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**Apology of Metaphysics
Or the Art of Conversion**

*Draft English Text – Proofreading of translation in
process*

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To all those I met throughout my life,
which ceaselessly incited me to reshuffle the cards.

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Introduction

Metaphysics, what for?

Metaphysics, so it seems, is an empty thing, according to an opinion which remains very common. For some, metaphysics is a mere hollow dream, pure and free speculation devoid of any substantiality, almost like a pseudo-religion. For others, it is a pretentious and factitious intervention of human reasoning, or again an inopportune irruption into the sacred domain. In any case, its reality is questioned, faced either with a materiality which stands for the unique criteria and the final outcome of any idea, or with a transcendence which arises to mortal eyes already fully loaded with compulsory metaphors, defended by a restrictive range of concepts, or again faced with an individuality for which 'thought' can be narrowed down to the restrictive subjectivity of the felt and of personal reasoning.

Let us ask ourselves, out of pure curiosity; how is it still possible today to defend metaphysics? This kind of free game, an exercise apparently devoid of purpose, a luxury inaccessible to the busy person, holds a huge advantage: before forcing us to exclaim "to the point!", it allows us to a meandering thought that dares think the unthinkable. This unthinkable demands to be thought, as the sole guarantee of our freedom to be. For, if a defense of metaphysics is still playable, this is where it will find its footing. Gratuitousness and distance will be the keywords of its pleading.

Metaphysics is primarily a passage to the infinite, a kind of projection of our thought onto the backdrop of its own eternity. Beyond time, space, matter, even beyond the causal chain; beyond a linear and studious logic; beyond a self, given as primary evidence; beyond any formula taking itself to be a password to a hereafter, hitherto conceived as a preserve. It is in fact this 'mise en abyme' of any solid attachment that provokes the terror inherent to metaphysics. But, we will be objected, how can the individual, with all his procession of mediocrities, of unconscious rationalities, of baseness, ever have access to such truths? Is it not completely ruled out to allow the mind to state anything universal when it is so easily lost in the vast stinking swamps that constitute the bedrock of its own articulations, those of an unconscious and unbridled

subjectivity, guided by fear, desire and a reductive egocentrism? For if the sewers are found below, one preferably lives on the upper floors. And when, out of necessity, we have to go down to the cesspool, it is neither about pulling out some pride, nor about claiming to bring back any kind of truth from it.

It is nevertheless in this direction, foundation or pothole, among the flashes of archaic thought, where we want to walk. And the nature of the chosen metaphor is important. One could be shocked by what we have just expressed, a sacrilege which, with a wave of one's magic wand, suddenly pulls out metaphysics from its starry heaven, to transform it into some kind of a backward Cinderella. How could this famous 'beyond' which takes itself for infinite ever find the means to evolve within such a restricted space, so devoid of any dignity? A morbid and shameless unconscious, if need be, but not metaphysics! Even the one for whom poor old metaphysics is mere hokum will veil his face and revolt against such incongruity.

Nevertheless, it is out of this chthonian fog that, children, we pulled out those ghosts populating darkness, that we use to invent games for ourselves, that we would metamorphose into knights and fairies, into princes and princesses; our imagination was running freely without us worrying about investigating, through some ingenious device, the fruits of our thoughts. But, while growing up, we've let ourselves be absorbed by what we commonly call reality. And slowly, this reality which was only a testing ground took precedence over any other mental function, severe censorship established itself, forbidding the play which consisted in letting the realities which constituted our mind, emerge from it, prohibiting with the same decree any freely determined thought. It therefore became necessary that a thought 'adheres to', but 'adheres to' what, if not to the determinism of the banal and the daily. No more ways to question; now only the evidence criteria matters, that famous common sense 'naturally' accessible to everyone which supposedly saves one from wandering about in the labyrinth of illusion and subjectivity.

In reaction to such an oppression, answers burst out, proposing to abandon this reality made of harassment and boredom, to return back to the paradise lost of a forgotten childhood. "Enough of this reality in whose name we

would be forced, we have our desires and we want to express them.” And out of these desires they made masters, since they did not want to question them. Others, dismayed, pretended that this reality was false, empty and malignant; somewhere else existed sacred writings which could at least show truth. These answers did not want to be questioned either. Others again, in reaction to the first ones, or from simple inertia, settled piteously in the world that was offered to them; “We will do our best”, they said, and they considered that such a perspective would save them from the excesses they had witnessed.

And hence metaphysics? *A priori*, it doesn't refuse any way, it is ready to see everything, to listen to everything, it lets any reality come to itself, it requires no entrance fees, but once an object is caught in its web, it keeps questioning it, putting it to the test. Relentlessly, it is interrogating. Taking side with the subject, it questions the object, and then it reverses the roles. Similarly, it organizes a debate between the whole and the part, unity and multiplicity, cause and effect, matter and idea, freedom and necessity, finite and infinite, singular and universal, and other nonsense. Nothing can stop it, it stops at nothing, or only for a brief moment, the time to breathe awhile, time to question itself, time to question the tools it has slowly and painfully forged. It does not deny testing, it simply refuses it to be erected as a mean of submission which, under the pretext of a truth requirement, would force its unfortunate victim to self-impose some prefabricated reality.

Metaphysics does not claim to capture alone the essence of reality. For this reason, all its senses remain alert, ready to bounce at the slightest alarm, at the slightest expression that could feed and erect it. Like Archimedes, it seeks a foothold and, for this purpose, any hypothesis is imaginable. If this hypothesis does not exist, then it should. Neither teeming imagination nor demanding reason are alien to it. It has nothing to defend, it is ready to barter anything, to shed all, for the slightest opening that will allow it to breathe better.

So, if metaphysics sometimes seems to alienate man from himself, to somewhat make him forget about his own wishes and necessities, one should rather not be surprised. For, this distancing, this remoteness, this passage to the infinite enjoined by metaphysics, very difficult to handle, sometimes causes a rupture, a complete ‘mise en abyme’

of one's being, a dive into the dark chasm of non-being, another restful nest where a complacent soul can be lost forever. But is this last posture not the mere risk of excess inherent to any perilous enterprise? Can we accept that the observation of these periodic outbursts be used as arguments, abusive arguments used again and again by those who, shivering, remain caulked at home, buttoned up in some greatcoat of thought?

That the human mind decenters itself from its own anchorage, alienates itself from its own formulations, that it abandons for a moment the oppositions and distinctions from which it makes its daily fodder, this is a measure which can only be salutary. That from this dizzying summit it contemplates the valley of its little world and that it perceives all its absurdity; that it recasts its articulations into disturbing generalities which ignore all the subtlety of nuances – since from afar they fade out – what could be more desirable? That it allows the images that appear from nowhere to resurface, and thus supports its outlook on the evanescence of an elusive horizon, to better tackle the rigorous and imposing reality of proximity, to confront the heaviness of evidence, what could be more essential! A frail skiff offering as only safeguard the simple joy of the journey. And that, as only usefulness, it questions the very idea of usefulness, what could be more useful!

Foundations

Being, Matter, Life and Thought

Horizon of Being

What is the foundation? Is there a foundation? Is it accessible to us? Eternal and legitimate questions. Condemned to walk, we must at least look at where we step, and find the safest way. It is useful to capture various disparate intuitions about this or that as they fly past, amusing, instructive, enlightening even, but an impression of confusion gradually sets in, which wearies us, upsets us, loses us. The chaotic display of the world in its parts, in its multiple infinite and inconsequent reflections, installs a feeling of helplessness and despair. Wherefrom shall arise this whatever once again, insignificant and inconsequent, lacking in continuity, which breaks daily life into an unpredictable series of grueling times? A pressing need to rest, either by vanishing into the void, by fleeing, or by an attempt at coherence, at unity, of the underlying hypotheses, as fragile as they may be, invades and presses upon us. A peace of the soul, at all cost; the longer one waits before eating, the more one's appetite becomes uncontrollable, before disappearing forever in the worst of pains, the cause of which one imperceptibly comes to ignore. Light imposes itself till we decide to go blind.

Therefore, let's now dig, as far as we can. Till the stone, but without illusion, for no stone is kept safe from erosion, from some earthquake, from any disaster which we could hardly foresee and which we could not prevent anyway. Let's go as far as possible into this humus, this silt, this gravelly soil which constitutes the very matter of our thought. Let's not dwell on mere trinket, on some remnant which we will unearth along the way; we have grown accustomed to the practice of such dilettantism. Like when we look for a word in an encyclopedia and, along the way, we are attracted to various entries, distractions which make us forget why we were there in the first place. Let's not fear to seek. It is scarcely to conceal or to bury ourselves that we penetrate into this unusual den, but it is to better establish the premises that lead us to conclude in one way or another, so as to go back to the source from which our many contradictions flow

out, without hoping for some ultimate and well-deserved rest.

And then comes a moment, one amongst many others, but one of those rare and particular moments that give its being and meaning to time. It interrupts the endless process of indiscriminate succession, and it forces us to choose, in order at least to mark it, this very moment, to mark it with an indelible stain, so as to make it irreversible. It forces us to gaze at the horizon and it asks us, as to 'sister Anne': "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anything coming?"

We will then answer, hesitantly, aware of the unfolding drama, since we know that soon we will come to know how all this is ephemeral. There are irreversible moments, defining ones, moments impossible to postpone for many reasons, but fortunately so, otherwise thought would not exist. Without these crossing-outs and ruptures which smear scripts with indelible scars, there would only remain the continuity of an eternal platitude.

For the time being, as far as I can think of, I thump upon against some discontinuities, some asperities: there is being, there is matter, there is life and there is thought. These are the irreducible elements short of which I cannot elaborate any reflection, without sliding infinitely, without skidding uncontrollably. The inescapable archetypes which organizes and structures the world in which I move, which rhythms the universe or reality in which I live and which lives in me. Everything else appears to me as derived from these four irreducible data which, for the mind, constitute a receding horizon or the tension of the ridgelines.

The Radicality of Being

With being arises the first distinction, a distinction without which nothing can exist nor even be thought of. A principle of identity. This is; this is what it is, not what it is not. If being was only one thing it would be a distinction, the subtle demarcation that allows alterity. Being distinguishes being from being. That which distinguishes one from the other, which allows the splitting or duplication that requires the identical. For without this doubling, how would we know that the identical is identical? It is necessary that the identical be different from something that resembles it. Otherwise, how to know that it is an identical one?

However, with being, nothing else asserts itself, if not the fact of emerging, of distinguishing itself. To be or not to be, here is the unique question. Should one talk about being more or being less? At this point, this question makes no sense. The 'more' and the 'less' imply a quantitative comparison, and to thus compare, we would have to intertwine, to interact, to proportion, in order for being to more or less manifests itself. When I am, I am, I am not this or that, neither more this nor more that; I am, period. Being, in the strictest sense, only affirms or refuses the presence, in a sort of all or nothing. Here the term 'presence' is used in a very minimalist or radical sense. One poses else one deletes. Nevertheless, presence, even if it is only a presence to the mind, still requires some kind of alterity. But we will discuss this difficulty at another time.

The essence, this act of being, is or is not. It knows of no other option.

In reality, the essence always remains, because it cannot be named without being already. At least under the minimal form of the possible. Certainly, it needs nothing more than being named to convene, to confirm or to affirm its being, but much less still satisfies it. Moreover, in truth, as bizarre as it seems, the essence does not even need to be in order to be. It is sufficient in itself. For, who or what could make it be? Nothing and no one. If we stare at the essence straight in the face, one can hardly think of it otherwise than as eternal: time becomes here meaningless. For if essences produce essences, why have the first essences not intervene earlier to generate the second? And if essences have been generated by material things, these

essences are no longer essences since they are necessarily composed of matter, they are generated by matter, or they would be a mere predicate. Logically, temporality cannot have any function here.

