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PHENOMENOLOGY OF IPSEITY

Summary

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	6
Typology of "ipseity" in the thesis	10
<i>1. Fundamental ideas of psychology of conscience</i>	12
1.1. Philosophical relevance of the psychological concept of science	12
1.1.1. Psychological paradigms of identity and significance.....	15
1.1.2. Perception of the self and mystery.....	16
1.2. Psychoanalytical approach of ipseity	23
1.3. Ipseity on the boundaries of (ab)normality	27
1.3.1. Pathology and sense of reality	28
1.3.2. Selfimage of schizophrenic personality in pluralist culture	30
1.3.3. Cultural dimension of mental alienation	32
1.3.4. Metaphysical reassessment of abnormality	33
1.3.5. Dialectic of alienation.....	40
<i>2. Philosophies of conscience in modern time</i>	43
2.1. Conceptual preliminaries of philosophies of rationality	43
2.1.1. Metaphysical priority of the substantiality of <i>hypokeimenon</i>	44
2.1.2. Difference of the subject and subjectivity.....	45
2.1.3. Metaphysical dimensions of the soul.....	48
2.1.4. Metaphysical nuances of spirituality.....	50
2.2. Sceptical assumptions of rationalism. Descartes' <i>Cogito</i>	52
2.2.1. Metaphysics of the sceptical conscience.....	53
2.2.2. Evidence of <i>cogito</i> inherited from scepticism.....	56
2.3. Developing conscience in the hegelian vision	58
2.4. Brentano's theory of intentionality	63
2.4.1. The scholastic origins of the concept of intentionality.....	63
2.4.2. Brentanian preliminaries of the phenomenologies of conscience.....	64
<i>3. Facets of identity</i>	67
3.1. Self identity in accordance with primordial existential qualities	67
3.2. Gilbert Ryle's conception of self - knowledge	71
3.3. Self-knowledge and the experience of the self	72
3.3.1. Antique model of self-knowledge.....	72
3.3.2. The issue of inner freedom of ipseity.....	76
3.4. Facets of ipseity and alterity in the context of identity	78
3.4.1. Historical approaches of alterity.....	79
3.4.2. Explicit approach of Nietzsche's alterity.....	81
3.4.3. Phenomenological assumptions of alterity.....	82
3.4.4. Phenomenological assumptions of the <i>Ego and the Alter ego</i> at Levinas.....	86
3.4.5. Derrida's criticism concerning Levinas' standpoint.....	91
3.4.6. Everyday dimensions of alterity	93

3.5. Dialogue- like aspect of I- you relation	100
3.5.1. Reflections upon G. Marcel’s personalism.....	100
3.5.2. Danger of the self’s reification at Bulber.....	101

4. Husserlian and heideggerian approaches of ipseity.....105

4.1. Husserlian and heideggerian aspects of self - comprehension.....105

4.2. Phenomenological basis of life- world.....108

4.2.1. Significance of life-world and the problem of self-knowledge..... 108

4.2.2. Self- comprehension within the world of the world.....110

4.2.3. Correlating “life” and “world” in transcendental egology.....114

4.3. Insufficiencies of solipsism.....117

4.3.1. Suspectable positions of solipsism.....118

4.3.2. Schopenhauer’s romantic solipsism.....119

4.3.3. Refularea aparenței solipsiste a egologiei husserliene.....121

4.4. Existential analytic of *Dasein*.....124

4.4.1. Transcendancy, ipseity and comprehension of the self from the point of view of *Dasein*.....125

4.4.2. Phenomenological conflict of *Dasein* and *subject*127

4.4.3. On the threshold of radical destruction. Facticity vs subjectivity.....129

4.4.4. Heideggerian concept of ipseity in perspective of *Dasein*132

4.4.5. Important modalities of the ipseity134

4.5. Heideggeriană reinterpretation of humanism.....137

4.5.1. Heideggerian criticism of traditional antropocentrism..... 139

4.5.2. „Closer” to the being.....142

4.5.3. Modalities of historical ipseity.....146

4.5.4. Planetary man, or the being that forgets its own ipseity151

4.6. Self – comprehension in the metaphysics of finitude.....156

4.6.1. Existence of *Dasein* in front of death159

4.6.2. Temporality and denial in Levinas’ view of finitude167

Conclusions.....171

Bibliography.....175

PHENOMENOLOGY OF IPSEITY

Summary

This research work - as it is revealed from the title - focuses on the different phenomenological aspects of ipseity as they occur in self-perception in the context of everyday existence, and, at the same time, as they have been debated throughout the history of western thinking. The paper takes as its starting point the assumption that ipseity means our way of being, that it simply constitutes our own identity, comprising its psychological and social, as well as its cultural and axiological aspects.

