

IPP Phenomenology of Being Series

Anxiety



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Abstract

Why are human beings anxious? Like all living creatures, the human being has desires, expectations and needs. Each individual hopes those diverse wants will be fulfilled, more or less intensely, depending on his personality. Each person constructs his existence around the pursuit of the wants that are important to him, in particular the needs, defined as a type of satisfaction that we cannot be deprived of, therefore considered necessary: it would be too painful, too intolerable otherwise.

Everyone has a sort of built-in axiology, a hierarchy of values, where we give importance and priority to specific needs. Most of the time, those needs remain on a pre-reflective level, conscious merely as a feeling, as an impulsion, not really conceptualized and analyzed, unless someone willfully engages in a rational introspection. As a shadow of these needs, in their hollow, anxiety sets in, it surreptitiously insinuates itself. The fear of not satisfying something that is considered vital, of not accomplishing or obtaining what we strongly covet, is problematic. This anxiety is twofold. On one side it provides incentive and motivation for our existential project, what makes us get up in the morning and moves us all day long, the vector that structures and directs our life. On the other side, it constitutes a source of worry, discomfort, or pain, a permanent preoccupation, emotional and intellectual, that can induce trouble and chaos in our mind, to the extent it can become overbearing and make our life impossible. In the present text, we examine those needs and the anxiety they carry. Be they fear of death, of not being loved, of feeling stupid or useless, of meaningless or others, those fears remind us of the inescapable sentiment of nothingness constitutive of our being.

Preamble

Like all living creatures, the human being has desires, expectations and needs. Each individual hopes those diverse wants will be fulfilled, more or less intensely, depending on his personality. Although some of these particular wants can as well be ignored or suppressed, either naturally, because of life events, because of aging, or through work on oneself. Each person constructs his existence around the pursuit of the wants that are important to him, in particular the needs, defined as a type of satisfaction that we cannot be deprived of, therefore considered necessary: it would be too painful, too intolerable otherwise.

Everyone has a sort of built-in axiology, a hierarchy of values, where we give importance and priority to specific needs. The gradation of those needs can be diverse: personal experiences, familial influence, cultural determination, etc., or simply the “mysterious” dynamic of what constitutes an individual character. Most of the time, those needs remain on a pre-reflective level, conscious merely as a feeling, as an impulsion, not really conceptualized and analyzed, unless someone willfully engages in a rational introspection. As a shadow of these needs, in their hollow, anxiety sets in, it surreptitiously insinuates itself. The fear of not satisfying something that is considered vital, of not accomplishing or obtaining what we strongly covet, is problematic. This

anxiety is twofold. On one side it provides incentive and motivation for our existential project, what makes us get up in the morning and moves us all day long, the vector that structures and directs our life. On the other side, it constitutes a source of worry, discomfort, or pain, a permanent preoccupation, emotional and intellectual, that can induce trouble and chaos in our mind, to the extent it can become overbearing and make our life impossible. In the present text, we examine those needs and the anxiety they carry.

1 - Life - Death

The Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza coined the concept of *conatus* as the principle of “persevering in one’s being”, which signifies that any entity tries to maintain itself in existence and preserve its integrity, its particular form. It should not be viewed as an artificial extraneous effort, as a conscious endeavor, or as a goal, but as an intrinsic dynamic at the heart of being, as a sort of primary and intimate affect. It is an internal impetus, an inclination, the expression of an essential power, the manifestation of being or existing of any substance. In a more physical way, just as the concept of inertia, it is the tendency that incites a body to maintain its way of being, be it movement or rest, against any external cause that would inhibit or exert a force against this “natural” state. For the human, as a conscious being, this can be taken as a willful and deliberate enterprise, which then involves effort and determination, amplifying the *conatus* as an intended purpose. This undertaking takes a conceptual or ideal manifestation in the concept of immortality, a fundamental archetype in thinking and culture. It takes both forms of eternity of existence of our self and maintaining the specificity of this self, what can be called identity, what makes us different from other beings. Although some philosophical schemes propose this eternity in the form of a dissolution of our particular identity, subsumed in some transcendent, ontological or cosmic broader reality. This *conatus* can as well be expressed as a “blossoming” of the self, the actualization of its potential, the realization of its intrinsic power.

As a consequence, anything threatening this natural process, inhibiting it or prohibiting it, any danger of interruption or limitation of our self is troublesome. A reality that can be called the finitude of the self, the consciousness of its different limits. In this context, the most radical threat is death, since it is a radical cessation of this essential drive. But we know that death is omnipresent, as is phrased by the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley: “Death is here and death is there, Death is busy everywhere, All around, within, beneath, Above is death, and we are death.” Therefore we are affected at different degrees by this fear, by the anxiety of mortality. And the more someone’s identity is limited to his own immediate self, the more he fears death. That is why philosophical and religious schemes propose various stratagems to overcome this anxiety: life after death, unity with the cosmos, living in the instant, identification with transcendent realities, dissolution of the self, etc. This fear of death generally deals with our personal reality, but it is easily transposed to any broader manifestation of mortality: death of relatives or friends, disease, death of animals, disappearance or collapse of any structure or phenomenon, apocalyptic perspectives, etc. Actually, unconsciously,

some people prefer to worry about “outside” death as a way to avoid facing their own death, as a sublimation of this anxiety. But fundamentally they are worried about their own death, even if they prefer to deny it. We should remember that reality is for many people primarily their own specific existence, and the extinction of their individual self signifies the “end of all”, the absurdity of everything, the meaninglessness of existence. That is the origin of this common question: “What is the point of doing anything since we know that we will die?”. The horizon of death is a constant and daily threat on the very essence of their existence. Nevertheless, the death of persons we are attached to, who are dear to us, can signify as well our own death, to the extent we feel that they are part of us: their death is our death. In a similar way, it can be the disappearance of anything constituting one’s fundamental identity, for example his creation for an artist, his firm for a businessman, etc. In this sense, for some persons, the essence of death is the cessation of their activity, the interruption of a process they are engaged in, the non-fulfillment of a mission, a cessation that they will consider unfair, scandalous or absurd. From there we can understand the anxiety about the vanishing of diverse elements or beings that they perceive as consubstantial to their being. Philosophizing is periodically proposed as “learning to die”, as dying to oneself, as learning to give up on all those attachments that seem to fulfill our existence but actually engender addiction and anxiety.

2 - Being loved - Undesirable

Love is a fundamental emotion in the human being, although it is quite polymorphous and can take even opposite meanings and directions. Love encompasses a range of strong and positive emotional and mental states, from the most sublime virtue or good habit, the deepest interpersonal affection, to the simplest pleasure. And we even find diverse words in different languages designed to express those distinctions. An example of this range of meanings is the difference between motherly love, romantic love and love of food. But in a general way, love refers to a feeling of strong attraction and emotional attachment. Love can be taken positively as a virtue representing kindness, compassion, and affection, the unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another, and negatively as a vice, a shortcoming, in particular the love for oneself as in vanity, selfishness and egotism, considered a moral flaw, or in relation to others, for example mania, obsessiveness and codependency, considered as a psychological pathology. But most negative connotations of love have more to do with some excess or lack rather than with love itself, although we can consider in a way that nothing in love itself implies any form of temperance. As a passion, it is rather unbridled, unconscious and irrational. But it is often used to describe compassionate and affectionate actions towards other humans, one's self or animals. In its various forms, it acts as a major facilitator of interpersonal relationships and existential motivation. From a social standpoint, it fulfills the function of keeping human beings together against menaces and it facilitates the continuation of the species; from there it is considered a necessity.