At this point, a modern reader can easily be disoriented and wonder what is the point of all these essence stories. For these intellectual constructions have little to do with reality as he formulates it, as he lives it. It should be added that, in general, specialists or enthusiasts concerned with such matters merely discuss them within their ancient formulation and context. They do not try to rethink the matter over by transposing it into our present context. Here mainly lies the problem of metaphysics. By meeting this kind of concept, our fellowmen are often embarrassed by the idea of eternal essences (especially the one which concerns their own person), essences planned from all eternity or generated by some mysterious principle. Questions are scrambling. By who? By what? How?, they ask. And if everything is known in advance, does this not put free will, so dear to our modern consciousness, at risk?

Let's not forget that these hypotheses result from an exertion of our mind, when it tries to articulate the world and reality through its own resources, when it tries to give the whole some architecture. It is confronted with entities, material ones for example, which can however not be considered as mere matter, but as a specific piece of matter, a kind of minimal quantum, determined and solid. And it is precisely this specificity and unity which the notion of being pretends to manifest. Because this piece of matter can never be reduced to the whole of which it is constituted. A piece of plastic is not mere plastic. It has a shape and a maybe a purpose, or a function, however undetermined. Furthermore, any conceivable object is both one and many, a finding that has fascinated many minds since the dawn of times. But our era is rather beguiled by multiplicity. It is not surprising that this unity which represents being embarrasses the contemporary thinker, the one of postmodernity as it often called. It goes in the same way as when the singular was embarrassing thinkers of another era, for whom only the universal or the absolute could represent adequately reality.

As for the problem of the eternity of being, it is mostly an issue about the non-origin of being; it means that the singularity of the material singular being cannot be

reduced nor be solely attributed to its materiality or to its extension. The sense of indetermination resulting from this observation is then transposed to the chronological mode, by denying the very temporality of this singularity. This feeling leads to think, among other things, that the singular being, as a being which did not wait after materialization to be, has been of all times. Thus, on the mode of spatiality, of extension, the essence is also a negation. For, generally speaking, being expresses the transcendence of unity against multiplicity, a multiplicity indispensable merely for spatiality. But this expression is merely a formulation, a representation, which one must see through to the best possible extent. In other words, the notion of the transcendence or of the eternity of being is a metaphor that helps to articulate the independence or unity of the subject against the multiplicity on which it depends. This allows us to think about the permanence of the subject or the object against its impermanence, to think of its independence on a background of dependence. This amounts to thinking about what is truly 'ours' against what can be alienated; thinking about the paradoxical reality imposed upon us with all the difficulties which we encounter while expressing this very reality.

Language and Poetry

There is an easy solution for who worries about such metaphysical perspectives, for the one struggling to grant credit to such apparently abstruse statements. To him we put forward the postulate that, in the end, everything is metaphor. To speak, to write, the choice of words, of expressions, always pertain to a certain way of expressing oneself. The concept of literature would imply no kind of reality; expressed thought would forever be a mere approximative re-description. Whatever one says, it expresses the poetic dimension of being, elusive and allusive, simply because words are not things, because syntax is the structure of nothing else than language. Certainly, we are in a quest for certainty, and certain formulations are more reassuring or meaningful than others. Though it would be abusive to consider pure abstractions as objective or realistic, whatever their nature may be. Indeed, these formulations can help us to understand the world and ourselves, they provide us with insights, help us to move or to transform things, but they are not the things they designate, as effective as language

may be. Not to hypostasize our words, there lies the real difficulty, but the trap is tempting.

We can hardly dispense with thinking about the indivisible subject, the unity of things and beings, or of phenomena, even composite ones. Divisibility, space and time, impose themselves upon us, they fall within a practical necessity: one must make sense of it all. Fortunately, our innumerable conceptual or scientific categories allow us not to go crazy, to organize and communicate. But that is not to say that we must fall into the easy way of granting all these imaginings some undeniable solidity, the trap of certainty.

Let's build, elaborate, analyze, speculate to death, but let's remain aware of the limitations of our articulations, in order to grasp their legitimacy. After all, this is the history of science, which continually adjusts, rethinks and rewrites its own formulas and formulations. Thinking is being able to identify, to review, to criticize and to problematize our own assumptions.

We can assign an epistemological value to the development of abstract painting, which still remains problematic for many viewers in our days. Like poetry, it takes a subjective side on the representations of the world, refusing the givens of evidence and common sense. Contrary to the popular view, the function of the name is probably to instigate disorder. The point is not anymore to evaluate the realism of those forms, it rather lies in the effectiveness to make us think the unthinkable, to review and rethink the anatomy and physiology of totality. Sensory and mental platitude is a very tempting option. By escaping the pathology of realism, the canon of representational art, we allow the diversity of representations, as fantasmatic as they may be. But one must learn to navigate there, for the limit becomes ever more elusive. How to distinguish pure wishful thinking from a spark of genius? Subjectivity gets its due while truth can very well loose its bearings.

In any case, truth is not a literal representation. How to postulate that the concept of universe can adequately represent the universe, whatever the phrase that encompasses the concept may be? What we call a 'term' is often something that we can hardly conceive, yet we call this a concept, that is to say that it allows us to conceive, to understand. Here, to conceive rather signifies to

imagine, to invent, even though such excesses help us to understand. A double problem arises: we bestow trust on our perceptions; we bestow trust on our words. If we combine this with our congenital anxiety, which generates our desires for certainty, the result is catastrophic: we believe in what we hear, we believe in what we say. Critical thinking and problematization are not often on the agenda. We make a great fuss about the act of naming: “this is called this or that, so I know what it’s all about”. We forget that names are personal rather than common: they are arbitrary to a large extent. Joseph is called Joseph because he has to be named somehow, as a knife is a knife because it is so. We forget however that a knife could be called otherwise, depending on the use that we make of it; for example we occasionally use it as a fork. We take our conventional codes for categorical obligations, we turn them into absolutes. It is useful to give credit to our perceptions, to our understanding, to our thought articulations, to our language, but let’s not forget the danger therein: every usefulness has a reductive and reductionist connotation. By accepting the arbitrary dimension of our representations, we come to recognize the function of subjectivity, we grant some share to the shimmering of multiplicity, and we open new perspectives to the mind. Perhaps metaphysics and the concept of being will then finally find favor in reluctant ears.

An objection is raised. What about the performative dimension of language? Is what we state valid only within the descriptive dimension of speech? When it comes to bringing about an action, does the metaphor disappear behind the expected ‘performance’? It seems that the problem remains the same: is the meaning of the enunciation contained and exhausted within the speaker’s intension? In the principle of language as a communication tool, it is the case. In fact, the purpose is to reach maximum transparency, optimal efficiency, as if the speaker had to manipulate and control his public as best as he could. But if we stick to language as an expression of primordial truth, there is no question of subjugating or limiting a content to any subjectivity or singular reduction. In this perspective, a content can never be subjected to territorial claims. The verbal gangue can only burst into a multiplicity of meanings, which intercross, oppose and overlap each other. How many formulations announce the opposite of what they state! Let’s simply look at common examples, like: “It’s fine!”, which often signifies that “it is

not fine at all". "Honestly", often means that "I will sweet-talk you". "Not at all!", often means "Absolutely!" On the one hand, one could not do away with equivocality, this ambiguity constitutive of being, of which the most appropriate image would be a kaleidoscope. On the other hand, without even admitting it to ourselves, language often serves to exorcise, to convince, or to comfort, so many motivations that lead us to hide obscure intentions behind some alleged clarity or sincerity. One only has to observe the strange and sometimes perverted motivations of those who want to teach us or inform us. So much so that we can very well ask ourselves to what extent does any linguistic consciousness operate in the act of speech.

Matter as Resistance

With matter arises a distinction within distinction, a new order of distinction distinguished from the first distinction expressed by being. This second distinction also knows its own radicality: in its excess of being, it refuses everything which it is not. Contrary to being, or much more than being, it can refuse, because with matter comes interaction, anything can act upon anything. It is power or potency, there lies its essence and its limit. For this reason, any form of simultaneity upsets matter. Everything that is material is opposed to all that is material. Among themselves, material objects repel, attack, undermine, squash, absorb or destroy each other. What 'is' does not oppose anything since what is, is, and needs nothing to be, since no relation is established. Although one can claim that identity rejects, as a theoretical principle, since an affirmation is a negation: A is not B. But in matter everything can practically act upon anything else at any moment and, for this very reason, everything threatens everything. Furthermore, when an entity is dependent upon another, this other threatens it. Mutual dependency is a threat. What is absolutely alien to us, by nature, necessarily leaves us indifferent. Without any minimal community there is no issue, hence no peril. When a difference is to be feared, it is because a similarity exists in the same proportion. If the material object in itself does not know feeling, since it ignores the emotional and sensitive, it knows impediment and destruction, physical changes as such, and it resists them according to the capacities of its own nature. Inertia, hardness and impermeability are but some examples of this resistance to alterity. A pebble does not prevent another pebble from being. But two pebbles may not materialize simultaneously: they will be separated by space, time, or some other parameter of materiality. It is probably because of this difference between being and materiality that, for some thinkers, being means nothing while, for others, materiality embodies decline or insignificance, nothing essential or substantial. Entities are not opposed within the imagination, either in God or in being: opposites are the criterion for what is tangible and rational, for what matter is or for what is real, as some may say. But perhaps the real is suffering from unreality or want.

Being is the archetype of matter, non-matter, non-material matter, the principle of matter. Without being there cannot be any matter or, rather, without being and its

unimultiplicity I cannot think matter, because without singularities matter would be senseless. Let's not forget that matter is a concept, which we have invented, which attempts to combine a number of features, deriving from our invention. What are the principles of matter? First of all, continuity: unlike 'beings', I do not say "the matters" but "matter". By saying "matter" I presuppose a kind of continuity or a quality common to everything material. This quality cannot be material, else it would be separable from matter by leaving behind some non-material matter which would pretend to be material, something that is impossible. This leads us to a first epistemological consideration: the principle of any entity cannot be of the same order as the entity itself. This is what we will call transcendence: a reality legislating an underlying order, an underlying order which allows the principle to be manifested. The point here is not to hierarchize – let's keep safe from this terrible and endemic virus –, but to articulate the specificity of every mode, of each entity. Thus, the transcendent does not fully determine what it transcends, since what it transcends is solely the principle of the transcended, which is not enough to substantiate this transcended. In this way, the throw of a ball does not fully determine its fate: the accidental constitutes space and time. Certainly, a kind of nature or substance is given to the animal at birth, but it does not fully determine it. Contingencies equally determine its existence. One must distinguish here between the condition and the cause: the first one is merely necessary while the second is in addition sufficient. *A priori*, the principle indicates the theoretical, while reality is practical and *a posteriori*: a quasi nothing is enough to modify the situation.

Thus, the principle of the material, which by definition is derived from our system, lacks materiality. Mater is not material but it provides materiality. It generates what it is not, even being generous with it. It finds its specificity there, without which it would be reducible to being, a dangerous perspective.

This raises a question. Since the idea of the relation of transcendence seems to be articulated at the heart of our system, let's wonder if what is transcending is more real, or less, than what it transcends. This is a mere hokum. This question makes no sense, because if transcendence is the dynamic of our system, it cannot be conceived without a transcending and a transcended. In this sense, one can hardly speak of any single primacy, but of a double

primacy: transcendent/transcended, or principle and manifestation, without which there can be no transcendence. In other words, transcendent and transcended condition each other, and this, in the end, allows one to assert that there actually is a double transcendence, or a reflexive transcendence. This should calm fears and appease those for whom the mere evocation of transcendence signifies in fact the dissolution of their existence and everything else into some almighty and divine principle. But, above all, let's not forget that, when we talk, when we think, everything which we postulate is postulated within our mind, which implies nothing objective, even if I postulate the coherence of my thought and of the world which surrounds me. All this is only a game, an attempt, a speculation which is almost totally free.