When outlining a phenomenology of ipseity, one has to take into consideration those ways of existence that define us, that define our identity, and which are, consequently, responsible for the way in which we exist. One of the main topics of our paper refers to the way in which ipseity is: can we talk about a „pure” ipseity in the transcendental, husserlian sense of the word, or is our reality a sum of the features / characteristic inherited by tradition and of the skills developed and formed throughout one’s life?

If we consider the majority of the points of view presented in the chapters of the paper, we can conclude that ipseity can be reduced to human nature free of predeterminations but obliged to choose itself in the context of the challenge of life’s facticity, its identity is defined by any choice that is made and cannot remain indifferent to external challenges. Thus, ipseity is not a transcendental abstraction but our simple individual reality, determined by psychological, social and cultural factors. However, due to the fact that it bears spiritual values, it is also susceptible to philosophical interpretations.

The subject of the paper cannot be reduced to the ”Phenomenology of ipseity” in the narrow sense of the word for two reasons. On the one hand, we could hardly speak about a phenomenology of ipseity in contemporary philosophy as a autonomous philosophical issue, on the other hand, we have to consider the fact that a briefing concerning the ipseity that practically defines our identity requires anthropological, ethical, sociological or psychological research.

Reesearch of the psychological and social components of human identity requires drawing up some studies charcterized by the particularity of scientific thinking, as well as reflection concerning the essence of the nature of human identity. When drawing up a possible phenomenology of ipseity, we encounter a methodological difficulty: the criticism concerning the nature of human identity, made throughout the history of philosophy, cannot be the exclusive and specific object of humanities or of some philosophical disciplines because the issue of the human can be found implicitly in every theoretical approach of the cognoscible individual. Consequently, it is possible to *conceive* a phenomenology of ipseity on the incomplete field of humanist thinking, in the context of which the object of knowledge is the individual capable of self-perception and self-knowledge at the highest possible theoretical level. Otherwise, without the competence of apprehension (the cognitive process through which human rationality is its own object and knows itself in an objective way) in the kantian sense, no phenomenology of ipseity is possible.

Given the complexity of human nature, we have to state from the very beginning that a phenomenology of ipseity - in the broad, authentic sense of the word - is impossible; on the one hand, the notion is used as a tehcnical term, on the other hand, it occurs as a general notion which means the totality of theoretical perspectives revealing a certain aspect of human nature, and which tackles (relates to) ipseity as to something offered by conscience and uses the descriptive method of phenomenology. However, the interpretation of personality diversity in the context of postmodernist culture, which encourages the emergence of the alienated personality with character disorder, suffering from axiological crisis and displaying "schizophrenia" in thinking and behaviour, is more difficult to make than in conservative, hierarchized cultures.

A possible phenomenology of ipseity has to face a paradoxical, epistemological situation: ipseity as the object of research is, in reality, nothing else but the ipseity that carries out the research. In this case, the object of research identifies itself with the conscience of the subject that carries out the research. This identification raises the issue / possibility of objectivity. Naturally, the conscience that researches human consciense itself confronts obvious epistemic limits. Yet, on the other hand, self-knowledge is within human nature, so one can speak about the innate need for tackling with human essence (see the conclusions of the fourth part of the paper, according to which self-accomplishment, defining one's identity, inner freedom depend on enquiries into the constitution of the soul); so, the phenomenology of ipseity is not just of academic interest, it is the existential, consciously assumed challenge of the individual who is able to reflect upon his own essence.

As in the centre of humanities is human nature itself and great philosophies are formulated in accordance with man's intellectual profile, an inquiry into the significance of man's intellectual enterprise is welcome. The main expressed purpose of this paper is to go through and assess the main approaches formulated throughout the history of philosophy, which deal with the theme of human essence, either implicitly or explicitly. This assessment does not have an end in itself but it aims at drawing up a comprehensive image of our identity, as it reveals itself in everyday life. Since the different philosophical and / or scientific standpoints, taken isolated one from the other, are insufficient to interpret human essence, within the individual chapters of the paper, besides the central concept presented in each, we also touch upon those problems acknowledged in the tradition of western thinking that are related to *subjectivity, subject, reason (rationality), identity*.