But contrary to common prejudice, it is not so much loving which causes anxiety, but the fear of not being an object of love, of not being loved by others, someone specific or various persons. Although most people, out of confusion, complacency or bad faith, jumble those two facets unscrupulously: either they do not distinguish “loving” and “being loved”, or they declare them indissociable. We can trace the origins of this anxiety of “not being loved” to the newborn child, whose psychological and physiological survival is based on being loved by a mother figure, and later by a father figure. This love is what guarantees his survival, and later on his self-worth. Any early deprivation of this need will haunt the future adult who will try to eternally compensate for this existential lack. One can say that the pressure of wanting to be loved by others is proportional to our incapacity to love ourselves. We always want from the outside what we cannot provide for ourselves.

One might be surprised that we address the anxiety of not being loved, but not the anxiety of loving. That is because the anxiety about active loving does not make sense in itself, since love signifies generosity and giving, in itself it is joyful and free, thus the fear of abundance is a rather oxymoronic perspective. But it seems to us that such an anxiety as the fear of loving has no direct bearing on the loving itself but only on its implications, corollaries or consequences. First, fearing pain, through disappointment and sadness, being vulnerable and easily hurt when one gets involved, worrying more, having our life become unstable and troubled, waking up pains from the past, suffering from inflicting pain on others, or just suffering from sharing their own pains. Second, fearing loss of freedom, though psychological exposure, being dependent on someone else, losing control over our life, becoming responsible for someone else. Third, fearing potency, since we affect others through our actions, speech and emotions, furthermore knowing that our passion can make us irrational, excessive and violent. Fourth, fearing impotence, since we will be facing our own limits, like an incapacity to express our feelings, of providing for the other, and the suspicion we might suffer from abandon or unrequited love, facing permanent doubt. Fifth, existential fear, since love provokes a certain dissolution of the self, our identity is shaken, our routine and habits are destabilized. Sixth, a fear of worthlessness, since we might not be worthy of being loved and we prefer not to face this painful reality which reminds us that we do not love or even appreciate ourselves. Seventh, xenophobia, since love is an uncontrolled emotion which plunges us into the unknown and the unexpected, both because we uncover this unknown dimension of our self and because we get involved with a person who is radically other, strange and unpredictable.

A basic characteristic of being loved is its unconditional dimension: we are not loved for what we do or what we have, but for ourselves, our person, without excluding other accompanying features of this self. Although one can claim, as french philosopher Blaise Pascal, that this is a pure phantasm, and that we always love someone for a reason, for certain specific attributes or utility. So we want to be an object of desire for the person, we want to be needed, and as Jean-Paul Sartre claimed, in this way we want to deprive the other person of his freedom, we want to exercise power over him. Short of this, our existence is wanting, truncated, devalued. Paradoxically, by being an object for this other, we acquire freedom, because by being desired we become potent,

since we can deprive the other of a needed or coveted possession. Thus some persons will compulsively offer themselves, or sacrifice themselves, in order to obtain or maintain their object-like status. This self-abasement is typical of those who can be called “love beggars”, who go out of their way in order to be loved. They accept unbearable and absurd situations just to protect the appearance or illusion of being loved, when all rational evidence points to the contrary, for example the “beaten spouse” syndrome.

There are different reasons why some people do not suffer from the anxiety of not being loved. For example, they sufficiently love themselves, so they do not need others to do this. Or being loved can be for them pleasant, joyful or satisfying, but it does not constitute a painful need. Or they are themselves loving persons, be it in relation to other people or in relation to some passionate activity, an attitude that fulfills their emotional needs. Or again they are peaceful and enjoy life as it comes, avoiding drama, so they do not get troubled by emotional issues.

Therefore, people who worry about not being loved generally have a bad self-conception, in the sense that they think or suspect that they are not worthy of love, they are not “lovable”, and therefore feel worthless. Or nothing in their life fulfills them sufficiently, neither activities, relations or ideals, so the only thing left is their own self, as a self-evident entity, which is valued through the eyes of the others, as the object of a desire or a need. When nothing has value, when nothing is enjoyable or exciting in life, all that is left is love. Or again they view love as the highest or the most fundamental value, but being themselves incapable of giving love, or believing themselves incapable of loving, they are constantly looking for this “being loved” as a compensation. One common characteristic of all those suffering from this need is that they suffer from chronic dissatisfaction: no matter how much they are loved by those around them, they cannot and will never feel satisfied: they will always want “more”. Or they are always anxious about losing their “being loved”, by being abandoned, forgotten or betrayed. Thus through this dramatic and obsessive perspective, they establish love as the supreme value, since it is forever wanting for them, as is any absolute. “All you need is love”, as the song says.

Love is the appreciation of reality in spite of its imperfection, its acceptance as it is, including its flaws. The fear of not being loved is the suspicion that our reality is too flawed to be acceptable. This doubt reveals our incapacity to accept ourselves as we are, to embrace our failures and reconcile with our imperfections. Thus our tendency to request this capacity from others. But since the degree of love that one gets from others is generally proportional to the degree of love one grants himself, it is likely that one will be rather disappointed. A disappointment that nurtures anxiety and probably resentment. From this standpoint, the commandment of the Gospel: “Love your neighbor as yourself”, can take a strange significance. Although the model of Christian love is Godly love: it is agape, not eros. It is pure offering and generosity, not the desire of possession; it is giving, not expecting. When the anxiety of not being loved is related to love as a form of greed, of control, of ownership. We should add that there is as well such a thing as a fear of loving, but it has more to do with the fear of attachment than

with love itself. It signifies a loss of freedom and the threat of powerlessness, which we deal with later on.

One additional acute form of the fear of not being loved manifests itself as an avoidance of any relationship, a refusal of involvement. The main reason for such an attitude is the fear of abandonment, the fear of being cheated upon, the fear of betrayal.

Fundamentally, this person thinks he cannot be loved, that any love story necessarily fails. Any possible love emotion will therefore be nipped in the bud as a dangerous existential risk; any manifestation of love from another person will be rejected or ignored, an attitude which of course will engender anger and resentment toward others and toward ourselves. They compulsively avoid attachment, which can be viewed as a form of psychological disorder. Such persons avoid intimacy and long term relationships, because they are afraid to be hurt. They might be sociable and have friends, but when it comes to "serious" feelings they tend to panic and will keep their distance. They have a hard time expressing and assuming their own feelings. They are anxious about being attached to someone, because they fear pain and betrayal, they don't want to lose their freedom and be at the mercy of another person. So, not having any profound feelings is a permanent safety net that protects them from suffering and imprisonment.

3 - Relation - Loneliness

Loneliness is an existential threat, since man is a social animal, as Greek philosopher Aristotle coined it. On our own we are more vulnerable than in a group. We are exposed to external dangers with no chance of hiding among the crowd or being protected by others. What is valid for animals is valid for man, with the added existential and psychological dimensions, but in a way the problem remains the same. The threat to our integrity becomes the threat to our identity, and the group often represents a shield against various dangers, practical and symbolic. Alone, we have to deal by ourself with our problems, both physical and mental, without any help: nobody is there to help us. And even if we are fine at a given moment, there is a fear of being alone when problems actually surge, or for when we grow old and infirm and nobody takes care of us. Being alone also exposes us to judgment on our own person, other's judgment and even our own. Since the lonely person is an outcast, someone who is rejected, someone who does not fit in, someone who is not worthy of companionship. The lonely person is therefore met with suspicion: either he prefers to be alone which is not seen as natural, or he lacks the capacity of finding friends and companions. The complete quote from Aristotle is the following: "Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god." The loner is either overhuman or subhuman, but he is not one of us. Either way, there must be something wrong with him. Most people do not want to suffer such a judgment from their fellow beings or from themselves so they make an effort to avoid loneliness. Take for example bachelorhood:

they will start a family without really having this vocation or stay married in an absurd way. Or social gatherings, which for some is an unbearable but unavoidable psychological or social obligation.

In a way, loneliness is a feeling that can be encountered even when one is objectively not alone, probably because those relations seem futile and meaningless. But it can be considered as a healthy consciousness of our own separate and individual existence. Although most of the time, loneliness is an unpleasant emotional response to perceived isolation. It can be associated with an unwanted lack of connection and intimacy, or an incapacity to establish such bonds. It overlaps and yet is distinct from solitude, which is simply the state of being apart from others. But not everyone who experiences solitude feels lonely, some enjoy this solitude because they actually enjoy their own intimacy, their own private company, generally because they are content with their own life or activity.