Distinction and Indistinction

So, the first distinction, since the principle of distinction seems to determine this work, is the one which distinguishes being and matter, even if one recognizes that being – quite solipsistic – is already distinguished from itself. We will later see the application of this principle to distinguish matter from life and life from thinking and, of course, looping the loop, we will have to distinguish thinking from being. But for now, let's see how being differs from matter, or metaphysics from physics. Materially, this glass A is not that glass B. For glass A to be there, glass B necessarily must not be there. In other words, glass A excludes glass B. It is not quite the same for being. Although, from the perspective of being, A and B can be distinguished, within being they do not necessarily stand out, since being also operates in simultaneity: a glass is a glass. Matter distinguishes, as does being, but the principle of matter is a continuity, a contiguity, an extension, a principle which differs from the characteristic simultaneity of being, a distinction without which there would be neither matter nor being.

The distinction of being allows to distinguish, but it is indistinct itself. Within being, A and B can possibly be distinguished, but nothing distinguishes them yet: both are letters. They are only one within this very possibility. And it is through this community that they can be distinguished. Without community, there is no possibility

of distinction; without alterity we are deprived of being. For example, this community is their glass nature, a nature which will never be materialized in itself. But thanks to this nature, one can distinguish them as glass A and glass B. What matters is then to know if for the ones or the others this distinction has any reality, or if the glass nature, like any community or concept, is merely a mental construct. As for us, we will answer that since the beginning of this reflection, by convention or by definition, when we think, it is only a matter of mental constructions, and it is unclear what could qualitatively distinguish this construction from another one. Neither what would make us move forward more in the fact that such a system corresponds to 'reality' whereas the other corresponds to a simple categorization of the mind. It is not by referring to some objectivity of matter as an alibi that it will prevent the notion of matter from being only a concept, and nothing else. The crucial point is to deepen the functioning and usefulness of a concept, whatever it is, without ideological prejudice or rigid philosophical bias.

Failing to attribute it any substantial or hypostatic reality, such a conception of being has at least the advantage of serving as a safeguard: without it everything would be absolutely different from everything, and the scientific method, which requires the knowledge of things to be organized into orders of reality, that is to say by community and repetitiveness, would be made obsolete. There would be no more laws but only broken down singularities. If we had to baptize every glass we know with a specific name and prohibit *de facto* the generic word 'glass', since this word would not have any reality in itself – to the extent where reality would be confined to the sensible and its infinite and indeterminate multiplicity –, we would be much embarrassed. As for saying that the word glass is mere formalism, pure construction, the same thing can be said without being bothered of A and B, of just about any name: the words 'glass' or 'A' and 'B' are in the same boat: they are only names, only their necessity for our mind is real. By what arbitrary choice would material necessities be the exclusive bearers of substantiality?

If we think about it, being, taken in its general meaning, just as matter, life or thought, is not something which we are going to define, or reduce to something else, but a mere unavoidable thought operator. Being is a condition of thought and matter, irreducible to anything

else than itself. It is neither material nor spiritual. This notion simply means that nothing can be neither thought nor materialized, without there being a form or another of community between everything that is thought or materialized. Being is necessary both because it is general and specific, because it is absolute and relative. There lies its essence, its identity. As such, it is a condition of thought, matter and life.

The quest for a ‘universal community’, for a ‘common link’, sometimes far from obvious, is the very dynamic of a knowledge or a science which does not want solely to collect and accumulate data on the world. The notion of being is a dynamic, a pressure, an instigator, which requires the mind to test every thought against every other one, every concept against every other concept, every logic against any other logic, even if it constantly stumbles upon barriers and various hiatus which prevent any universally coherent proposition to be expressed. In this way, being is an infinite possibility, an infinite power and thus an ungraspable term; whether under the shifting form of a dynamic power or that of a transcendence frozen in its eternity. It is for this reason that such a distant and powerful notion has always inspired respect and a sense of the sacred; as much as violent rejection, right or wrong.

Reality of Thought

Although being is an irreducible concept, a kind of absolute or limit, this object of thought must not be hypostasized nor become a kind of all-powerful figure, nor should life or matter or the mind be hypostasized, deified or reified. Thus stands out the practice of the philosopher, whose material is exclusively a production of the mind, and nothing else, in spite of his diverse inspirations. Here lies the importance of addressing such concepts in view of their necessity for the mind. This is dialectics, not catechism, metaphysics, not ontology. For these reasons, we must never forget that whatever we are thinking of, these are mere formulations, even if these formulations try to express necessities imposed upon us, internal necessities that in this sense we did not choose. Often, without realizing it, some have decided to turn matter into a God or some other form of absolute, the sole foundation of reality, while others, for the same purpose, will chose being, thought or life. As for us, we choose to let ourselves

be constantly jostled by each of these concepts while trying not to get carried away in the turmoil, even if these concepts are suggested at the outset of our work as the most intimate foundation of our reflection. Let's say that what has been the culmination of our reflections till today does not mandatorily constitute, even for us at the present moment, neither the eternal panacea of a faltering thought, nor some guarantee of certainty. This is a mere attempt at articulating some coherence or sense in our existence.

The reader might be troubled to see that, as this work progresses, the distinctions between thought and reality, as common sense distinguishes when it opposes "it's only an idea" to "it's a fact" or "this is tangible reality", fade out. For, in what we propose as a scheme, it is argued that whatever man thinks is by definition an idea or a representation, an image. That the various circumstances which provoked these schemes differ in nature seems to be a reasonable proposition, but to claim that these representations emanate out of another source than our own mind seems, at once, a sheer mistake, even though one can attest to 'external' influences. To substantiate this position, one must only observe how everyone perceives differently a similar sensible reality or a same concept, what everyone notices of totally identical situations: great differences separate the comments. The reason is simple: the reality that we perceive might be external to our mind, but what we perceive can only be limited by what our mind can and want to perceive, including in this limitative process the determined intrinsic possibilities of our sensory and mental apparatus.

A quite relevant question could however be asked at this point in the discussion: can we trust in these constructions of the mind, or should we be wary of them? Neither one nor the other. Do we trust a hammer? Or are we wary of it? A hammer has its uses and limitations. While the opportunity of what can be accomplished with this tool obviously depends on its hammer nature, it also largely depends on the decisions and capacities of the user. The difference with the human mind is that the user and the instrument are identical. This situation creates the following paradox: is the instrument determining the user or is it the user which determines the instrument? The limitations of the mind, are they pertaining to the user or to the instrument? To answer that the two propositions are equivalent is an escape, since these two realities are somewhat distinct within us. Does our 'will' transform our

own nature? Does our 'acceptance faculty' seek to temper our 'will'? The two modes are not identical, neither on the psychological level nor on the philosophical one. In fact, they articulate what we call the double perspective.

This means that any individual mind is characterized by its own nature, like any body, with its constitution, its imperfection, its particular structure, its uglinesses and its diseases. It is what it is, both by what is intrinsic to it, by what can be easily modified, by what can be changed more slowly, by its anchor and by its relations. As with every human being, there is no need to decide *a priori* whether to trust or to be suspicious; one must let things come, see, discuss, confront and observe, without being naive or distrusting. However, if there was a choice to be made, naivety would doubtless be the less dangerous option. For, even with its pathologies, the mind teaches us something, if one knows how to observe, and, of course, insofar as we know how to keep a minimum of distance from ourselves. Without such distance, the infection becomes too quickly contagious for us to learn anything substantial from our mind.

Fragility and Power of the Living

We now turn to our third archetype: life. As for being and matter, this entity is to be discerned through its relationships, by analyzing what distinguishes it from the two others. Compared to matter, life seems to singularize even more. The living being is much more singular than some bit of matter. Its outlines, what separates it from what it is not, its integrity, everything that differentiates it from its surroundings is better established. In the same way, or for the same reasons, the unity of the parts of a living being turns out to be better integrated than the parts of a material object. This is probably why we speak of living beings and not of material beings. All the inner flows which characterize the living being are involved in this integration. An integration which is accelerating throughout biological evolution. From protozoans to mammals, these features are constantly accentuated; up to the mind which will amplify this integration and individualization process.

With this individuation occur several other features: dynamic, fragility, finiteness, begetting, which is quite coherent. The unity of a living being presupposes a high

degree of interactions from its constituent parts, a unity which can easily get lost, thus the living cares much about its self-preservation. On the other hand, the unity of the being is a given, since being is a unity devoid of parts; for the same reason, because of this total lack of interaction, this lack of power to act, singular beings do not act upon each other. In the case of the unity manifested within matter, for living beings, unity is the result of an act which constitutes and maintains it. In fact, life differs from strict matter by its infinitely more dynamic aspect. The transformation of the living and the transformation effectuated by the living on its surroundings are proportionally more intense than those caused by inorganic matter. One could also say that matter is alive, since it transforms itself, interacts and even comes to generate life, but it should be specified that matter as such is infinitely less alive than the living. Its life is much slower and thus less fragile. Can we still talk about life then?

Every dynamic implies some imbalance, an asymmetry, a tendency, a subjectivity, an instability, and this quality, in a certain way, threatens the living being more than the material object. Compared with the material object, the living being is more unstable, perishable and precarious as a structure, that is to say in its materiality, but it is nevertheless more resilient and powerful as a dynamic. This apparent paradox can be explained as follows. A man is materially less solid than a wall. But a man can demolish a wall. He will not demolish it by throwing himself upon it – he would break his bones –, but by attacking the unity of the wall: by hitting it piece by piece, or by using a more powerful or more solid entity than the wall: an instrument. He will not attack the wall, but what makes a wall a wall, the linkage of the wall, its unity, thus reducing the wall to pieces of wall, pieces that are easier to handle. In the same way, a fragile creeping plant and even a bacteria could also destroy the wall, even if in the absolute the wall could crush them. Because its nature is more singular, a living being partakes more to being than a material object, and it is at the level of unity, that of being, that it finds its strength and its mean of action.

The finiteness of the living, as well as its ability to reproduce, partake of the same quality. The living is in fact a hybrid crossing matter with being. By the fragility of its singularity and its capacity to act, the living being will

produce another himself, if not many others, so as to extend his own being. This is what we call reproduction. A solution specific to the living, with the intimate relation to alterity that such a solution implies. To reproduce oneself amounts to being through the other. This notion of being through the other might bother us, because the other is not me and vice versa, but maybe now is the right moment to question the very notion of identity, tested by the living, which finds its identity outside of himself. Life is a challenge to the principle of identity.

Singularity of the Mind

Now we come to the mind, or to thought - we here establish a sort of equivalence - which is also a hybrid, between the living and the being. The mind partakes of unity, even more than matter and life: it is singularity par excellence. The mind can not only grasp many objects at once, it can not only assimilate everything it meets, but it can apprehend the whole universe as a single concept. Therefore, the integrity of the mind is even more threatened than that of the living. The more it assimilates, the more it can become what it has assimilated. Just as the living being somewhat becomes what it consumes – it can even be poisoned and die – the mind becomes what it learns, it can thus alienate itself in a more dramatic manner than life. One of the first consequences of such a nature is the ability to live the moment, or even eternity, the suspension of time, so to say. Either by interrupting the sequence, either by accelerating it infinitely, and either again by taking hold of it in its limit and exteriority. In the same manner, the mind can transcend space or materiality, and in this it closes the loop and rejoins being; like the latter, it has access to the unity which transcends all distinction, the private unity of all single part.

The mind can reach being in its timelessness, an inaccessible phenomenon to the material entity or to the living being in themselves. And what applies for temporality applies for all type of continuity. In other words, the mind is what has access to the infinite, and it is this infinite, the order of another order, which characterizes it in more particular manner. In this way, the mind is even more singular than the living being, since its unity must be even more powerful against the wider multiplicity it must face. The degree of interaction

between its parts, between itself and what it is not, is much more consistent than in the living being. But because of this, as an entity, it puts itself at risk even more easily than the living being, a living being which we had found already more fragile than the material object. In other words, the identity of the mind is even less static and more dynamic.