If we consider our own reality a given fact of conscience, the interpretation of the category of "ipseity" is made first of all from a phenomenological perspective, with numerous references to Husserl's and Heidegger's standpoints. We can only know what is offered directly (even with the help of psychoanalytical incursions) or indirectly (different forms of meditation, introspection) to our own conscience. Thus, the phenomenological method as well as the phenomenological principle, according to which we have to study the facts of conscience and not the theories and historical standpoints concerning things, take priority. In comparison, the anthropological, psychological or even the empirical aspects are of secondary importance.

The themes of the present discussion refer to the various concrete possibilities of understanding, perceiving human essence. In the context of the discussion, the following questions arise: to what extent and in what conditions does ipseity offer itself to apprehension within the direct experience? What do we actually apprehend of our nature and, what is that something else which still has to be studied if the sphere of ipseity does not include the whole existence? To what extent does our self-image formed in the course of perception match other people's opinions of us? What does reality look like from the point of view of the critical assessment of rationality, or what part does The Other play in understanding one's self? Can we speak about ipseity alone, free of any social or cultural determination?

In order to clarify all the above questions, it is necessary to give an interpretation that is more general than the ones met within the individual studies of sciences. The phenomenological point of view provides the possibility of a broader human approach of our ipseity as it appears under the form of a synthesis of concrete experience and of the ambitions

of theoretical reflections. In this context, a new question appears: what can we understand of ourselves, and what do we refer to when we speak about the self-perception of ipseity?

As our inner reality considered on its own is a pure abstraction that lacks concrete determinations, self-knowledge centres upon the determinations that are „exterior” to the self and also upon revealing the central core of our being viewed in the form of the self. *The Self* becomes the key concept of the paper, a sort of synonym for ipseity, respectively the quintessence of that part of our inner reality which can be grasped at the level of conscious thinking. Our inquiry starts from the hypothesis according to which the ipseity we know about and are conscious of is nothing else but that part of human nature which can be the object of rationality and is situated in front of the critical assessment of the conscience (unconscious tendencies are real and understood as they become conscious).

In conclusion, ipseity is reducible to the essence of the rational self which is capable of self-knowledge, and which - considering the aristotelian paradigm which states that all men have an innate wish for knowledge - can self-accomplish in and by the method of knowledge. In our view, the socio-cultural determinations mentioned above do not exclude and do not contradict the rational profile of the individual, whose prototype was established by thinkers like Descartes or Hegel. It is simply about different possible approaches to human nature.

Drawing up a phenomenology of ipseity is welcome in the context of postmodern culture, in which the relativization of values and the systematic deconstruction of the self have resulted in ”dislocating man from centre X” (see Vattimo’s and Baudrillard’s viewpoint) and in levelling social and cultural traditional authorities. All these have led to a relativized, problematic, maybe indefinable image of human identity, even to a real crisis of the self.

Having to deal with such a cultural background, it is necessary to go through the main psychological, respectively philosophical views in order to recover the sense (the epistemic authority, the ontological status as well as the metaphysical essence) of the self. Thus, the problem of ipseity is carried out mainly from a substantiationist perspective: meditating on the essence of man’s inner reality, we study the metaphysical substratum of this reality on which the effects of the socio-cultural processes are deposited. If we thoroughly reappraise ipseity understood as psychic reality that bears values, we see that this is irreducible to the egology of transcendental phenomenology represented by Husserl.

A comprehensive analysis of inner reality reveals the fact that ipseity is the amalgam of the empirical self / ego as well as of the transcendental husserlian self, and the two facets of our identity stand out depending on the nature of the perspective they are approached from: scientific or transcendental - phenomenological.

The thematising of the phenomenological facet of ipseity - in the classic sense of the word - as it is present in the husserlian and heideggerian writings, is essential but insufficient to solve the problem of human nature, synthesized in the kantian question „what is man?“. If we meditate on the essence of our nature, we can see that we have to deal with a complex reality, which is impossible to determine by using the classic definitions. In the background of the phenomenology of ipseity, one can encounter the conviction that it is impossible to explore the dimension of human individuality at the level of concepts (see the paradigm *individuum est ineffabile*).

Since we have reached the idea that ipseity is far more nuanced and subtle than the pure self, a result of transcendental reduction, we sense the need to interpret this self from the perspective of modern philosophy. Tackling ipseity from the perspective of *subjectivity, individuality, conscience, rationality, Dasein, pure self*, or even from that of the levinasian *the Other* and *alterity*, justifies the idea of heterogeneity of human nature, as well as the existential modalities of the concrete self, situated in concrete contexts. The synthetizing criticism of ipseity offers a piece of evidence for the interdisciplinary research of the individual's socio-cultural situation.