Very often, when someone tries to explain his need for the company of others, or his obsession with relations and social life, we can perceive a sense of worthlessness, in particular the idea that one's self is boring, uninteresting. Being stuck with oneself, having to permanently face oneself, is like facing a void, or confronting a grimacing and ugly reality. Others become the object of a need, like with a narcotic, where we can forget our miserable being in a whirlwind of bonding and socializing. One will therefore go out of his way to please others, to look for others, permanently seeking company, begging for others' presence. Their social life takes precedence over any other activity or preoccupation, even though they periodically suspect or realize the emptiness of this socializing. This mundane activity consists in attempting to display the best image possible in order to be socially attractive, therefore guaranteeing some permanent surroundings. The main problem of such a pattern is that it implies a form of internal corruption that amplifies the feeling of emptiness and worthlessness that stands as the root of this compulsive existential dynamic, increasing the fear and the pain connected to the phenomenon of loneliness.

Since we were small we learned that by being separate from others we can lose them, so we tend to become attached and find all sorts of ways to make sure they stay with us, especially if they are nurturing and protecting us, and make us feel good. Their loss would lead us to experience a sense of void, difficulty and suffering. And if some people have learned as well to accept separation and be autonomous, even have learned to enjoy their solitude, others remain in the need of a dependency, which engenders anxiety.

4 - Recognition - Forsaken

Doubt is an essential feature of human psychology, a crucial aspect of our existential project. Anguish is unavoidable, connected to our need for meaning, for sense, for worth or for integration in the whole. Therefore, the consciousness of our limited individuality and our separation from others permanently needs to be reassured, encouraged, comforted, soothed, etc. Different internal mechanisms can occur that make us autonomous by satisfying those needs, reducing them or distantiating them,

like a sense of accomplishment, a peaceful mind, a passionate activity, a strong belief, etc. But some people either do not have sufficient access to those recourses, or suffer from a more acute sense of doubt, resulting in a stronger form of anguish and therefore a stronger need for others. But unlike the lonely person who merely looks for company, this person more specifically looks for people who can reassure him, compliment him, hearten him. It is not so much the company of people he longs for, not the people themselves, but their deeds or their words, or any situation that will honor him, congratulate him, confirm the value of his self or his actions. Of course, one might claim that checking with others the value of our thoughts and actions is a normal and desirable attitude, which protects us from some dogmatic, self-enclosed or autistic pattern. But the problem arises when this desire becomes a compulsive and systematic need.

There are two aspects to this need for recognition. The fear of criticism and the fear of being ignored, two different forms of negation of our self by others. Both of these fears have their different functioning and implications. For the first aspect, some persons are very sensitive to criticism. they are very attentive to whatever others tell them or say about them. They even go out of their way trying to figure out if people speak about them even when they speak about something or somebody else. Or they strain their own understanding of people's words and actions to check if it contains some implicit criticism of their own person, sometimes with very bold interpretations. They jump at the slightest allusion to themselves, even when it is minute, even when it is meaningless, even when it is not really a criticism. They are often called paranoid, which in a way makes sense, since they are unreasonably worried, obsessively anxious, suspicious or mistrustful: they see a threat or a danger when it does not exist. They easily feel attacked and suffer from this perception. What they want, expect and need are compliments, acknowledgment, admiration or respect, all forms of positive recognition, and anything short of this can easily be transformed into scorn, contempt or depreciation. Any hint of those attitudes toward them are unbearable, for the simple reason that they echo their own judgment on themselves. In fact, they are their own worst critic, a realization which is unconscious or repressed in those persons. Thus, by a strange mechanism, they hope that the others will relieve them from their self-contempt. Others are there specifically to make them forget their sense of worthlessness, to provide them with the value they cannot provide themselves. Thus they become "recognition beggars".

The second aspect corresponds to persons who fear to be unnoticed; they need to be seen, independently of the way they are seen. Of course, they would prefer to be admired or appreciated, but since it might be difficult in a society where most individuals are primarily concerned with themselves, in an egocentric world, out of spite they accept the second option of being "negatively" noticed. All parents are familiar with the child who misbehaves in order to attract attention, a common and understandable scheme. But some adults never grow out of this desire for attention and develop a neurotic compulsion: they are ready to do anything in order to get attention from their surroundings, a desperate attempt at recognition. They will act stupidly, they will be mean and aggressive, they will destroy: the end justifies the means, and they have to

be seen, they have to stand out from the crowd of the anonymous. To be unnoticed is too painful, again because it echoes their own sense of worthlessness.

One particular case of this fear of not being recognized is a very common phenomenon vulgarly called shyness. This term is used a lot, in particular by adults speaking about children, in order to explain or justify a pattern of silence, discretion, reticence or inhibition, sometimes qualified as introversion. Those terms are used to describe the self-evidence of a character, a way of being, even the nature of a person, without any real attempt to understand the phenomenon, and of course not dealing with it. This scheme displays a paradoxical nature. One could logically state that the shy person does not seem to need recognition, that he prefers to be ignored, since he does not speak or act out. But this is the case only superficially. In general, shy people bear in mind the idea of "greatness", with two different ways to relate to it. The first type thinks of greatness as something they know but they do not have. They are not good enough, they are less great than the neighbor, but they should be great: that is the normal way, the right way to be. But since they are not "great", they remain silent so this absence of greatness remains invisible. Unconsciously, maybe they even have the credit of "greatness" if they avoid showing their "not-greatness". Through a sort of lie by omission, they hope to look better than what they are. As the proverb claims, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt." Plus silence can always look mysterious and deep. The second type of shy persons feel that they are great, generally convinced of this by an "overenthusiastic" parental figure. Those precious little princes or princesses who are shy "outside" can be a tyrant at home. Or they indeed experience some particular talent in themselves, for example gifted children can display such characteristics. But they are worried, or persuaded, that "outside people" will not realize how great they are, they might even criticize them. Thus, in order to avoid taking the risk of their greatness not being recognized or denied, they hide. They hide unless they perceive a safe or "enthusiastic" environment, until they sense there is an appropriate moment or circumstance to prove to the world their greatness or claim some recognition, or because they cannot suppress the expression of their greatness anymore, so they "explode". Periodically, observers can be surprised at the way that some--until then--shy person suddenly expresses huge pretensions or manifests great expectations, in a very unpredictable and excessive way. But in both cases of shyness we can identify a megalomaniac tendency, a fascination with "greatness", a rather comparative scheme, where one cultivates a heroic phantasm and admiration on the part of other people. And both schemes are affected by a sense of impotence, which provokes anger and resentment. That is another reason why, if or when the claim is openly spoken, it will often come out in an abrupt or emotional fashion. The "non-expression" of the shy is like a dormant volcano, animated by powerful lava streams, which might erupt at some occasion or some time. In other words, beware of shy people!

5 - Usefulness - Uselessness

One of the ways to manifest one's worth, one's existence or to be recognized, is to be useful. This can overlap the other anxieties, but it is worth identifying since it is a very specific and common existential preoccupation. The principle of usefulness is a basic social link, where one "belongs" to a community or society by helping in some way, which in exchange provides him with some benefit. It grants us recognition, social status, even love and friendship. And the deprivation of this usefulness can bring about practical and social problems, as well as psychological ones, primarily because of the absence of self-fulfilment and recognition. The work ethic is a good example of usefulness as a fundamental existential and moral principle, with the catastrophic consequences of being unemployed. One strange aspect of this usefulness principle is that we take pride in being considered as a means, as a tool or as an instrument, which means that we are not recognized as a person with value in itself, with its own end in itself, an opposite principle which should be the base of morality according to Kant. However, usefulness is also one of the basic motivations of friendship, according to Aristotle.