Taking our analysis a bit further, we wonder if within the mind itself, this kind of progression between concepts, this series of relations, of quasi mathematical cardinals, continues in the same way. Does the combination being/material object/living being/thought continue within the mind? Within intelligence, is there a similar intrinsic relationship? We can offer an analogy: it looks like the relation between discursive thought and intuitive thought, between the 'reason of reason' and the 'reason of the heart'. Is it not what religions aimed at in their distinction between mind and soul? The mind is what analyses and reflects, the soul is what desires and fears: the mind is flexible, the soul is whole; the mind calculates, the soul gives itself; the mind is multifaceted, the soul is one; the mind distances itself, the soul is immediate; the mind is attached to the body and the world, the soul is the citadel of being within the mind. Thus, intuition engages the totality of the individual thought, it reveals its state, its state of mind, and it is passion, while discursive thought unfolds partially and cautiously, it is cold and sharp. The mind is artefact, science, whereas the soul is the very nature of the subject. In a man, should we judge the soul or the mind, or the tension between the two? It is on the treatment of this question that lies the true problematic, the one that underlies our worldview, including the view of ourselves.

Our mind is a reality in itself and, in terms of the real, we do not have to oppose thought to material reality any more than we have to oppose the material or the living to reality. Yet, these oppositions which often ignore each other, one or the other, depending on their temperament or on their inclinations, will feel compelled to practice them, indulge in them, by some kind of pure subjectivity often ingoring itself. There simply exist different orders of reality, and this particular arrangement structures reality, it draws the articulations and determines frictions, just as flesh and bones structure the human body in its coherence and its differences; the flesh is neither more nor less real than the bones, or vice versa. It would be like comparing

vowels and consonants. The outlook of the individual is part of reality, it constitutes it, even if reality is not limited to this view. It would be absurd to oppose a reality in itself, external and objective, to a reality entirely determined from within, purely subjective. But it is, alas, what is often being done, not least in the very grotesque contrast drawn between the scientist and the artist.

Subject and Object

The ancients, who had few technical means, were more easily drawn to use their own mind as an experimental laboratory. They took themselves as models, analyzed their own thought and being, and speculated on the intrinsic nature of things. Obviously, subjectivism was a danger, that of metaphysical overflowing, despite the guardrail and the benefit of rigor in such an introspective practice of thought. Today, where our eyes and ears are extended by very sophisticated means which allow us to immerse our gaze in ever more unimaginable places, our gaze, fascinated by its discoveries, is far more inclined towards externality and becomes more dependent on perceptions.

However, two phenomena are noteworthy. First, the more technical devices are sophisticated, the more they require that the analysis be superposed to observation and thus the more analysis becomes a significant part of observation; accordingly, the computer data which are used to convey or restore information require a greater part of subjectivity than direct contact with the sensory apparatus, if only because this information technology is a language in itself, with all the particularism and subjectivity of language, and the risk inherent in interpretation. Second, since several years, a kind of cultural rejection of technology has emerged which, in reaction to a growing 'objectification' of reality and of being, proposes schemes where precedence is given above all to imagination and sensitivity, with the serious risks inherent in a headlong rush into arbitrariness and the felt.

So what is the nature of the exercise proposed here? In a way, we return to the technique practiced by the elders: trying to develop for ourselves a 'worldview' from our mind and the data assimilated on this world. But this 'view' should not be a mere list of things or of precept codes, it must be the articulation of what is central to our

mind, a sort of hinge around which operates our thinking: a naked architecture consisting in the weaving of its founding hypothesis. This is what we call a foundation, even if this foundation is in fact bottomless. It even seems to float in the air. However, what differs from the practice of the elders in the present exercise – although some of them have had the deep intuition of this aspect – is that we shall have this view play a rather critical role, instead of concocting some kind of unquestionable absolute out of it. Metaphysics is then no more conceived of as some established back-world, but as a dynamic, as a dialectic, which plays with everything, that plays everything, including itself.

Let us clarify, for a moment, the problematic of foundation. When I think about an apple, does this thought have a foundation? I can suggest the idea that this apple did not fully emerge out of my mind, unless I enter into a system of radical subjectivism where I would pretend to have invented the entire world, including myself. We will leave this hypothesis aside although it has something amusing in it. In other words, there is a certain reality outside my mind, which escapes and transcends it, a specific reality which I conventionally call ‘apple’, an entity to which I attribute a number of predicates. However, I must admit that whatever my mind can perceive of this apple is but a representation, the apple itself will never be inside of me. I could also use this last argument to conclude that the apple will always be foreign to me, and stop there. Or I could use this very interesting situation to play a game: the game of foundation.

The foundation game consists in taking whatever data arises around this apple, to accept it *a priori*, and to try to play together this multiple information in order to reconstruct the nature of the apple and to rebuild the nature of the tool which I use to understand the apple. Since I am starting from the principle that I did not invent the apple, but that I can only grasp it through my subjectivity, I conclude that whatever I will have in mind will always be the interweaving of the apple and of my mind. The whole game is to try, as best as I can, to sort out this interweaving in order to simultaneously understand the apple and my mind. For example, imagine that the only apples I know are red and ripe. Every apple will necessarily have a color, a form and a given shape, a given taste. But one day, by chance, I find a small fruit, all green, tiny, acid in taste: I will have little reasons to call it

an apple, except for a vague resemblance in shape. It will be the same for an old rotten apple that I shall never dare to taste. In order for me to equally call apple these two 'apples' which differ from my idea of apple, I will have to learn or invent a certain set of new characteristics regarding apples, and especially, thanks to study and reflection, I will have to understand the genesis of an apple, from its birth to its destruction. Henceforth, what could not previously be an apple in my eyes now becomes an apple; this moment could in fact be called a dialectical moment: the moment where a glimmer of light arises in me, because a certainty has just been short-circuited, an opposition has fallen, a link has been established, a process is born in my mind.

During the experience just described, I simultaneously discovered the reality of the apple and the one of my mind. The genesis of the apple echoed the genesis of my mind, and *vice versa*. At that point I hold the undeniable proof of the correlation between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Indeed, by discovering this little green fruit, I discover a new kind of objects, which in itself teaches me nothing on my mind, nor anything on the subject itself, on its nature. But by establishing the link with what I call an apple, by establishing relations, I discover the nature of this new object and of the apple, while I also discover the nature of my mind through the experience of an inner process. In this way, it is no more about knowing, but about recognizing; by this we want to say that true knowledge is in fact a recognition, some would say a reminiscence. To recognize is to identify, that is to say to link something with something else: this is what we do when we give a name to a face, not a new name invented for a newcomer, still unknown – this would amount to baptism – but a name which already contains a certain amount of attributes, assigned by resemblance. This is how the zoologist assigns a name to a new species, classifying it in the known order, incorporating the unknown – not really unknown – in the known.

To recognize is to place oneself within continuity, it is integrating novelty in the pre-established by discovering or granting it an unprecedented specificity. Without this new facet, I would truly have learnt nothing; my new knowledge would have nothing new. It is in this way that to recognize is to understand: recognition must shake up what is already in my mind, which must surpass itself, reorganize itself. In this confrontation lies the difficulty to

recognize. But without this confrontation there is no learning.

Knowing that there is a little green and acidic object is nothing, as long as I have not established a relation with the apple. Without this link, this continuity, I do not use anything more than mere sense passivity, and if need be some ratiocination. To recognize the novelty as an apple amounts to change my mind on the apple, dialecticizing it in order to include negation, to incorporate alterity. Thus, by discovering the apple I discover my own thought.

Seeing and Thinking

To learn or to understand is nothing else than seeing. All visual metaphors (to see, to imagine, to foresee, to enlighten) expressing comprehension and intellectual activity do not lie, are hardly fortuitous, and reveal much more about reality than we would think at first. If to understand is to recognize, one should keep his eyes open and not shut them out of fear. Often, the first comment that comes to mind when we just solved a problem concerns the obviousness of the solution which appears to us. We finally see what was right before our eyes. We just draw the shape, the figure, the hyphen of what appeared to us initially as chaotic and disconnected, an imbroglio or dead end. Amidst the tangle of broken lines and points now appear a drawing, a profile, a pattern, net and clear, luminous compared with the dark and indistinct background which filled our mind. We finally perceive what is, the unity allowing being, beyond elusive appearances, beyond scattered shadows.

Some will challenge such a vision, for, according to them, if there are distinct forms, they are superposed unto an initial chaos which is the real substance of things. In this perspective, forms somehow always remain artificial, superficial. They constitute the appearance which we need to be reassured, to act, since for our existence we rely on these forms without which we would be lost. However, in this perspective, these forms resemble the breadcrumbs of 'Tom Thumb', they serve to show a path, even if the birds can eat them. In other words, we organize our lives around some benchmarks, but we must continuously witness how they periodically crumble. It is generally a matter of time. It is only for reasons of scale or of focus that some marks assume the form of certainties. Indeed, their truth is

actually within their limitation, what could be called their purpose or outcome.

Thought being after all just a game, let's remain within this logic for a moment. Especially since we will notice that this hypothesis has its consistency; it resists easy criticism and makes sense. Indeed, imagine that reality is chaos, and that the determined forms are mere appearances, factitious and momentary illusion. All that can be distinguished from chaos is thus an ephemeral manifestation that falls within the accidental and the factitious, since nothing substantially distinguishes chaos from chaos. Yet, if two beings are not strictly identical, they are not distinguished by chaos, but by the appearance of their form. If two beings differ, they necessarily maintain a specific relation and this specificity is provided by the particular form taken by their relationship. It would somewhat be daring to refer them back to the indistinctness of a primordial chaos. Here we meet a requirement: to give back some substantiality to the appearance, to the extent where, without it, nothing can be distinguished anymore. By saying that everything is chaos we risk to fall back into the night where all cows are black.

At this point, in its foundation, nothing distinguishes our hypothesis on chaos from the one on forms. Because, with the latter, there is no reason for chaos to be relegated to a kind of 'nothingness'. After all, it is the daily matter with which we constantly fight. The unknown is not nothing, the unpredictable is not nothing, the 'not-yet-happened' is not nothing, the 'purely possible' is not nothing. The invisible is a reality, as much as the indivisible or the undetermined. While the known threatens without notice to become ignorance, pure negativity, what already exists also threatens to turn into a void at any time, whereas the possible threatens to confine itself forever in a kind of dark primal refuge. Everything seems to spring out from the invisible and to return to it, promptly, as a kind of metaphysical black hole.

There is no painting without a background, no painting without canvas, without borders, although the painting is neither a background, nor a canvas, nor a border. Why does the gaze tend to exclude? Probably, by its very nature, it must exclude: an intrinsic inability prevents it from fixing its attention simultaneously on the painting, the background and the borders, on the details and the vanishing point. An outlook cannot embrace

everything all at once, nor simultaneously, not even with any comparable intensity. Here lies, perhaps, the challenge of the intellect, both for intuition and for comprehension: to acquire the capacity to grasp differences within simultaneity. For example, the gaze of the mind would be the one unifying the gaze of the different sense. But do not forget that sensory view has already this function, to unify chaos. For example, in its very structure, beyond the pupil which has the mere function of a mirror, the human visual system does not perceive points, but forms, whether geometrical or hues. Finally, the relationship between mind and vision would be the same as between vision and the world reflected on the retina, between the visual cortex and the eye. To recover the forms that make the world is a world, and not chaos, even is somehow the world finds its justification in chaos: it is its location. Without chaos, there would be no genesis, but a simple rigid state of things. Without the substantiality of the formless, there would be no room for the simple possibility of the forms which prelude the emergence of forms. This mysterious place might as well be called the void, to the extent where we admit that the void is tightly contiguous to being.

Order and Chaos

To multiply, to generate existence, the being or the world must 'invent', bring forth what is absent, bring out of mere possibility what is to be. This possible is somehow impossible as long as it is not, because it is unpredictable. It lacks power too much in order to be possible; its potential being is too uncertain. This is why one cannot ignore the concept of chaos, for the very notion of chaos signifies unpredictability, since it has no consistency. Else, from the point of view of matter, what can allow the prediction of life? From the point of view of life, what can help to predict the mind? Nothing. Or a vague speculation. However, life is still relatively consistent with matter, and the mind relatively coherent with life. It is the same for the operations of the human mind. A discovery is unpredictable, but once discovered, it seems almost obvious. Chaos was the misunderstood appearance of an order exceeding us; the little we understood of it, we always understood it *a posteriori*. Thus, divinity – or another tutelary power – wishes our 'good' even if we can't understand it, and even less expect it.

