Anyone who does not believe in them, who wants to explain them away and make them plausible by means of some sort of rough ingenuity, will need a great deal of time. But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that“ (Plato, 1997, 509-510).

And yet, Socrates does not say: “But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, *is* this.” For the verb ‘to be’ (being) is not present in the Greek – which is not to say that the translation is wrong – nor absent; rather it is implied, an implication, so problematic, which may not just be a problem for being, at least insofar as it has implications, and for γνῶθι σαυτόν as well. And linguistic implication (common enough in Greek, as in Russian – “Я Американец,” literally says, “I American,” but means, “I *am* American” – and many other languages, including English; Haas, 2014) is a sign of ontological (or more precisely, metaphysical) implication. For neither presence nor absence, neither substance nor attribute, neither form nor matter, neither a question of existence nor essence – nor any other determination proposed in the history of philosophy as metaphysics – being is an implication; being is implying; “to be” is “to imply” (Haas, 2007). And the way in which being is, is *qua* implicit – that is, in a way that is not just necessary or possible, but problematic.

Implication and Suspension. What then, is the problem with implication? With knowing oneself implicitly? Knowing that one is implied by oneself? And what is so problematic about implicative knowledge, and self-knowledge? With this knowledge of implication and self-implication?

First, the problem of implication, that out of which its possibility and impossibility, necessity and non-necessity come, is two-fold. On the one hand, *what* is being implied remains problematic. “Know thyself,” for example, can be an apodeiction of its necessity: like the *cogito*, if I know anything at all, or nothing whatsoever, or something in between, then I always already know myself as the one who knows; or self-knowledge is necessarily implied every time I know another – for even in knowing that I do not know, or cannot know, knowledge of myself is necessarily implied. Or it can be an assertion of its possibility, so although I do not know myself here and now, it remains a possibility that I can do so there and then, a potential to be actualized, not in the present (and so not present, except as a possibility) in some possible future, whether I do so or not, and whether my life is one worth living thereby, a good life, happy, *verum et bonum* or not. And even if it is impossible, “know thyself” can imply this impossibility, whether apodeictically or asser-

torically (at least if it may be possible that I cannot do so, or can) – so that the impossible is necessarily or possibly being implied. Or it can be a sign that something may be being implied, although we know not what – and that it may have nothing to do with knowledge or self-knowledge, nor with its necessity or possibility (or impossibility); but rather something completely different, like “you are a fool” because you do not know what it means to know oneself, or not; or “you are wasting your life” because the unexamined life is not worth living and you do not even know it; or “do not take up philosophy; do not think” because it is not to your taste and does not suit you and you (and we) may be better off, if you remain a farmer or carpenter, doctor or lawyer – or for some other reason; or “there is no philosophy outside of metaphysics, of the Greek tradition that stretches from the Delphic oracle to us” because even the non-metaphysical is metaphysical, even those who refuse self-knowledge know something about themselves; or “I love you” which is why I beg you to take up the examined life; or “I hate you” or simply “listen to me” or “here I am”; or nothing at all. So that the problem of *what* “know thyself” is implying – and whether we can or must resolve it – remains; or it seems to be a sign of something (or of nothing), but we do not know what of.

On the other hand, the *way* in which implications are, *how* they imply, is problematic. For *what* is being implied by “know thyself”, whatever it is, if it is only implied and so does not come to presence (nor remain absent) – this cannot possibly (or necessarily) present itself, whether as itself or another, at least if it is to be implied, an implication. Rather in seeking self-knowledge, I only imply myself to myself, implicating myself thereby as well: being the one who is supposed to know, to potentially or actually know myself, I do not come to myself, present myself to myself (although nor do I just remain absent and other from myself) – on the contrary, I am implied by myself. This means that self-presence (and self-absence) is as much of a fiction or translation as being-myself or being-another, at least as much as knowing (onself or another – or anything at all) and non-knowing, ignorance. And so self-knowledge (indeed, any knowledge whatsoever) is a kind of translation or transformation of a problematic way of implying into a possible (or necessary) one. Thus the call to “know thyself” is a call to extricate ourselves from the problem of implication, to solve or resolve it, to transform our way of being implied (and implicated) by ourselves (and words and deeds, thoughts and things) into the language of presence (and absence) in accordance with the categories of possibility and necessity, and to transform being itself (and every being) into something that is or can present itself, or not – but being means implying, to be is to imply, and being is an implication.

What then, is implied, and how so – this is the problem of the problem (of implication and self-knowledge), that which makes it problematic. But what is so problematic about the problem? About a way of implying, of being implied (and implicated) that implies neither the necessity or possibility (or impossibility) of knowledge and self-knowledge? That is neither present nor absent? That cannot simply be translated into a history of philosophy as a metaphysics of presence, and absence? And so about a sign (of being and knowing, whether of the self or not) that neither reveals nor conceals? A way of implying that suspends speaking and being silent, and all the usual philosophical sub-

terfuges?

In fact, the problem of the sign of implication is perhaps this suspension itself. A way of being that is neither present nor absent, possible nor necessary – this is how the sign of implication implies, and implicates itself thereby. For the task of self-knowledge (perhaps even of any kind of knowledge whatsoever) is suspension – suspension of the referent, knowledge, and of the self (and that may very well be what the Husserlian ἐποχή implies, and nothing like “bracketing”). Knowing neither whether it is possible (nor impossible) nor necessary to know myself, I imply myself to myself, so that *what* I am is an implication for myself; and *how* I am is implied, implicit to myself.

But then, does “know thyself” not imply “suspend thyself”? Or is self-knowledge not a sign of self-suspension? Of a self and a knowledge from which presence and absence are suspended? And so a loss of what is possible and necessary, in order to regain what? Ourselves *qua* problematic?

No wonder the Delphic oracle has caused so many problems.

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