To be useful is a commonly shared value by numerous human beings, to different degrees, which makes sense. As the Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith proposes it, there is a natural sympathy between humans, both innate and learned. People are dismayed by the distress and lifted up by the happiness of those around them. Therefore they want to help others, and they find in this assistance some identity, value and meaning for their own life. This can be a powerful motivation for one's existence, but it can as well take place at the expense of this personal existence, as a form of sacrifice. Of course, sacrifice is not necessarily a negative concept. The fact of giving up something important or valuable to oneself in order to obtain or accomplish something that seems more important, the act of giving up a lesser worth for a higher one, can be a sign of maturity and self-control. Abandoning our own self-interest in order to satisfy the need of others presents as a healthy opposition to an infantile egocentric preoccupation. But as always with existential dynamics, as we have seen in the previous cases, the problem arises when this dynamic becomes excessive, obsessive, when it becomes systematic and overbearing, at which point it engenders anxiety. And the anxiety is the symptom of an unhealthy relation to a particular endeavor, expressing a lack of freedom and consciousness, the phenomenon of need in opposition to a desire or an existential project.

The basic issue in the anxiety of uselessness is the absence of self-worth, the negation or the suppression of the self. One has no value in himself, he only has value in terms of his utility, in his convenience to others. Therefore he will be permanently seeking those others, and if he has found them, if he has set his sights on someone or a group, he will go out of his way to be of service to them, expressing or developing a servant or even slave, even martyr, attitude and behavior. He will even impose his support, guidance or service, without even realizing the nature or intensity of this obtruding or intrusive behavior. This more or less subtle enforced help can be qualified as a form of soft dictatorship, but it can as well be applied in a harsh way. That is the very principle

of political dictatorship: to impose the good on the people, officially for their own benefit, even if they do not want it, even when they fight against it. One knows best what is good for others, the principle of benevolent or enlightened despotism.

The “useful” person knows what is good, what others need. There is a permanent oscillation between giving others what they explicitly ask for, what they think is good for themselves, and guessing or deciding what these others need, since the useful person wants to do the best for these others, which often is more or different than what they express as their desire, or even different than what they think they need. This easily becomes an almighty god behavior. God provides for the needs of his children, but often it does not correspond to what those children claim or think they need; it might in fact be just the opposite. God knows better than we do what we need, and because he is generous he will disregard our claims and provide us with our real needs. But some “useful” persons have no such claims, and content themselves with being on a permanent lookout, to be available and alert to the slightest whim of others.

In opposition to the previous scheme where the “helper” is a god, in this one the “helped” becomes a little god. The slavish or servile helper will permanently abase himself to provide and satisfy his idol, at the expense of his own needs, desire, or self-accomplishment. But inevitably, because of the excess of this helping behavior, there will be moments when the “little god” does not want any assistance, he wants to be left alone. The helper will then try to help anyhow and push his “luck”, or he will withdraw into himself in a sad or resentful mood. Furthermore, the “little god”, realizing this servility and even inconvenienced by it, will be strongly tempted to play some vicious or sadistic power games, humiliating further the helper. Thus, we can say that even the servile helper exerts a form of tyranny, by the constant presence and pressure he deploys on his unwilling victim. He will resist any refusal for help, he will neither understand it nor accept it, he will take such resistance quite personally as a rejection of his own self, since this “usefulness” is the core of his identity. Such an encounter can take a violent turn, since some persons manage to really shove help down the throat of the person, or attempt to do so, one way or another. The mere perspective of not being needed is unbearable for “helpers”, only comparable to the absence of the expected gratitude, the ultimate reward. Mothers often suffer from such a scheme, oscillating between a “queen” status, since she controls the household and she is so important, and a servant, since she attends to everyone’s needs. Of course, she is permanently hoping for gratitude and recognition that never really come, or not sufficiently so.

A common paradox is that “helpers” want for others what they do not want for themselves, they want others to do what is good for them, but they do not apply those same standards to their own self. Others are thus advised or encouraged to study, to develop themselves, to do something interesting, to practice healthy activities, etc., but the helper does not himself follow his own counsel. This scheme is very typical of parental behavior, with the result of lacking credibility in the eyes of their children, especially when they reach adolescence. And those naive parents do not understand why their authority is not very effective, since they do not perceive the nature and effect of their own performative contradictions. The “useful” person often indulges in giving

advice, short of any concrete action, as a way of avoiding action, or through acting by proxy, a very convenient posture.

By instrumentalizing himself, the “helper” can avoid or sublimate his own sense of worthlessness or meaninglessness. He has a sense of purpose, he feels he accomplishes something. Of course, this can constitute a legitimate perspective. To the extent it corresponds to a real need in others, to the extent it is not excessive, to the extent it is conscious of its own limits, to the extent it does not infringe on the freedom and autonomy of the ones he wants to help, to the extent it is not a declaration of ownership, to the extent it is not a forced credit that expects a heavy payback of the debt. In other words, to the extent his endeavor is actually altruistic, and not simply using the other to satisfy his own wants and to calm his own existential anguish. As a typical form of excess, we encounter the common phenomenon of codependency. It characterizes an imbalanced relationship where one person allows or fosters another person's weakness, such as addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement, in order to be continuously needed. It can typically include high self-sacrifice, which gives it a semblance of credibility and value. The “helper” remains totally focused on the others' needs, suppressing his own emotions and needs while attempting to control or fix other people's problems, creating a situation of “mutual neediness”. He exhibits a low self-esteem, both as a cause and effect of the codependency situation.

6 - Freedom - Constraint

Freedom is an attribute or an ability that is consubstantial with the fact of being human. We distinguish ourselves from animals because we are conscious, we can reason, we can reflect and deliberate upon our thoughts and actions, diverse capacities that make us free. Man is the animal that can truly modify his environment and himself, for the better and the worse. But evidently, this freedom knows its limits. First, the internal limits, what is called finitude: we are fragile, imperfect, mortal, dependent, weak, etc. Second, the external limits, the reality of the outside world, be it other beings that can hinder our actions, that have their own opposite desires or needs, or the materiality of things, which has its own rules and principles. Thus, our potential freedom is delayed, inhibited, paralyzed or denied by numerous realities beyond our control. And if some individuals have reconciled with those limits and with their finitude, others have a hard time with it, and they are anxious about all or any factors that could therefore restrain, curb or proscribe their freedom.

The principle of freedom or free will presupposes in general a substrate for this freedom: the subject. In logic or in syntax, in a sentence or proposition, the subject is a person, entity or phenomenon that is being discussed, described, or dealt with, that gives rise to a specific feeling, that produces a response or an action, what can be called the pivot or center of the sentence. In philosophy, the subject is in the same way a pivot or center, primarily either as the cause of an action or an agent undergoing a process. More specifically, it refers primarily to the human in his capacity to be conscious of his self and his identity, to deliberately act upon the world and upon

himself. He is the origin and the foundation of his representations, his actions, his judgments and his beliefs. He is endowed with subjectivity: the characteristics which belong uniquely to an individual, his feelings, his emotions, his thinking, his power and way of acting, what defines this subject. Therefore a subject aspires to express his subjectivity, his way of being, his desires and will, and to realize his own aspirations. Of course, many factors--internal and external--restrain, inhibit or prohibit this subjectivity, a reality that is bothersome, painful or unacceptable for some persons, an objective factuality that can be very preoccupying. Let us examine the primary forms of this constraint that can irritate, torment or concern the individual anxious to protect or express his subjectivity, to manifest his free will.