The world is chaotic; the world is ordered. Since the beginnings of human thought, individuals, cultures, and philosophies have relentlessly squabble on the topic, projecting the limitations of their own mind unto their formulations, limitations which thus belong to the world itself, since the mind constitutes the frame and the weft of this world. The whole of all these limited and contradictory perspectives we entertain constitute the very fabric underlying the universe, of which our mind is but the image and emanation.

The limitation of our being allows us to be, our limited perspective allows us to exist in our individuality and not to drown into chaos. But this limitation also makes us perish, because only chaos remains eternal and unchanged. For one simple reason: chaos is equipped with all the prerogative of the unknown. The small shore of chaos to which we have access, very restricted, does not change its substantial nature of chaos in any way. In this unbearable situation, in this limitation which makes us be, lies the paradox of our existence. Everything that is exists solely through this paradox. Everything that is matter incarnates it, everything that is alive lives it, everything that is thought thinks it; our lot is to be aware of it. For example, what the animal partly solves through reproduction, we also accomplish it by thinking the universe and by acting on it in another way. The mind does not have the same means as life, but it fulfills the same destiny. Projections of the self on the world; relative continuity and eternity of our being. Nothing of this is extraordinary, these are only our humble attempts at satisfying our meager part of form-generating chaos while fighting against it.

To not prevent ourselves from seeing, from imagining, to expect everything, to look at the invisible even when we do not see anything, to believe that something exists which does not exist, without trading the prey for its shadow. To focus on the mysterious and unknown wave in order to recognize ourselves without indulging in the reflection of our own face. For, if the wave reflects back our own being, it is not at all because it is there for us, but in spite of appearances, precisely because it is there for us. If we admit that water is so well done that it returns us our own image, why not infer that it must send us back the image of the world, this world of which we ourselves are only the pale, uncertain and marvelous reflection. Indeed, the mirror sends us back our own reflection, but if we know

how to look, it rather sends us back the image of the world. For this, one must not be obsessed with one's own reflection, one must know how to look at the mirror itself, admire its power. One must accept to really see oneself, to see through oneself, to see oneself as an accidental culmination, an accident of being, an accident of matter, an accident of life, and an accident of the mind. So, from this perspective, the wave is truly there for us, for this 'us' is other than ourselves. If the 'us' is merely ourselves, the wave is not there for us. And, in the same way, if we are only a reflection of the world, the whole world is there for us. Because he looks at itself through us, and we know ourselves to the extent that we grasp ourselves in this mirror identity.

Thus, understanding means nothing else than to see. For, without the hypothesis that we have just stated, who are we? What is the world? We are not asking here for an analytical definition, but rather for a formulation that would focus on the very conditions of existence, on the experience which determines and generates the main axes of our life and thus those of our thought. This is where chaos finds its true station within us, not anymore as a mere concept which we can stir at will, but as the true operator of thought, the unavoidable pillar of our individual being. Thought is henceforth no longer considered as a mere function, as a part time activity, which entertains our leisure, which helps us to impress the crowd or to make a living, but as a conscious attempt to elaborate our own individuality. Something which necessarily leads us to enter in relation – if not in conflict – with the chaos inside us, and thus with chaos itself, since there is only one and single chaos.

Finally, what is this chaos inside of us? Of what nature would this appearance be which would authorize it to be distinguished from what it is not? Indeed, although chaos is 'indistinction' itself, in a way or another it must be distinguished from what distinguishes. Inside us, what might look like such a nature? If chaos is what makes us go beyond the limits of our being, if, in that sense, it looks like a kind of refusal or overflow, it could be considered as that nature in us which resists the constitutive rigidity of our being. Still, if from chaos come forth the forms, this strange nature generates forms while refusing them, since it cannot accept to be limited to anyone of them. Visibly, when we are talking about the chaos in us, it is a force. A force, that is to say something in us which is our being and

which, at the same time, constantly threatens it in its limitations, an uncontrollable coercion. It makes us come forth in ourselves and pushes us out of ourselves. It is a kind of current that flows through us, gives us birth, makes us live and die. Hindus gave this specific and paradoxical nature the name of Shiva, the Creator god, the preserver, the destroyer, the dissimulator and the revealer, or Trimurti, unique principle composed of three gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

By presenting itself as a dynamic and not as a state, chaos is of the order of relation, that which generates, which links the various natures together. It can probably be considered as the very archetype of the relation. For, what generates and destroys form, what generates being and makes it become other than itself, is the foundation of all relation. Order being static: the already-there, the fact, the established, what should be done here is to oppose form as order, to force as chaos. However, here, relation is no longer thought of as some vague link between beings, a pale notion of circumstances or of connection, a pure intellectual product or a factitious reality. Nothing can be thought of without its genesis, nothing can be thought of without the force behind its becoming. Relation is what connects with alterity, an alterity that simultaneously constitute and threaten us.

Temporality and Causality

A problem arises. One could say that for every being, all that is needed for the next moment to be is already available in the present moment. This is not entirely wrong, although it is necessary to moderate the claim, to avoid that the tumult of confusion rushes into the wide open breach. For, already, to speak in such a way hypostasizes time, turns time into some kind of a thing in itself, a mechanical series of moments, powerfully hovering like a god over the world and going about with it like a child's toy, with the relentless regularity of the all-mightiness to which no being nor form can resist. Indeed, if all being already contains everything in itself, why would it become anything else than what it is? By granting too much to some entity we make it self-sufficient and we wonder why it is not immutable and eternal. And time would thus have no reason to be, unless it is him who, as

Santa Claus, brings novelty by distributing it to everything and every being.

However, if by saying that everything is already present in every being signifies that in every being resides something which goes beyond it, an infinite which transcends it, a power which animates and guides it, then we can accept the proposal in all its weight. Because the force which makes the entity different from itself is taken care of, it falls within the possible, the antagonism intrinsic to every singular being is made manifest. Alterity operates, circumstantial mechanic plays its part, there is no need any more to appeal to a mysterious and omnipotent entity which, from its heavenly altar, would relentlessly and clandestinely determine destiny, even if, veiled, it would implicitly or explicitly pretend not to exist.

If time is not intrinsic to the specific being, where does it come from? Where does it dwell? To install a thought on the idea that time exists in itself, as an absolute and immovable entity, is it not like summoning the magic of words and concepts? Is it not like believing in our own inventions? Is it not idolatry? And we could speak similarly of space, for even if this operator of thought also holds a crucial importance, it does not allow us however to transpose it into an absolute and infinite metric in the frame of which everything should be located. But this mistake can be forgiven: man, fascinated by his own thought, could never prevent himself from hypostasizing, reifying or even godifying every concept which seemed unavoidable and inaccessible to him. Be it time, matter, being, man, the self or the me, nature, the universe or anything else, throughout the centuries we have never stopped to transform into a cult the admiration which we have for every entity whose liminal side, because of its borderline aspect, fascinated us a bit more than others.

Thus, within our system, time is an intrinsic modality, which we can abstract in order to think – as we can and must abstract any quality that stands out as a quality –, without necessarily considering it in an autonomous and radically separated manner. On this issue we must constantly stay vigilant: we so easily allow ourselves to be carried away by a tenacious desire to hold the object of our reflections into our hands, always drawn by the strongest desire to possess a solid seat on which we could settle down without fear nor after-thought. Moreover, as a general principle, as soon as we try to define an absolute

concept, as untouchable an immovable, a small alarm bell should automatically ring in our head to warn us, to force us to review our position, to make it more dynamic, less rigid, more dialectical, to incite us to give back to this bronze statue the living and palpitating flesh of which we deprived it.

Hence, what happens with time once we have forced it to reintegrate the global entity from which, for a moment, it thought it was emancipated? What form does it take if its identity is not this enormous linear and graduated rule which bears witness to the changes in all things anymore? For, to find our way, to make our existence easier, we made choices: the cycles of the sun, of the earth, and of the moon have long punctuated our daily lives, even if new technical data intervened in recent years. But in itself, before any specific choice on a metric, what is time? What does time look like before being time as we know it in daily language and practice? Or rather, if we go back to the root of time, let's consider what makes time sprout, which gives it its mere possibility. We are forced to imagine that time, before time, the principle of time, is sequentiality. But how does it come about? By what chance does a state become another? Would it not be magic if we were to believe that a transformation happens by itself, without anything to motivate it? And if we do involve a notion of cause, or of structure, or of condition, what does it mean and imply? We postpone the nature of time, but it remains a problem, and it must stay that way.

Cause and Condition

Here is a proposal. To the extent where there is multiplicity, the act or interaction would be a primary data of the real. Each singularity interacts with each singularity, and simultaneously each part interacts with its whole and with its subparts, which happens in a world infinitely divisible and multipliable. Said otherwise, each singularity acts simultaneously as a single and autonomous singularity, as a divisible totality, and as part of a whole. Therefore, there is no cause in a unique and unidirectional way, but a reflexive interaction of which some aspects might appear more decisive than others. It is no longer a cause, or causes, but an intertwining of conditions. Any transformation would be the result of a dynamic and fluid geometry. Time thus becomes the internal regularity of a

system whose parameters are arbitrarily chosen, a regularity in motion itself, since it could very well speed up or slowdown in relation to the system as a whole.

In this perspective, there is no more absolute time than there is an absolute cause. Insofar as the different temporalities auto-reference each other, they are arbitrary. Insofar as they are measured to other metrics, they are changeable. Thus, there can be no absolute time, but solely a concept of action unit, arbitrarily chosen, out of which flows a regular sequentiality which we call time. Every useful time is thus based on a cycle that repeats itself and that can be counted, and in the absolute this cycle can be modified. Even if it would not be modifiable in itself, what happens while time happens modifies it, which *de facto* accelerates or slows down our time since it is an interaction. Just as the value of a golden coin is modified by its commercial exchange capacity, despite the constancy of its gold content. Only eternity would be invariable, because devoid of any comparison. An absolute time would come to be totally unusable and to deny the time: in order not to be counted it should not repeat itself at all, since any repetition always finds somewhere a limitation to its own regularity. The useful time, the one we can quantify, bears sense only in the constancy of a relationship, in the regularity of a frequency, which make it all the more fragile. Any disruption would make it inefficient. We realize the problem when we wish to transport temporal values into space, or by modifying the parameters of interaction such as speed or acceleration: we get lost.

Thus, a cause is a predominant trend of action that provides a form of unity to being, or to a being, or to a phenomenon, including the production of singularities. There is continuity in being: a particular cause interacts necessarily with the matrix or the whole of what there is. But this cause is relative since it is predominant only in the context of a specific relation, which is itself determined according to the type of already existing singularities. Thus, if there are no living beings, or if the physical conditions of life are not met, life is not a cause, it does not generate anything. Or at least it does so only potentially. To think of an absolute cause would for this reason imply thinking the absence of cause, since no absolute cause should depend on any condition: it would

generate all its own conditions. Nothing would delay or affect this cause, its potential for realization would instantly come about, outside of any temporality, therefore be eternal and have no beginning. At the same time, this unconditional would have no reason to act upon anything; it would suffice to itself and would be the cause of nothing. It is in this sense that an absolute and Almighty God cannot be considered as a cause, because he is totally coextensive with what is, lacking any specificity, as some philosophers tried to show it, at the risk of pantheism. Such a God should be considered as being devoid of existence, as a non-being. To exist, some specificity should be granted to him, some finitude, some particularity. This is generally what religions are doing, granting him a story, decisions, feelings, etc.

We must thus infer that all cause is relative. Thus life could emerge out of matter proportionally to the life or life-potential contained within matter. At every step of this transformation belonged a certain capacity to emerge. And this interaction, this resistance of matter to life, of matter to mind, etc., defines time. In that sense, it would be false to declare that the notion of being, itself, has some finality; being is, simply. Only the specific has a finality, since it becomes, whether it likes it or not, the mere means of its cause. However, since the cause can only be partial, every specific being is also a being lacking a cause, or a mean of its own cause, *causa sui*, that is to say without any other concern than being, being itself. Thus can we easily proclaim or reclaim an autonomy of the self, as an effect of its own cause. Thus the cause needs an object to relate to and an effect to be produced in order to be a cause: the causal principle is necessarily a relation.