Having started from the necessity of tackling ipseity from the double perspective of the transcendental and the empirical, I divided the paper into four distinctive parts and segmented each part into chapters and smaller divisions of these.

The sequence of the four parts of the paper takes into consideration the two main facets of ipseity, that is, approaching it from the concrete (scientific) perspective, and also from the speculative (philosophical) one. Therefore, the first chapters deal with the psychic image of human nature, which will be completed in the following chapters with inquiries into the theme of identity, constituting the self in the social context, presenting the main standpoints of modernity concerning rationality, morality or values, and last but not the least, paraphrasing the husserlian and heideggerian phenomenological viewpoints, which has common ground with our theme.

On grounds of the above-mentioned considerations, the parts of the paper follow each other as it is presented below:

1. In the first part of the paper (Basic ideas of the psychology of conscience), the phenomenon of ipseity appears in a psychological context. The psychological presentation of the individual's fact of being is based on two considerations: on the one hand, our ipseity is

of psychic nature, on the other hand, when we speak about our inner reality, we refer to our psychic constitution, as to a first reality to give to direct self-experience.

Taking as its starting point the paradigm according to which all our knowledge about our ipseity goes through the filter of conscience, the core of this chapter focuses on the concept of "conscience" (chapter 1.1 presents a synthesis of the classic theories about conscience, developed by W. James, H. EY). In our view, conscience is the last frontier that limits the cognitive capacities of the self, that last mystery in and through which the intrinsic structure of the psyche is revealed to us, and so is the exterior reality interpreted and reflected at a psychic level. As a result of the philosophical analysis of the scientific notion of "conscience", we reached a conclusion of ontological importance: concerning the sphere of comprehension of the intellect, reality itself is subsidiary, only the world represented by conscience bears personal consequences. As a result, the world is given to us in and through conscience, and, as soon as the structure of our intellect determines the limits of the consciously assumed reality, we are very close to the problem of solipsism.

We mention briefly the fact that the approach of ipseity from a psychological perspective demands a functionalist approach of the term; under such circumstances the area of ipseity somehow is identified with the "field" of conscience, functioning simply in accordance with the laws of psychology. In the following part, we shall see that a functionalist approach of ipseity is insufficient, it involves the danger of estrangement of the self. Consequently, beginning with the following part of the paper, we will make use of the semantic resources of the substantialist viewpoint.

Besides the analysis of the psychological side (interior, personal, tackled in an objective way) of ipseity, I have also designed an inquiry regarding the nature of the data of conscience. With the help of the key concept "*qualia*", we have assumed a short incursion into the dimension of the data of conscience, a dimension inaccessible to empirical research (the term appears in the contemporary research of philosophy of mind, started by D. Dennett). As the phenomenological method is reduced to operating with data of conscience, leaving the concrete field of the sensorial, the nature of these mental contents becomes uncertain. After a short overview of the well-known contemporary conclusions, I have reached the conclusion that the data of conscience belong to the personal experiencing/living of ipseity, and they cannot be communicated; the utmost we can do is to communicate with the help of words, supposing that our interlocutor will have the same impression the respective concept left in us: the form of these data but not their content, which remains "captive" within the sphere of the strictly personal experiencing. At this point, we ascertain real equalities between the above

statements and the philosophical position of the Vienna Circle, which, under M. Schlick's leadership asserted the incommunicable nature of the impressions roused by concepts (especially the metaphysical, esthetic, religious categories).

The psychological interpretation of conscience as an inner, subjective reality, which offers our inner life temporary unity, coherence and continuity, led us to the conclusion of the subjectivity of ipseity.

But as not all actions of individuals are conscious, we dedicated a short chapter to the psychoanalytic dimension of the human psyche.

Beyond the horizon of the "normal" self (irrespective his degree of conscience) lies the field of the abnormal, of the pathologic, in one word that of the modality of being, which completely differs from that of common people, but it represents an important source of sense with a view to understanding the normality of ipseity. Analyzing the cultural-axiological relativity of normality, we have reached the conclusion that such statements are historically defined, without any importance in themselves. In conclusion, we cannot draw clear limits between normal and abnormal ipseity. (Abnormality is in fact a denied normality - see the viewpoint of psychiatrist C. Enăchescu), and in the background of diagnosing the self as pathological, we identify repressive tendencies, manifestations of power, as it appears in M. Foucault's vision). Metaphysical reassessment of normality refers to the axiological and psychological diversity of ipseity.