- First are the rules, written or unwritten, the laws or principles regulating human existence. There are social rules, material rules (for example gravitation), moral rules, all of which bear their weight and affect our free will and the expression of our subjectivity. The individual who entertains an acute or tense relation to his subjectivity views these rules as oppressive. What for some others is a mere necessity that has to be recognized and accepted, a feature constitutive of reality one has to cope with or even enjoy, are for him unpleasant or agonizing, therefore have to be resisted and fought against. As much as possible, he will avoid them or confront them, preferring to undergo the problematic consequences of such a confrontation rather than passively accepting them.
- Second is reason, since processes such as logic designate a chaining of actions and consequences, causes and effect, that condition and determine our power of being, affecting and limiting the expression of our thoughts and the realization of our desires. The adept of freedom will prefer to any such consideration his internal drives and impulses, his spontaneous thoughts, all of which constitute his own private self. Feelings are his leitmotiv, his real self, more primitive and immediate, he trusts his own intuitions; he does not care so much about taking time and effort to analyze, he views reason as a formal, artificial, external and unwelcome constraint. He easily refuses common sense and common language, preferably referring to his own private logic and private meaning of words. He frequently claims not to be understood by others, invoking a mysterious intention behind his own words (What I want to say is...) and negating the factuality and significance of the words he already pronounced. He as well pretends to be creative, to think out of the box, unlike all those conventional people.
- Third is morality, since such systems or values and principles determine how one should conduct his life and regulate his actions. By deciding what is right or wrong, an obligation is created that infringes on our free will. Either by producing a feeling of guilt and shame, or by straightforwardly prohibiting actions under the threat of some form or another of retaliation. Their being "belongs" to them, body and mind, and it is up to them to decide what they do with it, even if it means self-destruction.
- Fourth is society, or others, since the mass of these people are foreign to his subjectivity and rather alien or antagonistic to it. This derives from the fact that by definition a subjectivity is private, specific to an individual, and all individuals

being different, each one pursues the realization of his own subjectivity. The mere encounter with the other already signifies a loss of freedom, if only because he is looking at me and thinking of me as an object, even judging me. From this standpoint, subjects are incompatible and conflictual with each other, even if occasionally one subjectivity might coincide with another in some specific aspects. Plus very often this mass of others tends to produce and enforce principles which they deem right or good, thus ignoring the principle of self-determination of the subject. As well, others want to help us, they even impose their assistance, or engender some form of dependence, depriving the subject of his autonomy.

- Fifth is authority, be it social, political, practical, moral or intellectual, since those authorities detain a certain form of power that can infringe on the freedom of the subject. In political terms, the subject even becomes the member of a group other than its ruler or governing body, that has to abide by the commandment of this ruler or governing body, and the laws he promulgates. The sensitive subject will view any action by an authority as a direct and offensive attack on his own subjectivity, on his freedom to act and think what he wishes. Therefore he is very touchy on the subject of equality, since he has as much of a right as anyone else to “be himself”, and no one can pretend to impose himself upon others, whatever the reason is for this imposition. Although de facto, since he is concerned almost exclusively with his own subjectivity, he will naturally and unconsciously impose it on anyone else. For example in a dialogue, he cannot stand to be interrupted, he enjoys claiming he has the right to his opinion, but this right often allows him to interrupt others and to harshly criticize them, since that is the way he feels. He instinctively tries to establish his own tyranny on those surrounding him, unless he decides to escape the burdensome company of his fellowmen.
- Sixth is commitment, or attachment, since it signifies an engagement or obligation, active or passive, that necessarily restricts his potential or future freedom of action. For example relationships, which imply to take into consideration the subjectivity of another person, making concessions to an alien and potentially opposing and therefore threatening subjectivity. We grant to the other one some power over our being. As well, since the sensitive subject has a difficult time to assume a consequential principle, he avoids any resolution or arrangement that will mortgage his general freedom. So it is with promises, that he will either avoid making them or he will not honor them. As well rooting oneself or settling down can represent a form of such binding commitment, even if it is to oneself. Mobility is associated with our capacity to flee from danger, real or phantasmatic, therefore when being grounded we experience a threat to our capacity to escape. Routine is another form of freedom deprivation, from there the unpredictability of one fearing it.
- Seventh is judgment, since such determinations and conclusions coming from someone or a group confine the subject to some fixed category or proposition that binds him and his identity. Besides the fact that the one that pronounces this judgment assumes a right to do so, implicitly granting himself some type of

authority or superiority over the one he judges. We become a mere object for the other, losing our status and our free will. The sensitive subject easily perceives the negative or critical dimension of such judgments, especially on moral issues. He does not view a judgment as a legitimate pronouncement, for example founded on reason, but as an arbitrary comment of a given subject or group of subjects on another subject, in other words as a totally subjective statement, probably gratuitous or even aggressive. As well, he doesn't like to be judged because he feels labelled, put in a category that defines him, along with other persons, when he wants to be his "own category".

- Eighth is our self, since our own being is an impediment to being free. This phenomenon is rather frequent in teenagers, and in persons who remain rather immature or entertain a bad self-conception. They actually feel impotent, they are indecisive, they do not know or would not know what to do with any potential or possible freedom. Thus their only claim to freedom is to reactively say "no" to the outside and to feel resentful against any imposition or constraint, but when faced with choices and decisions, they are lost, they feel impotent, an ill-being from which comes out even more resentment. Paradoxically, this fear of freedom deprivation is actually a fear of one's own freedom: we are the obstacle to this freedom.

The fear of not being free, in spite of its excesses and limitations can, like all other particular fears, condition or constitute an existential dynamic, a purpose and a meaning for life. The "adept" of freedom will therefore pursue the accomplishment of his own singularity, in spite of all the constraints. He will refuse established rules, customs and conventions, on which he bears a critical or suspicious eye. For example, an artist who follows his own path, without any consideration for trends, classical canons or even public taste, an attitude which in a sense can preserve his integrity. Or an entrepreneur who innovates, against all advices and objections, indifferent to any negative feedback on his project, he will pursue the goal he has given himself, his internal drive. Since their free will and self-determination comes first, they will not respect established rules, traditions or common opinion. Thus they naturally enter into conflict with others, with society, with institutions, with reality. Unless they manage to isolate themselves. In this sense they can be creative, but they can as well, or at the same time, fall into chaos and mayhem. They have a hard time to collaborate with others, unless those others accept the dominion of their subjectivity. As well, because they tend to be rather unpredictable, being rather inconsistent and whimsical. Strangely enough, those freedom lovers are often not respectful of others' freedom, which they ignore and combat, since their own subjectivity rules. They are critical of society but their own behavior is often erratic and irresponsible. Unlike many people, they choose a precarious and adventurous lifestyle over comfort and security. They might be admired or despised, but they are preferably kept at distance. Some choose the path of the fugitive, fleeing, in order to remain free. But they sense that there is something flawed in this scheme, since it becomes another form of dependence.

One last point about freedom which constitutes a strong social preoccupation and public worry, bearing on the emergence and power of the internet and the popularization of social networks, is the issue of privacy. This issue can be formulated first of all as the conflict of two opposite forms of freedom: the freedom to express oneself, the uninhibited circulation of information, and the freedom to protect oneself, the right to prevent the exposure of our private life. Actually, it is a modern version of the old problem: "One person's freedom ends where another person's freedom begins". The concept of person can here be applied to a physical person or to a moral one, as a private organization or public institution. A second formulation is the opposition between safety and freedom, where one should decide to what extent the political executive or the judiciary have the right to control and examine the flow of information for the sake of collective wellbeing and security. Depending on their personal sensitivity, each individual's anxiety about loss of freedom will be more inclined toward one side or the other in those debates on privacy. But it seems that diverse preoccupations intertwine in this problem. First, as we said, the freedom to express ourselves, to protect our intimacy, but as well our freedom to know and the right to protect our own security, which often contradict each other. Second, the issue of power, between ourselves, other persons, and as well diverse institutions, public or private, separate and opposite centers of control which easily come into conflict. Third, the issue of shame, the fear of being seen as we are, with our flaws and defects, when at the same time we often rejoice in seeing the others revealed, with their flaws and defects, including to shame them, in particular when they are people of fame or power or when we have some grudge against them.