In a way, one could argue that both cause and time are mere visions of the mind; however, to be satisfied with such a formulation seems to be a generality of little interest, to the extent that there is no thought of man which would not be exclusively a vision of the mind, abstract and reduced, a caricature of some phenomenon whose deepest issue often exceeds him. One must thus take the formulation that comes to mind, whatever it is, and, without hypostasizing it, try to use it to see where it leads us once put to trial.

While on the way, let us examine the notion of space for a moment. What is space? Before any other quality, it is what excludes, since what is here is not what is there. It

is the very symbol of scattering and multiplicity. What differentiates singularities without any necessary relation of anteriority, unlike sequentiality which distinguishes cause and effect. “This” is not “that”, spatiality excludes for no other reason than identity: this is not that because this is this and not that, this is here and not there. There again one must avoid thinking *a priori* about space as a great void, since such an abstraction is only a ‘full’ of which the filling has been removed. But if one thinks about it, it is still this ‘filling’, with its limits, which surrounds space. True and pure space is the absence of space, since nothing can be distinguished anymore: the ‘here’ has no reason to be distinguished from the ‘there’; such a space would thus be invisible and without actual meaning, if not as a pure possibility. Here again, one must see how trapped by various certainties rooted in sensory perception we are, even if these certainties are intellectualized. After all, senses do not know pure time more than pure space. An empty box remains a box, mainly determined by an externality.

And matter? Matter resists, this is its main quality. In other words, matter is what prevents this from becoming that and forbids that from becoming this. It is what guarantees the integrity of this and that. But, in our conception, because ‘this’ is always contiguous and interacting with ‘that’, matter is what acts. It is the continuous action which allows everything to be. For nothing is which does not act, or does not resist. However, nothing is fully in action; much of the action of every being is residual and waits for the opportunity to appear. Matter is thus this ensemble composed of action and of the capacity to act, which characterizes very specific being. Just as the global energy of a system is the sum of its potential energy and of its kinetic energy, the materiality of a being is the sum of its action and of its capacity to act, or power. Of course, as for energy – especially the potential one –, one could ask: but compared to what? And we find here, as with time and space, the idea that there is no absolute metric, but that every system is defined in relation to itself, which necessarily makes it arbitrary.

Within these conditions, what does immateriality mean? And can this immateriality be considered as belonging to the order of reality? The absence of materiality could mean that being does not act, that it cannot act, or again that it acts fully to the maximum of itself, that it is already fully realized: it is, and no

becoming dwells in it. Indeed, immateriality implies intemporality since time is determined by an action and immateriality excludes any transformation and thus any action. At best, it is a potential for action, but only a pure potential, a qualitative kind of potential. In this way, the metaphysical entity is fully itself, it cannot lack anything. Yet it is determined, limited. Thus, the triangle as a triangle cannot the least become square-like without abandoning its triangle nature. The material triangle, however, is always more or less a triangle; it always suffers from some distortion. The metaphysical triangle, defined as a triangle, is a triangle or is not one. This corresponds to the singular and irreducible integrity of any entity, which we can name transcendence or archetype. Metaphysical form does not mix, else it becomes something else. Metaphysics, as we have seen, operates within discontinuity. Of course, metaphysics only makes sense in relation to physics, just as physics makes sense only in relation to metaphysics. A human being is such only because a 'human being' is a reality, else we would only know Paul, Peter or John, all entities without any particular relation with each other. Similarly, 'being human' is a reality only because there are human beings. Materiality is thus the relation between a power of action, meaning a metaphysical reality, and the act itself, a physical reality. And it is in the same way, through action and transformation that time and space are generated.

Physics and Metaphysics

Our words point directly to the essence of metaphysics, since materiality is precisely what distinguishes physics from metaphysics. Although atemporality and aspatiality are also specific to metaphysics. However, a permanent preoccupation of our work aims at preventing the fracture of thought, not as a doctrinal obligation, but simply because fractures prevent confrontation. Also, if I declare that physics has nothing to do with metaphysics, I would not have them challenge each another. For, in the end, beyond the quasi-religious aspect of metaphysics, since it constitutes a kind of act of faith, outside the realm of direct experience, what is metaphysics? Does the formulation of any concept not belong to metaphysics? Insofar as senses do not perceive any universal, since universals are only concocted by the mind, is not science itself a sort of metaphysics?

It is said of metaphysics that it only deals with what is not material. But are our thoughts on such and such issues material? Only a neo-realist or a pseudo-realist ideology can pretend that thought is objective insofar as it deals with material questions. It is not because a thought observes, calculates or measures that it is more objective than when it speculates on the nature of the soul. For this, one only needs to look back at the numerous mistakes of the past committed by physical sciences. As we see it, everything is representation, even if this or that particular scientific hypothesis or postulate seems to materially operate, by flying airplanes or moving cars. A particular theory works until it does not work anymore, for the good reason that it has reached its limits. This is probably one of the phenomena that best characterize the history of science.

The only distinction that can be done in order to identify a so-called scientific thought – that is to say an idea of the physical world – and a metaphysical thought would be of a quantitative order. Indeed, we could say that what distinguishes them is only the variation of the distance which separates one or the other from sensory reality. Thus, a reflection on aerodynamic is closer to sensorial reality than a reflection on the human mind, although recent neurobiology tries to bridge that gap. But we will always fall back at some point on sensory experience and data.

So from our standpoint there is no radical separation between the two domains. On one side, because nowhere aerodynamic theories can be seen, be heard, or directly act upon the material world. They are mere tools of the mind which the latter uses to guide its physical actions. On the other side, because it is exactly the same thing for metaphysical concepts, which can certainly not be seen, be heard or directly act upon physical reality, but just as physical concepts, they provide tools of the mind that can guide as well physical actions, for example in the moral domain. Thus they reverberate in one way or another, more or less directly, on the material world. The conception of the mind, of the soul or of God entertained by man, will necessarily impact on his daily life and actions.

One could raise the idea that the main criteria of differentiation between the two types of reflections is calculation. What is physical can be calculated whereas

what is metaphysical cannot. Number would be the redline which would divide the two domains. But then, would a reflection on the very nature of the number be physical or metaphysical? For the study of this nature does not require calculations but qualitative definitions. Thus the principle which distinguishes the real numbers from whole numbers is not a calculation, but an activity of conceptualization. These orders are not calculated one from the other, they in fact belong to the register of the infinite, and their relation is of the order of pure concept, like the transfinite. Moreover, it is ironic to see that the domain which is drawn upon to distinguish the physical from the metaphysical one is among sciences the one which is the most metaphysical; indeed, what is more abstract and non-empirical than mathematics! So much so that some mathematical schools claim that mathematical science has no foundation at all, that it is purely made out of formalisms chosen out complete arbitrariness. It works, and that's all, but another language or coding might as well have done the trick. After all, where do we see numbers? They are a pure mental construction, and any numerical system is based on a given set of arbitrary axioms. If only the one which, one day, opted for a decimal system instead of another. Informatics, for its part, has mainly chosen a binary system, rightly or wrongly so. And the idea that mathematics is merely interested in what is computable, as if calculation was its main motivation, is a very algebraic version of the problem, which omits geometry, which was however the very origin of mathematics.

Theory and Practice

However, without adopting a radical rupture, one must admit that something separates the two domains, physics and metaphysics. Let's put forward the idea that it is their center of interest which distinguishes them. One is oriented towards the exteriority of the mind, that is to say its deployment in the world, the other is more focused on the interiority of the mind, that is to say to have the mind turn onto itself, to think the intimacy of its own process. But how to think of a deployment without a return on oneself? And to think of such a return without thinking of a deployment? How to avoid the permanent confrontation between the singular and the universal, to the extent that a singular thought permanently tries to think the world, to

the extent where, through singular experiences, we try to establish the universality of phenomena. Multiplicity of the unity and unity of multiplicity. This problem has been identified long ago, and it appears that we can't escape it; it is even desirable to not let it rot in the dungeons of the mind.

This problem can also be identified as the one of theory and practice. Since by accepting a rupture between metaphysics considered as pure contemplation and a physical science rather oriented towards immediate usefulness, there is a disconnection between reflection and action. Action does not reflect on itself anymore, and thought is no more action, even if, absolutely speaking, this situation is hard to conceive. To contemplate unity and to live through multiplicity. Having a glimpse of eternity and suffering from temporality. To rise with the mind and to grow heavy with matter; to escape with the mind and to realize oneself through matter. This is the dilemma which man must face, which always led him to choose, subjectively, arbitrarily, between mind and matter. And from this axis, he has generally constituted a polarity, where, according to tempers, one side was made positive and the other negative. The Devil was the spirit or it was matter; salvation was spiritual or material. Religion as the opium of the people or matter as the damnation of being. The body as a tomb for the soul or the soul as a fiction of the mind.

But, what is the soul, if not the unity of the body? And what is God, if not the unity of the world? Many will jump, atheists or religious, against what in their eyes represents the iconoclastic aspect of these declarations. However, let's add this. What is the body, if not the manifestation of the soul? And what is the world, if not the manifestation of God? Is there any reason why God would be more real than the world and the world more real than God? With these different sentences, we have alternatively made happy and unhappy people, and yet, through these words, we somehow said exactly the same thing. Although, words, words, there is evil! By dint of taking words for reality, minds freeze and are prevented from thinking. By dint of prohibitions and of mandatory formulations, of sensory revelations and of prophetic evidences, by dint of taking for words of Gospel everything that is said, thought, or felt, man is eventually unable to speak, to think or to feel. It is easy to forget that any thought is but a way of speaking, a metaphor.

Man reflects, and he would like to take his reflections for the foundation of all reality. Man has sensory perceptions, and he would like to take them for the foundation of all reality. Man has intuitions, and he would like to take them for the foundation of all reality. It is for these reasons that some, idea supporters, will emphasize analysis, logic and forms; while others, matter supporters, prefer utilitarianism, empiricism and pragmatism. And the last ones, subject supporters, will opt for the will, desire and belief. The intellect, the world and the individual. Or else, the transcendent, the whole and the singular. Or again, unity, action and multiplicity. These various poles somehow characterize the philosophical options which have defined human activity. Everyone is opting in his own way for one such axis or a combination of these axis, without really realizing the axiomatic and derisory aspect of the issue. Any of these working hypothesis foster their own inner coherence, which in every mind strengthens the conviction of righteousness associated with its choice. The 'other one' cannot be true. Much like when we think that our house is the most pleasant of all, or that our field is the best cultivated in the world; much like when we defend what we like because we like it, a mix of legitimate choices and of judgmental confusion. When we like, we discover the good in what we like. Does it prevent us from seeing it anywhere else? There lies all the difficulty, which is a source of clashes and of misunderstandings. All are right in their formulations, except when they refuse the reason and formulations of others.

Arbitrary and Precarious

To turn back on oneself, to become aware of the premises of our own thinking, to realize that it is only a choice, and that there are other choices. To have a glimpse at the precariousness of our position. To understand that to provide any basis to our existence consists in practicing arbitrariness just as much as the choice of our love is arbitrary. Willy nilly, we have 'fallen' in love, a choice which is simultaneously the most beneficial and the most difficult to accomplish: the test par excellence, the commitment that gives substance to our existence. Some will fear to see in this state of mind a kind of skepticism or nihilism, but this is due to an insufficient reading of our discourse. Certainly, for the one who is convinced about the absolute truth of such and such an intellectual posture,

such remarks may seem destructive. But for the one who assumes that what is true is yet to come, or never to come, and therefore engages in a dialectical path where any thought is only a hypothesis waiting for another, to grasp the derisory nature of his own thought does not frighten him. He dares and engages upon the most serious of thoughts knowing that it is only a game, and exactly because it is such, even if life itself is the main stake of this deadly game.