2. The second part of the paper entitled "*Philosophies of conscience in modern times*", offers an insight of modern metaphysical thinking, which, especially as a result of cartesian rationalism, approached human essence in a generally speculative way, with an optimistic stress on the gnoseological side of human reality. Considering first the interpretation of man in the antique terms of „*hypokeimenon*”, after the acceptance of the cartesian rationalism, man is no longer seen as a simple being among the others, but as a subject that knows is positioned in the middle of the world (see chapter 2.1.1). As the gnoseological status of human reality is once established, man is no longer a simple being among other beings, but as a knower subject, he practically constitutes the centre of the world. The fundamental notions of these chapters are: subject, subjectivism, cogito, conscience, rationality, spirit, intentionality.

Interpreting ipseity from the point of view of the metaphysical thesis of the subject proves to be the most adequate for the central purpose of the paper, that is to establish the essence of human nature, beyond the cultural and historical determinations. Otherwise, the

Cartesian, Kantian or Hegelian self is the primordial substance, which, as a "thinking thing", is responsible for the possibility of prime metaphysics, the self being the favourite object of this metaphysics. As a result, we face the gnoseological and metaphysical "destiny" of the self considered a substance: the self is, first of all, the "conscience of the world" in which all the happenings of the world are reflected, but it is also the bearer of rationality through which it gives itself as an object.

This second part of the paper does not constitute a phenomenology of ipseity in the strict sense of the term because it aims at offering an introduction in the history of metaphysical representations of ipseity. In fact, we cannot create satisfying self-knowledge without assessing historic views that refer to human nature. Paraphrasing the metaphysical standpoint of Descartes' thinking self, that of the Hegelian absolute spirit or that of intentionality in Brentano's conception. (the themes of chapters 2.2, 2.3, 2.4), reveals the primarily rational side of ipseity. Thus, the conclusion of the first part of the paper is justified: ipseity is of rational character, its at its core is discursive rationality. Man, mainly a knower, is the subject that is in the centre of the world perceived as an object, sees himself as a knower of the good, beautiful and of the truth.

The emphasis on the search for truth within Cartesian rationalism, ended with the „*cogito-sum*” formula, aims at drawing up the conceptual framework in which the Husserlian apodicticity is developed.

3. Together with the third part entitled "Facets of identity", we enter the area of contemporary thinking. In the chapters of this part, two independent spheres of themes are debated: the pertinent, widely - discussed and unsolved matter of the identity of the individual, and the problem of intersubjectivity.

Both approaches start from the idea of transculturality of the essence of ipseity, and can offer valuable clues for understanding the socio-cultural position of individuals.

Since we cannot speak about identity and consciously assumed intersubjective relationships without self-knowledge drawn up beforehand, the focus of this part of the paper is on the problem of self-knowledge. The presentation of the idea of self-knowledge starts with a short introduction to G. Ryle's standpoint concerning this topos, and it continues with discussions upon the antique ideal of self-knowledge, as it is present in the work of Socrates who synthesized the theories of thinkers before him about defining ipseity through a promotion of self-knowledge in his formula "know yourself". A systematically drawn up self-knowledge, continuously checked, free of prejudice, can lead to an ipseity that lives the

harmony of inner freedom. References to Aristotle, the stoics, and contemplative life become important in the ambition of inner accomplishment.

Approaching ipseity in the mirror of alterity and of the dialogue relationship of I – you, has a special place in the review of the paper. The approach of the theme of alterity begins with Baudrillard's and Guillaume's viewpoints according to which modernity is the process of losing the sense of alterity, gradual forgetting of the other, in favour of metaphysical egocentrism. Exposure of forgetting alterity (which is a segment of forgetting the being in the heideggerian vision) is strongly connected to the criticism of metaphysics, which starts with philosophising about Nietzsche's hammer and, then, continues until the deconstruction of the metaphysical subject undertaken by Derrida. For these reasons, we invoke the nietzschean standpoint concerning the exposure / concealment, the phenomenon of the anonymous in the consumer society, the degradation of individuality into the status of signs in a world of appearances, and the levinasian ethical phenomenology. Chapter 3.4 is dedicated exclusively to the intersubjective side of ipseity, a side that can be approached with the help of the following terms: the other, face, relation, enstrangement, ethical phenomenology, situated-in-the-openness-of relationship.