7 - Value - Worthlessness

Some people appreciate their own self and existence, others have a very bad self-conception, they are rather not happy about their own being; they sustain what is commonly called a "low self-esteem". But they find this feeling painful, so they compensate for it by means of numerous endeavors: social success, love, intense activity, pursuing wealth, power or fame, knowledge, etc., in order to gain worth, to have value. But throughout their particular quest, the "ghost of worthlessness" keeps haunting them, and drives them further along in pursuing their goal. And by intensely focusing on the object of their pursuit, they attempt unconsciously to forget about their painful feeling, about their fear, and more or less manage to realize this oblivion. Some people actually and explicitly feel worthless, but those who fear worthlessness the most are precisely, coherently so, the ones who try the most to forget about it by acting out in order to negate this perception. This offers the common paradox that people who are pretentious and arrogant, or seem very self-assured, are the ones who fear their own miserability the most, a paradox that fools many people, rather trusting the appearances. It will be much harder for them to admit this suspicion about their being, they will resist and protest, become aggressive with anyone pointing their finger at the issue. One typical manifestation of this fear is the susceptibility of those "worthless" people, their insistence and expectation on being admired, lauded or respected, which

make them jump and become aggressive at the slightest criticism, in a way that can surprise their interlocutor. Perfectionism, the obsession with being faultless, either by working a lot for avoiding imperfections or by simply denying any wrongdoing or mistake, is a common form of the phenomenon. Indeed some people manage, through persistence, labor, abnegation and self-challenge to produce such an image, to accomplish "great things", to be successful in one way another, to provoke admiration in the eyes of others, fooling everyone including themselves about their actual self-conception. It is true that those realizations or achievements can actually compensate to a certain extent for the bleak perspective that inhabits their soul, engendering a sort of peace with themselves, a certain satisfaction. But this success and self-satisfaction will always be tormented, carrying a dose of suspicion, since will always remain a permanent and indelible whiff of imposture in their posturing. Perfectionism is in fact a form of self-inflicted punishment: one is never good enough, one work and deeds are never good enough, one has to whip himself into doing eternally better. Perfection is the right way to be, the only adequate perspective: the absolute is a must, an obligation. It can be called the "sinner" syndrome. Humans are intrinsically defective, imperfect, viciated, thus the self is worthless, vile, defective and dirty. Godhead is the right way to be, the only acceptable criteria. Thus one has to suppress his nature, to torture it, to inflict on it diverse painful obligations and impositions, in a desperate attempt that might save him from his own doom. One can be surprised when observing some victims of perfectionism, noticing to which extent they enforce on their existence a strenuous pace, harsh and permanent exigency, a self-abnegation that seems excessive, hurting and distressing. One can observe this for example with overzealous students, people who go out of their way to look good, hyper-conscientious employees, obsessive entrepreneurs, all different types of extreme painstaking behavior. The forms taken by the imperfection are of various nature: mistake, physical ugliness, dirtiness, disorder, failure, etc. Each one will unconsciously choose his most dreaded feature, what echoes the "best" his idea of worthlessness. Of course, the gaze of the other is crucial in this dynamic, his judgment, or rather his potential judgment, since most of the time it is a feared or imaginary judgment more than the actual judgment itself that is taken in account and driving the perfectionist. The hypothetical or phantasmatic gaze is the one that is feared. For the perfectionist, the other person's gaze is a mere projection of his own gaze, since the most critical and harsh judgement is the one he passes on himself, in his quest of absolute. Thus he fears being seen, he fears being humiliated by the slightest remark, he fears being bad, he fears being ugly, stupid, fat or short, vain or incompetent, and his reactions to the outside can be for this brutal or violent, explicitly so or in a passive-aggressive manner. But, as we have already mentioned it, this anxiety of worthlessness can be a strong incentive, the engine of a powerful existential dynamic that can make someone accomplish great things. That is if the victim of worthlessness does not get bogged down in minute and useless details, if he does not get too affected or even depressed because of his insufficiencies, if he overcomes or ignores the conflicts this can create with his surroundings, if he can stay focused on the task he wants to accomplish, he can be very powerful and realize deeds that will impress others, somewhat forgetting

through his intensive actions and through the granted rewards his painful phobia. People who fear worthlessness try to build a “beautiful” image of themselves, which can either be grounded or fictitious. But the more this image is overinvested, the more it is excessive, the more it is artificial, the more anxious those people will be, the more they will be sensitive and easily feel hurt or humiliated by unpleasant circumstances or judgments.

One classical form of a perceived feeling of worthlessness is depression, in a mild or acute form. Depression is an affective state indicating a loss of interest or a loss of feeling of pleasure with activities that usually bring joy to the person, and therefore causing an aversion to activity for lack of motivation. Nothing has any worth, neither the world nor the self. An ancient term used for it was dejection, a lowness of spirits, which literally meant “cast down”, or downcast, a word which in French means “excrement”, which we can connect to the familiar expression “feeling shitty”. In a way, depression is contrary to anxiety, since anxiety is rather a state of excitement. But people who are prone to depressive states feel unstable, have a difficult time to be confident, persevering in their endeavors and enjoying their life. The threat of depression hangs permanently over their mental state, a rather anxiogenic if not pathological state. That’s why some people do not dare stop taking antidepressants, being afraid that depression will come back, even though those medications are intellectually impairing.

8 - Meaning - Absurdity

Periodically, people claim they are looking for meaning in their life, as if in itself their life had no meaning, as if life was not a sufficient value. As well, they might consider that their existence or the world were absurd, so they express their thirst for discovering some hidden meaning, or their desire to construct such meaning. But the term is polysemic, the word meaning has precisely different meanings. First, it can refer to what is meant by a word, text, concept, or action, its content, what can be understood in it. Second, it can refer to its implied or explicit significance, the fact it is worthy or not of attention, its importance. Third, it can refer to its quality of worthiness, its interest or value, specifying its domain of interest. Fourth, it can refer to its purposefulness, its integration in an accomplishment, in a goal, making it rational, coherent and sound, or senseless, absurd and futile. Fifth, it can refer to its echoe in the world, its correspondence to reality, its depth or extent, its universality. Most of the time, people who want their life to have meaning, those that fear meaninglessness have a purely intuitive and vague understanding and relation to this term. What they “know” is that living, fulfilling obligations, accomplishing daily chores and pursuing little pleasures is not sufficient: something important is lacking, so they have a need for “meaningfulness”, without really knowing what they want. An ignorance that funnily amplifies the sense of meaninglessness, since they want something but they don’t know what it is, they fear something, but they don’t know what it is, since they cannot explain it. They can only sadly or desperately repeat this word, as a mantra, as a repetitive lament, as a regret or a remorse about something they should have but they don’t have, that they don’t find and cannot find, since they don’t even know what to look for and how to look for it. All

they know is that there is “something out there”, or “something inside”, something beyond their daily life that they would like to consciously integrate to their life, otherwise their life is missing something fundamental without which it is not really worth living. There are some common ways encountered, which somewhat concretize the idea of “meaning”. In the slavic world, a popular concept is “vocation”. People periodically are eager to know what their “vocation” is, and the word used for this in slavic languages literally means “pre-assignment” or “pre-purpose”. It has a sort of religious foundation, very much in tune with this particular tradition, since it implies that we came on earth with a specific goal, some divine intention just conceived specifically for each one of us, as singular beings. Thus many persons, who of course have not identified this mysterious “purpose”, feeling unsatisfied with their life like most other human beings, view the discovery of this “vocation” as the solution to their own unhappiness, as the healing of their own personal drama. Rarely do they discover it by looking for it, if it has not already dawned on them as evidence. This concept is, more than anything else, the manifestation of an anxiety. Either their life already has some sense, some idea of purpose, then “vocation” is a non-issue for them, or they have not found it, and the mystery will remain forever. But the mere supposition that there is such a “vocation”, even if unidentified, is already a relief, since it implies that there is meaning, even if this meaning is unknown. A mystery which anyway is coherent and expectable, since “the paths of the Lord are inscrutable”.