Let's therefore come back on the subject of life, since this essay begins on the quadruple hypothesis of being, thought, life and matter. Let's go back to its metaphysical transposition. The problem is as follow. Assuming the principle that life springs out of matter, what more does it bring, what is its purpose, and why would it gush out of matter? For this, let's consider death. What begins at this very moment is a process of disintegration where what was one – the living being - becomes multiple. From this point of view, life is the growth of a singular being that incorporates what is foreign to it and subjects it to his own potency and being. Admittedly, matter is also a process, nothing is eternal within it, however the striking aspect of what sets life apart is both the important acceleration of the nature of the process, its fragility and its irreversibility. At the same time the principle of alterity also increases. Instead of “at the same time”, we could say “for this reason” but it would involve here a notion of finality, and one should always be wary of such a notion which is often reductionist and comes out of a taste for the easy. Indeed, not only do we notice the importance of alterity, since the living being must continuously appeal to what he is not, to feed itself, to survive and grow, and also to last, reproduction being nothing else than the continued existence of a being. Even if this continuity, especially through sexuality, an act of fusion and alienation, also implies a rupture and a negation. The new being is both the same and other than the previous one; in fact he assimilated one or two being to constitute himself. If, for a moment, we think about the chain of life, it is staggering to observe what constitutes a singular being. How could any living being still consider itself alien to anything on earth? The whole living world seems to have been conspiring to constitute it!

Compared with matter, life introduces unity, since a living being is relatively indivisible with respect to a material thing. At the same time, it introduces dependency,

a much more intense or extended relation to alterity. But who says dependence of alterity also says interaction: a living being is better disposed to act on his environment, to transform it. This is why it is mobile, it knows desire and communication, instead of undergoing a simple inclination like gravitational or electromagnetic forces. It changes much faster, resulting in greater freedom towards its own nature. It is the constitution of the subject as a separate and active entity.

In this same perspective, let's now think about the mind. What is its metaphysical nature? Although we can already postulate that the mind can only be metaphysical. What is its archetype, its specific identity in relation to matter and life? On the one hand, the ratio of alterity is increased: the mind is a much bigger consumer of alterity than life. The living being consumes several times its own weight during its existence, the mind can consume the whole universe if it wants to. A greater autonomy and a greater capacity to act on the world around it, and naturally a greater fragility. It is here again an increase of the affirmation of the subject in all its glory and fragility. But we can't let its specificity be defined as a simple increase of the nature of the living. Just as unity was the identity of life in relation to matter, what will be the identity of the mind in relation to the living? Relation. Since nothing is foreign to the mind. By knowing itself, it knows everything, since it is itself the historical culmination of totality. As we have seen by a temporal process, the living contains the immensity of the material. The mind can contain this immensity in itself. This relation becomes conscious, present in its redoubling unto itself. What life lives, the mind thinks it, to a greater extent.

The Scattering of the Senses

We have three ways of thinking: the senses, intuition and reasoning. What about sensory perception? It is oriented towards matter, since like this one, the senses work within multiplicity, in opposition. Vision is not smell, which is not taste, which is not touch, which is not hearing. Everything perceived is not only perceived separately from the other, but every perception, however small, is perceived relatively independently from other perceptions. The world looks like a flux of various perceptions, the

coherence of which need not be sought; we can at best try to regroup them by associations of circumstances and resemblance, while being aware that it is no longer the work of the sense, but of the mind. Indeed, senses need not to classify or organize, this is only a need of the mind. Senses know, they receive, they do not recognize, or hardly so. It is in this sense that they can be considered as being relatively passive, since everything is always new to them: they endure things.

And the animals, will be objected! Even if claimed they have no mind and do not think, even if they do not classify, they do recognize, since they prefer some food over another; even plants can choose. We will use precisely this argument to reintroduce the archetype of life. Indeed, thanks to the principle of unity, which unifies multiplicity, life can recognize since, because of that same unity, life makes choices. Who states unity states a subject, and implies a subjectivity, as we have already glimpsed. That is to say, a position which subordinates every part to a central flux, to a hierarchy of being, much more structured and hierarchical than in the simple matter. Parts have no more meaning in themselves. It is because of this that life is more active, less passive than matter. What made a choice is necessarily more active than what is relatively more neutral. It is true that matter also makes choices, as such metal is not such gas, which is not such alkaloid, and none of them reacts like the other; for example, they do not have the same chemical affinities. But every part of these different material being is not subjected to a transcendent unity which differs in nature from its parts. Thus, to the different local affinities of the different parts of being, a general affinity of this being, which differs from and can even oppose local affinities under some circumstances, is superposed. Thus an animal will suffer while accomplishing some acts, but he will execute them nevertheless because the vital principle in it has priority over the suffering conveyed by the nervous system. For example, a mother which, to defend her children, fights with animals against which she would have never fought under other circumstances out of fear of pain. Love, in its general sense, desire or identification with another similar one, represents the best manifestation of this 'alterity' characteristic of life.

To this principle of unity or vital principle relates what we call instinct, or intuition, by omitting for the moment the intellectual distinction between the two. This

is what, by anticipation, might be called transcendent, in opposition to reasoning or discursive thought which is part of what we call the immanent spirit, although qualifying this as 'spirit' is both legitimate and illegitimate. It is legitimate because we clearly see the embryo or the strain of what we can call 'spirit' appearing. Illegitimate because to speak like this indicates a will to understand life as a not quite finished spirit, as a mere draft of mind, while somehow life does not have to be subordinated to the spirit; maybe for life, the mind is only an instrument, a mean to persevere in itself.

Instinct and intuition are the immediate deployment of the living being. The mind is often surprised at the sight of such an animal who knows something without having learned it (as just born turtles who can swim and know where to go), or by a human who seems to divine something without knowing neither how nor why he knows it. It seems almost magical. Yet, is not a reasoning which reflects on its own approach just as magical? Can we realize the process by which the mind comes to realize? No, but perhaps the idea of realizing is more common to us, and most of all we like to reassure ourselves with the help of that which, by an abuse of language, we call explanations, while it barely amounts to supporting or developing one's thought. For, just as we do not have to ask ourselves how does the stone know that it must fall – it does not know the universal law of gravitation more than it knows Einstein and Newton – we do not have to ask ourselves why instinct or intuition knows what it does. Although this should not prevent us from exploring the issue.

Possibility and Circumstances

Life knows, although matter knows as well, in its own manner. However, in life, we notice a 'novelty' or 'originality': the knowledge of the integrated whole which makes the living being is not the sum knowledge of its parts; it is a new form of knowledge which does not cancel the previous one but is superimposed over it. It is for this reason that life transcends the matter of which it is made. This is why life is characterized by unity. And for this reason, due to its immediacy, all knowledge apprehended by this unity is not reducible to anything else than itself: it is what we can call subjectivity, the emergence of an

integrated subject. Why does life want to preserve itself? One could as well ask why there is being rather than nothing. Or why are there animals and plants? These questions are of a similar ilk, almost impossible to answer. Even if all of this, the universe, the genesis and the proliferation of life, once accomplished, make a lot of sense. Out of habit, perhaps...

However, with the mind as such, a new step was taken, because the mind has the specific capacity to break away from life, even though we can claim it emanates out of it. This is what gives man the incredible power of wanting to stop being alive, to deliberately wander, to hurt or destroy himself while being aware of it. Of course, this allows him as well to de-center in relation to himself, resulting in an immense openness towards alterity within the unity of his being, as we mentioned it before. This new form of knowledge or thinking, spiritual or transcendent, allows a distancing, with the advantages and disadvantages coming along with it, which sometimes becomes dissociation, unlike instinct, this thought of the living which operates within immediacy. The eye does not see itself seeing, instinct does not see itself knowing, but the mind sees itself thinking and it is even there that it finds its specific identity. It is in this duplication, a transcendence generator, that this new form of being discovers its own nature and its foundation. The problem of foundation arises only for the mind, since it alone can question its own grounds, it alone can duplicate itself and stare at its image in the mirror of which it is made. The mind is indeed a mirror, which reconstitutes everything according to its own nature. And by some magical dialectical trick which some will obviously dispute, one can state that precisely because the mind only is able to consider its foundation, it must constitute this very foundation: there is no foundation of the mind beyond the mind, there is no objective exterior socle to it. And one will do what he wants with such an idea. But the temptation is strong to grant one's favors to such a perspective.

Of course, this last statement begs the question of knowing how what remains posterior in time and emanates from what it is not could ever be the foundation or, said otherwise, how could that which is not chronologically the first be considered primordial. It is precisely here that things may become interesting. The time of short-circuits, where theories break apart, is the true test and the great

revealer. It is maybe the very notion of cause or finality which will require to be reviewed in another way than the one common sense usually means it. It is the notion of 'possible' which will have to be thought over, with all the implications for the very nature of metaphysics inherent in such a revision. For, if we want to draw a rough diagram of the usual and common way of expression today: there is reality – implied here in the physical sense –, and there are ideas, which are merely that, just ideas.

What do we mean? Things exist first of all because they can exist. Nothing is without father and mother; the smallest dust particle exists because its constitution was permitted by an environment, permitted by the conditions and the combination of circumstances that generated it. It exists because its existence was possible. It exists because it is in resonance with what is already there, with a state which constitutes a possibility. There is no existence without this possibility, or this compossibility, as a combination. Can we pretend that this possibility has no form of existence? That this possibility corresponds to nothing? That it is a mere ghost of reality? It would be like stating that my father and mother have no importance whatsoever or that they have absolutely nothing to do with the fact that I exist. If I want to honor my debts, I have to accept that I existed before existing. Otherwise we have to resort to a notion of creation *ex nihilo*, which would certainly not please everyone. Unless we fall once more on the extreme opposite and exclaim ourselves: "Here am I, my mind alone is enough for me, what have I to do with the rest!"; a tempting proposal which, in a certain way, has its legitimacy, but which has its limits, as any proposal.

Seen from another angle, it is the notion of relation which we are trying to introduce. Relation would no longer be this pale concept which attaches itself as a more or less accidental predicate to a thing or to a being: it is constitutive of that very thing or being. To start with, let's take the genesis of any kind of existence. Is it not the first form of relation between the entity in question and the world from which it arose? But this genesis is neither the thing, nor the world, but a very specific convergence of the world, a determined perspective on the world. Now, this is where mistakes are often introduced: one can easily suggest that this genesis is nothing, merely a vision of the mind. After all, what is a process? Nothing but the coincidence, simultaneity or sequentiality of a certain

number of presences. Thus no interest, if only for the sake of curiosity.

Primacy of Relation

An alternative here imposes itself on everyone. Either we accept the idea that all process has its reason to be, or we prefer to state that a process is a pure product of chance. A river would therefore be the accidental localization of a great number of water molecules, the human being a fortuitous conglomeration of amino acids and various hydrocarbon, a city an agglomeration of individuals, and so on. One might ask such theoreticians why they choose to speak of water molecules and not of hydrogen and oxygen, why they talk of individuals and not of arms, legs and hairs. For, their choice of what represents a legitimate unity seems totally arbitrary, especially since in their system of thought, unity does not even exist: if we follow them till the end, everything is in fact the aggregate of something else. It has been a while since, notwithstanding the fiercest proponents of the ultimate particle, physicists have realized that matter does not know of absolute indivisibility. One only choses to interrupt the division process.

But then, if nothing exists outside of relation, what is a relation? What makes this relation so essential to existence? Can we find a metaphysical foundation to support this evidence? Even if this evidence is so often occulted, for reasons on which we will come back. For, if relation is purely accidental, contingent, that is to say that it is dependent, amongst other things, on the vagaries of time and space, how could it articulate itself within a register where time and space do not exist as such? As we saw, metaphysics is the kingdom of permanence. But what characterizes relation is the interlacing, and thus change. A given entity is differently associated to an almost infinite multiplicity of various entities. Simultaneously or alternatively, in the same place or in different ones, in the same manner or differently, everything that exists entertains a terribly complex relation with its surroundings. If we push the reflection till the end, we see that, for example, on earth, there is nothing that can ignore anything else. Directly or indirectly, everything is in relation with everything. This observation is even more undeniable for the man of our time than for his

grandfather. Probably, one of the best examples remains the whole economic process, where one realizes that in the manufacture of any product huge production networks covering the entire earth are taking place. Between raw materials and their means of extraction, production techniques and the development of the tools needed, the complexity of the transportation networks and the construction of infrastructures, financial and commercial connections, a comprehensive study of the production process propels us in an endless round across the planet.