With the presentation of Levinas' ethical phenomenology, our research goes through a change of perspective: if in the metaphysical context of modern rationalism reality appears in a substantialist perspective, then, in the case of thematising the ethical profile, we have to deal with the relationist side of it. Whereas the metaphysician's ipseity was of substantialist nature, supposing an unchangeable individual identity, for which the other is either a simple object of knowledge or it represents the potential danger of enstrangement, for the thinkers who want to reestablish the ontological prestige of interpersonal relationships (E. Levinas, J. Derrida, G. Marcel, M. Buber), the category of ipseity is approachable only as a *relational aspect*. The self on its own, considered to be isolated, does not have existential autonomy. Only when the relationship with the other is established, the being that reveals itself as the other (Levinas' phenomenology is edifying in this sense), ipseity fulfils its ontological goal.

Iipseity is achieved and it identifies itself in and through the relation with the other. According to Levinas, this other can be the face of peers, as a projection of one's own values, or according to Buber, it can be God. Assuming a relation is not a common ethical gesture, which would depend on the free arbitrary, because man is a relational being, because the ontological status positions him in the way of a relation towards the other. The you, the other is inseparable from the I, the self. The openness of the self toward the Other is not ethically regulated, it transcends the sphere of norms because the fact of situating in the openness

belongs to the ontological nature of man as Derrida warns us. Missing this "openness" leads to reification of the self, to a fall of ipseity into impersonality according to Buber.

4. Only the last part of the paper entitled " *Husserlian and heideggerian thematising of ipseity*" debates upon the theme under discussion strictly in terms of the phenomenological tradition. The chapters of this part bring into discussion the main existentialist features of the pure self, of the Dasein: the possibility of understanding (with references to the famous paragraph from „Being and Time"), the overview of the concept of "life – world " (Habermas's standpoint is important here), trying the limits of solipsism (a philosophical category incomplete without sketching Schopenhauer's romantic solipsism), and, relatively defining in the case of the contemporary individual's self – comprehension, presentation of the problem of temporality and of the *Sein-zum-Tode* (the levinasian metaphysics of temporality plays an important part in the argumentation, practically ending the paper). It is easy to observe that not even this last part does not limit itself to "only" discussing Husserl's and Heidegger's positions. When presenting some widely accepted and acclaimed categories of contemporary thinking, e.g. life-world, death or solipsism, it was necessary to make references to great thinkers like Schopenhauer, Habermas or Levinas.

Husserlian egology could be considered late criticism of the metaphysics of *cogitatum* on the one hand, and of subjectivist idealism, on the other hand, which reduces the validity of reality to mental representation of things. We must admit that the pure, transcendental Self is the ontological nucleus of ipseity, the last sphere, which as a result of transcendental reduction is pure apodicticity, but, it seems to lead to an abstract meaningless, image of ipseity, despite the fact that it represents man's essence which is not influenced by time or history. For this reason, we are interested in transcendental egology only to the extent in which it manages to position the pure self in the empirical context of the existential fact of the "world" and "life" (see chapters 4.2.2, 4.2.3.) as well as it tries to deconstruct the idea that the world is only pure representation (chapter 4.3).

When we approach the existentialist phenomenology developed by the you Heidegger, we obtain the existentialist image of ipseity. If Husserl described the "pure" profile of an ipseity which reflects at its own phenomanality using only the data of conscience, then heideggerian phenomenology positions ipseity in the concrete context of

the ontic. We should not forget that Heidegger's approach aims to recover the sense of being, and can be considered a philosophy of ipseity only at a secondary level.

The interpretation of the essence of man in the category of the *Dasein*, as well as, in the late studies ("Letters on 'Humanism'", "What is metaphysics?"), through metaphors like "shepherd of being", "home of truth", sends the crisis of man's essence in the context of forgetting and of the technical domination. To be more correct, we can say that in Heidegger's case we cannot speak about the essence of ipseity any more. "Being and Time" presents a temporal but free individual, who, being in front of ineluctable death, can choose between an authentic and an inauthentic existence. Perhaps no other philosophy has managed to make so thoroughly clear the "open" nature of ipseity: man finds himself in front of existential challenges, having the possibility to choose himself. Heideggerian ipseity – in consensus with the paradigm of existence / option / choosing itself freely – is a being that is in front of existential alternatives, and defines its identity in the context of these alternatives, no matter what the quality of the choice is like.