Less religious and more pragmatic is the search for purpose. Some persons are looking for a purpose, some activity, some vocation, some accomplishment they could get involved in, with the unsaid hope that they would be suited for it, capable of it. The absence of such purpose gives a sense of chaos, of arbitrariness, like if their life was inchoate, like if it had not really started. They have the impression that they are going through the motions, that they satisfy unsatisfying external constraints, that the pleasures they pursue and cater to do not truly content them. They need a goal, a passion, some type of commitment where they would have the feeling they are realizing themselves, actualizing their potential. Short of this, they are suspicious or convinced that something is lacking, that they are failing or missing their own personal goal, that their existence is therefore meaningless.

Religion plays or has played a major role in this issue. Life is not sufficient in itself, the human needs to exist, the human has to humanize himself, since to be truly human, is not a given: one has to realize his humanity. Thus, in order to do this, are proposed transcendent and ontological schemes, explanations of the world and its genesis, psychological and philosophical dogmas, wisdom and moral recomandations, different types of askesis and practices, etc. The heavy conceptual and practical apparatus of most religions, the commitment it requires on the part of the adept, the psychological and intellectual involvement, combine “nicely” and manage to indeed soothe the needs and anxieties, or actually dissolve them, in spite of the fears most religions promulgate. This already provided religious matrix helps to overcome despair and worry about one’s own existence, a “gift” from which is deprived the contemporary atheistic person. Worse even is it for the post-modernist thinker, who is deprived of any ready-made meta-narrative in which he could inscribe his own being. He is therefore abandoned to

himself, having to invent his own “meaning”, his own “purpose”, his own “explanation”, condemned to making up his own “consolation”, obliged to formulate his own religion, his own recipe of wisdom.

Political doctrines or philosophical schools as well have this traditional function, in different ways. But the philosophical work can as well imply a personal reflection, the making up of one’s particular thinking matrix or intellectual thesis. Nevertheless, like the religious drive, the interest in philosophy generally echoes a fear of meaninglessness, in particular when one makes it the center of his activity or his profession. The quest or foundations, the temptation of radicality, the fascination with the absolute, metaphysical speculation, will probably echo a fear of meaninglessness, or the more radical fear of nothingness that we will examine later on. The lack of value or significance of our self in the world, the lack of consistency or purposefulness of the world itself, the disappearance of the gods, are so many reasons to perceive meaninglessness and pursue some compensatory activity.

Meaning and absurdity come together, chasing each other, completing each other. Meaning gives value to the individual, while absurdity is an object of criticism and scorn. One has to understand, not understanding is unbearable. Meaning provides substance and identity, it can be built upon, it provides tangibility and certainty, while absurdity fleets like sand through our fingers, nothing can be grasped. Alas, absurdity is part of our life, since many phenomena seem fortuitous, arbitrary, irrational, unreasonable and incomprehensible. Facing this threat, we give our life meaning through ideals, occupations, rules, forms, logic, explanations, etc. We stuff our existence with theories, gadgets, commitments, obligations, pleasures of all kinds in order to avoid having to face and think about the absence of meaning. But no matter how thick is the fortress we construct, we will always oscillate between both facets of this opposition, we will always have to face meaninglessness, a perspective that is more intense or more painful for some persons than others, since some individuals feel quite at home in the land of absurdity.

One common and particular form of meaninglessness is hopelessness. This despair is an emotion that builds upon a personal feeling of having lost all hope of success or satisfaction in any domain, existential, relational, professional, etc. It results in a lack of confidence in oneself and in others, a lack of trust in the world and everything, provoking discouragement, disinterest, apathy and helplessness. The impossibility of hope deprives reality from any meaning. But since the human is an animal of desire and expectations, he always has “hopes”, or “high hopes”, often excessive, where he views the world or the future as the “great provider”. This uncontrolled extravagance is always threatened with disappointment and despair, and this permanent anticipation is a constant cause of anxiety. The more the desire or the need is strong, the more anxiogenic it is. Hope is the path to despair, it is always threatened by its own shadow.

9 - Intelligence - Stupidity

“Man is a rational animal”, wrote Greek philosopher Aristotle. Therefore to think and be intelligent is a fundamental aspect of our identity, what gives value to our person and to

our life. Because of this, the fear of stupidity is a rather popular cause of anxiety. It can be considered a form of worthlessness, but it has enough importance and particularity to be dealt with as a separate issue. And it takes two different forms, which might overlap in some individuals or actually be specific in others. There is the fear of being stupid, and the fear of looking stupid, equivalent to being judged stupid by others. The first describes more an intrinsic relation with oneself, it gives precedence to the objective dimension of the phenomenon, the second is more preoccupied with the relation to others, the subjective or intersubjective dimension of the phenomenon. But the grounding is the same: idiocy as loss of value, loss of status, loss of a substantial identity. Plus, no one fears looking stupid unless he surmises his own stupidity. The primary manifestation of this anxiety is the fear of mistakes. This fear of mistake that the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel qualified as the first mistake. For indeed that is the paradox of this anxious phenomenon. The person who dreads stupidity will make himself look stupid, will act stupidly, will actually even become stupid. This process takes place in different typical ways, all rather commonly observable.

Blundering

The person who is anxious about making mistakes will naturally make mistakes, out of a strange psychological mechanism. This can be explained as a self-fulfilling prophecy: when someone "predicts" or expects something, and this "prediction" or expectation comes true simply because the person believes it will. Thus the person's resulting behaviors align to fulfill the belief, based on the idea that people's beliefs influence their actions. Individuals provoke consequences regarding people or events based on their acquired knowledge or convictions. Or it can be explained by the nervousness of the person fearing mistakes, a psychological disturbance that makes him lose his natural reasoning capacities, which results in blundering.

Paralysis

The person who fears making a mistake hesitates when time comes to make choices, to answer a question, to take action, to solve a problem or to propose an idea. He will overthink, envisage all the consequences, particularly the negative ones. This overthinking is actually not thinking but worrying. Rational thinking is free, although not spontaneous, not deprived of rules, but it is creative and joyful, when worrying is compulsive, repetitive and painful. But many people who claim they think too much actually don't think: they merely worry, a common oversight or misinterpretation. Like the famous Buridan donkey who died of hunger and thirst stuck between a pail of water and a pail of barley, the person fearing mistake will forever avoid deciding: commitment is too risky. Plus no matter what he chooses, he suspects he will most likely make the wrong choice.

Boasting, showing-off

The person who fears looking stupid will go out of his way to look smart and even imposing. Through loudness, excessive joking, displaying superfluous or inappropriate

erudition, pontifying, rigid dogmatism, peremptory speech, arrogant behavior, seduction techniques, compulsive commenting, systematic critics, stubbornness, bad faith, whimsical ideas, etc. The performative dimension of the discourse attempts to engender in the subject some self-confidence, or pretends to do so for the public, causing a stunning, fascinating or admiring effect on the interlocutors. But it can just as well produce the opposite effect, where the auditors will judge negatively the speaker, a reality that the latter realizes or at least intuitively presumes. He then either can abandon, get upset or up the ante by intensifying his strategy, often with “catastrophic” consequences, since later on he will feel even more stupid. Although the moment of power they granted themselves can provide some pleasurable and illusory compensation.

Playing stupid or ingenuous

Some people play dumb or naive as an existentially and relational strategy, an attitude or behavior which can provide a safe and stable posture. For example they can act like if they didn't understand or even notice what was said or what was going on, or they can openly pretend not to understand the obvious or not see it, or again to unconsciously hide in a comfortable non-understanding position. The claim and ostentation of spontaneity, to be frank and direct, belongs as well to this scheme, a brainless “goody” posture. This stance allows avoiding commitment and taking the risk of making mistakes, or avoiding conflicts. Strangely enough, stating openly or implicitly “I am stupid” is an easy way of looking smart, of having an “interesting”, “original” and “different” personality, since others rather pretend being smart. Acting stupid can be a passive-aggressive attitude, indicating a refusal to dialogue, a denial of openness and honesty. It can as well represent a seduction strategy, either by being funny or cute, or by granting the other person the role of the “intelligent” one, a flattering concession that pleases vain, insecure or superficial persons. It can be called the soft power of the weak, a typical manipulatory strategy, a calculation of effect, even if most likely it will be only temporary, until things become more “serious”. And paradoxically, those “actors of stupidity” expect anyhow to be perceived as smart, thus any clear accusation of idiocy might trigger anger in them.