This example brings us back to an important proposition. What if relation was as essential as the thing in itself? More so, what if relation was even more essential than the thing in itself? This economical example strikes us because we have considered the entities from the perspective of their genesis. We then realized that the notion of relation should be seen as constitutive of the thing, and not anymore as a set of secondary and arbitrary predicates. In other words, nothing can exist without relation, or rather without relations, and the specificity of relations determines the specificity of the particular thing. However, the number of these relations and the burden of this number can become so enormous and heavy that one comes to wonder what is left of the thing in itself. It seems to disappear, so much so that singularity dissolves into a kind of heavy, not to say crushing, continuity. In fact, is this not what happens to the individual through his relation with the world? A fading sense of identity develops. The more relations are dense and complex, the more the singular disappear and blends in the mass. Man becomes a tiny dot in a dense and powerful network, he feels or foresee the dissolution of his being. The relation to Internet, through its infinite networks, indefinite and interwoven, sends us back to this kind of intuition.

Returning to a metaphysical reading of the problem. The nature of the relation in itself seems difficult to determine, yet this relation allows location, space and matter. None of these three characteristics has any meaning without the notion of relation: what distinguishes a location from another is that it is here in relation to another which is there. What distinguishes a moment from another is that it happens before or after in relation to another moment. What distinguishes matter is that such thing responds differently in relation to another, and there is no reaction nor action without any relation to another. Relation, taken in its strictest sense, thus becomes the

presence of the other, a presence to what we are not. It becomes our possibility to be this or that, now or later, our possibility to act. To the extent that relation is constitutive, since it is a relation which made us be and makes us be, in other words an interaction generated us and now maintain us, what we are not is part of ourselves. It becomes undeniable to consider that relation is constitutive of our being and, in a sense, that it is our being.

Dissolution of the singular

Let us admit that relation is constitutive of our being. What consequences will ensue from the hypothesis asserting the constitutive and intrinsic, if not primordial, nature of relation? One of the most striking is the explosion or dissolution of the unity of being. Indeed, if the unity of any entity is composed of the relations which it entertains with an infinity of other entities, this unity becomes particularly friable; it ceases to be this pedestal on which we sometimes want to raise knowledge or identity. Out of question anymore to say: a thing is what it is; from now on, a thing is mainly what it is not. Above all, the first person of singular, this 'I' which we use so easily as if it was given to us by divine right, becomes a fragile word pronounced softly and sparingly, somewhat like when holding a fine crystal glass, without holding it too tight, because it could collapse under the pressure of our fingers. In the near background of the 'I', indistinguishable from him, looms a whole universe, a compact mass of presuppositions, a story with endless ramifications, an intertwining so tangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish what is from what is not.

Within this new perspective, the 'I' certainly loses an identity, but does it not win something in the exchange? It is now a result, made strong by its origins, its elaboration, its structuration, and it is no more a mere evidence accountable to no one, a power based on itself, and authorized by itself. He wins in the exchange because magic never fed anyone. It merely maintains illusions for some time. Nevertheless, the weight of a heavy debt certainly darkens the panorama for the one who would want to jump in a serene heaven where everything is given without measure. A legacy which we could have been spared; can we not refuse it? At the cost of a radical and total negation of oneself, since without constitution and

history, there is no being. We then become an insignificant step in a long chain of chaotic hedges, and in the long run one might question the point of this endless farandole. Is there a goal? An end? A terminus? A place where we could rest in lush grass and pure gratuity. Are we swimming in utmost chaos, a chaotic chaos even if by times it takes on the appearances of a marked pathway? Or again, are we eternally condemned to the status of a vulgar mean, of an unknown finality, a strange pawn in a game that we ignore. Are we manipulated by a hand so invisible that we perpetually move forward without ever emitting the slightest suspicion of rigging?

And the singularity in all of this? Our own identity? Is it still a viable concept in the painting that we have just presented? It seems reduced to a strict minimum, if it still exists at all. Between an invading world and an all-powerful arm, where and how does the possibility of being oneself happen? Nature, God, history, others, the laws of the universe, transcendences of all kinds... In this wide vision typical of the great days of American cinema, the entire cosmos and the forces that dwell within it seem to conspire towards a single goal: to destroy our being, to annihilate the being of any singular thing. Yet, all together, they composed it. Did they not conspire to constitute it? There lies the whole problem with the concept of debt and the rights it grants itself: the famous pound of flesh. What choices does that leave? For this very reason, even if this reason looks more like a fear, the mind takes refuge in the arbitrary. It tells itself: "Since it is so, it will be one against all." And it rushes to deny the world, to deny history, to deny any form of transcendence, in order to finally truly be itself, so as not to feel indebted to anyone anymore. For, leading a life of debtor pursued by his creditors, a debtor of an unpayable debt moreover, of which the claim is infinitely heavier than the capital, with interests accumulating relentlessly every second of existence, this is not a life but a flight of uncertain outcome. Better to immediately declare insolvency, for only this can protect us from the invading universe. Anyway, the bankruptcy is obvious. Without completely denying the necessity of its presence, since we are not totally blind, let's simply refuse to be accountable to the omnipresence of the totality.

A terrible emancipation, obtained through the murder of the father, the mother and of all the lineage. These abusive parents who, despite all their good intentions, can

only remind us of the chains that bind our soul. We burn with desire, a desire for freedom, a desire for being, a desire to pose oneself as subject, a desire to assert oneself as the center of the world. But this is also a debt, we also incur a deficit: simply by allowing us to exist, the whole world and its mysterious forces have irrevocably invested themselves in our person. By choosing to take us out of the void, an oath of eternal protection was taken, which must now be honored, without hesitation. For if the cosmos fails to its task, what could be expected from any of its parts, as noble as it might be? What infamous and unworthy mother would bring a child into the world only to instill in it the notion that he is a debtor, that he owes his life to her, and that his only fundamental preoccupation should be to remember till death this original guilt without which there is no possible existence?

Some take this situation at face value: they turn it into a religion. By advocating such a cult, they have solved the issue. Whether by erecting Mother Nature or the creating Father into an absolute monarch, they have transformed one or other of the two into an implacable divinity that requires all things to kneel submissively before its omnipresent being or its omnipotent will. These unfortunate ones sold their soul for a pittance: a pact of misery in the hope of a paltry peace. They now believe to be walking under protection; slavery has something convenient, one does not have to worry about where to sleep. It is furnished with full boarding, with a guaranteed peace of the soul as an indispensable bonus. By selling for a mess of pottage its place as a little center of the world, the singular being recognizes the prefabricated supremacy of the order of things: a pure will to which one must obey, the very state of affairs to which all must submit. An unconscious choice is being made, according to tempers.

Singular and Universal

Between the ridiculous temerity of murder and the pitiful surrender of sovereignty, two forms of cowardice and blindness which are yet very excusable, what other path remains open? Does the singular have the only possible alternative to negate the universal or to disappear into it? Must we absolutely choose between these two ways of being? Others have imagined a rather practical solution which they sometimes call the middle-way. This

conception somewhat looks like a kitchen recipe: a little of this and a little of that in well-balanced doses, you let it simmer, adjusting from time to time with a new pinch of this or that, with a lot of patience, and there you go! All is done! An example of this alternative is the one which preserves the singular aspect of existence to private life, and the primacy of the universal to public life. This produces a fully functional citizen, who during weekdays wisely obeys to the rules of the city, while his weekends and evenings are dedicated to whatever activities please him. In such a perspective, schizophrenic, the world is divided into two kinds of relations which alternate and oppose each other. On the one hand, a liberty which embodies the pure indeterminacy of being and subject; on the other hand, obligations which constitutes the determined aspect of being and subject. In this man, the individual is opposed to the city and to the citizen. For him, law is limitative and not constitutive; it is a stopgap, a lesser evil without which the freedom of others would represent an effective permanent threat. There, subjectivity is arbitrary and without any ground. In the same way, law becomes arbitrary and groundless. I am that way because I am that way; the law is as it is, but it is the law. *Dura lex sed lex*. And since we must operate within this absurd world, let's practice the middle-way, the principle of 'a bit of everything', a principle which we turn into the epitome of wisdom: the art of concession. One wonders if such a conception of existence is not the worst of all. It would seem better to act as if the singular and the universal did not exist; to behave in a completely ignorant and intuitive manner. There would be less chance to go wrong, and most of all there would not be any pretention to know what to do. Such a behavior would not erect itself as a universal maxim, in a sort of eternal return: it would not try to strengthen and to crystallize a state of fact by rationalizing it under a form or another. Absence is a lesser evil compared with a presence the distortion of which makes impossible any thought worthy of that name.

Before going further and drawing the necessary general consequences, let's work on another example of the problem of the singular and the universal. Let's take another scenario than that of man, so as not to psychologize the question too much and to avoid limiting it to the sole domain of anthropology. As always, the value of a problem lies on its universalizing power. Can we transpose it? Can we use it to enlighten other domains of

thought? How far can it lead us? Also, let's exaggerate the dilemma by grasping it through a borderline case. Taking the geometric point, let's examine what this situation can bring. A geometrical point is nothing. It has no dimension. In itself, it is absolutely undetermined and ungraspable. In fact, as long as it is not located, as long as it does not determine a location, it does not exist. In other words, the point really comes into existence from the moment where it is located on a line, or rather on two lines; for example, as an intersection between two lines. It is only as a location, by means of this intersection, that it finds an identity. Yet, if while situating it in this location we try to perceive it more precisely, it disappears from our sight. By gradually narrowing our metric, we see it dwindling even faster. We eventually have to admit, in a certain manner, that this particular point is a hole in the line, an interruption, a silence of the line. When it segments the line, it transforms it, cuts it, and alienates it: it introduces a new reality. We cannot think about it as a segment of a line. It is of a different order, even if the point seems to find an identity through its relation with the line, and even if the line seems to find an identity through a relation with the point, since the line is in a certain way a continuity of points, and specific points determine its trajectory. The point and the line are completely dependent on one another although they completely ignore each other, bundled in two different dimensions. The singular and the universal therefore require each other, even if in a certain way they otherwise completely ignore each other. Geometric reality offers us an obvious perspective on the paradoxical nature of being.

How to think? How to grasp reality? Neither a lone singular, neither a lone universal, neither alternating singular and universal, nor absence of singular and universal. What is left then to cling to? Only one option, although *a priori* it seems rather difficult to think about: the simultaneity of the singular and the universal. Even if they are radically distinct from one another, singular and universal are united in the most intimate way; they are intrinsic to one another and are unconceivable one without the other. Is singular only what is universal, is universal only what is singular. This directly follows from the principle which we baptized 'double perspective', a principle through which the simultaneity of apparent opposites constitutes the very foundation of reality, or its mirror image. This is what we have already considered

while trying to think the timelessness of time and the immateriality of matter. For the foundation of any concept is its negation, in the same way in which there can be no negation with no principle, since without a principle there would be nothing to negate. Opposites are born together, we could say, they constitutively require each other.

Thus, if we now return to our initial fourfold hypothesis: being, matter, life and thought, we do not think about it anymore as the ultimate categorization of all that we can think of, neither as a kind of metamerisation of reality and of knowledge, but as the representation of an unavoidable process, the one which generates and denies, which threatens and perpetuates, an infinite dialectic which folds and unfolds, explodes and regathers, which sows history and annihilates it, an elusive frame on which all truth tries to weave itself, all existence, any relation, every permanence, symbols and limits of the world and of our thought.