A general question can be asked about those different manifestations of the anxiety of stupidity. How substantial or essential, constitutive of the self are those features? Are they accidental and of no consequence, is it only appearance and games of perception, or do they actually participate in making the person more stupid? It seems we can answer yes and no to this question. It can remain an occasional, conscious and rather deliberate attitude, therefore not fundamentally affecting the person's intellectual capacities, but when it becomes systematic and involuntary, which tends to be the case, then it becomes a structural modification of the self. We can observe a real reduction in the cognitive capacities when people are anxious about being stupid,, because they are focused on secondary issues or on the outside, but not on a task or idea they have to deal with, a tendency that easily becomes a habit. In other words, most likely, the fear of stupidity actually makes people stupid.

10 - Satisfaction - Suffering

There is a principle called the "principle of pleasure" meaning every human being, as animals, tends to avoid pain and to search for pleasure. Pleasure is the state of feeling or being satisfied and therefore happy, pain indicating dissatisfaction: things are not as we would like them to be, the feeling is unpleasant. But if animals know primarily immediate pains, humans can anticipate pain, an anticipation that is in itself painful. Some people suffer from pain more than others. Because of this sensitivity, they fear pain more than others, which implies that they suffer more than others. They suffer more because they are more sensitive, and they suffer more because they anticipate more of their sufferings. They have pain from thinking about the pain, they suffer from the anxiety of pain. As a result, some suffer more from the pain of anxiety than from any other pain: anxiety then becomes a self-feeding process, endless and ever present. At a certain point, it does not need a precise or specific object anymore, it becomes a generalized anguish, which can be quite painful. In psychopathology it designates a state of ill-being which manifests itself by an internal sensation of oppression and tightening felt in the body. This is usually accompanied by a fear of misfortune or imminent death against which the subject feels powerless. It is a great affliction accompanied with worry, our very existence, in its abyssal dimension, becomes a source of pain of moral and metaphysical nature.

Pain is polymorphous, and with different personalities the source of pain might differ. One common contemporary form is connecting to feelings, as is visible in the expression "hurting someone's feelings", mine or someone else. This sensitivity has become so popular that "hurting feelings" has become a popular argument to criticize someone, in his deeds, his words, his interactions with others. This scheme is very much connected to the victim mentality, where one passively undergoes external phenomena in a powerless way. We describe ourselves as weak and impotent individuals with no internal recourse, who are stuck with full force by outside events. Existential or psychological freedom is denied, we have no responsibility for our own mental state, a rather heteronomous system. We define ourselves a priori as suffering beings, in both senses of the term: as subjected to external forces and as being in pain. Connected to the previous meaning is another form of this anxiety of pain: the "Disney", or "Care bears" syndrome. These are people that refuse to see, accept and understand the negative, dark or unpleasant dimension of reality, the tragic dimension of life. They prefer to live in some fantasy world, for they consider unbearable any unpleasant feature of existence. They want to be nice, they want everyone to be nice, they want to think positively and only pay attention to the "good" sides of things, negating anything unpleasant or painful. Of course, this allows them to decline or ignore any sense of responsibility, a rather childish behavior, linked to the Peter Pan syndrome. And when this negativity becomes obvious or imposes itself on them, they either become depressed or angry, feeling impotent to deal with it. They tend to explain everything in terms of feelings, theirs in particular, concealing or refuting reality or reason. They are fearful of any confrontation. And since they project this scheme on others, they easily interpret any action that does not fit their scheme as being animated with "evil

intentions”, as an expression of violence or brutality. Those “feelings” people fear all kinds of pains, starting with psychological aches or annoyances such as instability, discomfort or any kind of uneasiness. The concepts of effort or challenge are not so pleasant and sought, they are rather complacent with themselves: they have a consumerist mentality. They react to immediate effects of events, they trust their subjective perceptions and interpretations, especially when they feed their apprehensions. They do not reason or examine consequences, since it is beyond their feelings and might question their validity. Since they want to avoid any pain, they tend to ignore or kill the “messenger”: the bearer of bad news is not welcome, especially if he intends to criticize them: guilt, rejection, responsibility or shame would be too painful. They are what the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi calls « little people », those who privilege cowardice and pettiness, in opposition to the « noble people » who privilege truth, grandeur and wider horizons. Those “feeling” people easily fall into addictions, such as alcohol, drugs, medications or gaming, anything providing immediate pleasures and allowing them to forget reality. Such a scheme can as well make them become cynical, mean or fatalist, as different strategies to sublimate or to neutralize pain. Political correctness is another manifestation of this phenomenon, which proposes to eliminate « negative words » as a way to ban negativity, an attitude which can easily become aggressive towards the “outside” or any form of otherness.

A more metaphysical or ontological form of anxiety about pain is the religious or psychological fear of “existential” punishment. It can be of a transcendent nature, for example the Christian last judgment, that will decide, based on our deeds, if we go to hell, paradise or purgatory, the equivalent tribunal of Osiris in the Egyptian religion, the Erinyes in the Greek mythology, pitiless demons that pursued the criminal in order to punish him. It can be as well of an immanent nature, like the karma, designating the cycle of causes and consequences linked to the existence of sentient beings. It establishes that all individual actions have repercussions on the future lives of an individual, as a form of retribution. Or it can simply be the belief in a rational principle that everything is connected, therefore the good and bad caused to others will be naturally returned to us. This anxiety about future punishment will guide their actions, generally with strong moral implications.

A more general form of suffering is the discontentment or unhappiness about unsatisfied desires. Some persons are very prone to desire, and in general they are quite sensitive to the fact or the mere idea of not fulfilling their wishes, the intensity of their desire easily becoming actual needs, a satisfaction that cannot be done without. Craving to achieve a certain result or goal produces a strong expectation that feeds the fear of failure and lack. Each desire then tends naturally to generate a tension corresponding to an anxiety of pain. As we grow up, one is supposed to limit and temper his desires and learn to accept that expectations are not always fulfilled, a more peaceful attitude. But some persons have not really matured, thus they are permanently coveting an object or another, a chaotic state of mind that is quite anxiogenic. Beside the fact that their whimsical attitude prohibits any potent and consistent enterprise or undertaking in order to satisfy their desire. They develop a sense of impotence that furthers even more their anxiety and their pain. One intellectual feature that denotes

such a fear of not being satisfied is the obsession with results, in opposition to being attentive to processes. This will impair the thinking faculties of such people, who become incapable of dealing with problems since they are emotionally and mentally fascinated with getting results or not. This constitutes a very anxiogenic attitude, first of all because they worry a lot about the results, secondly because this obsession makes them incapable of solving problems, furthering the absence of results and the anxiety deriving from it.

One noticeable contemporary manifestation of the fear of pain is the common quest for therapy and healing, expressed in different ways and in different domains. Pain used to be more trendy, accepting and even looking for it was a sign of courage, of abnegation, of self-sacrifice, of self-challenge, that showed the value of a person, an attitude that could earn him his corner of paradise. Our world is "nicer", but also more complacent, the slightest physical or moral pain is taken more dramatically, therefore we have pills, remedies and therapies or help for every discomfort or pain we could endure. Of course, science and technique have evolved, our knowledge of human physiology and psychology has improved, and there is no reason that we should not benefit from this progress. But this addiction to comfort makes us in fact suffer more, as we are therefore more sensitive to pain, more reactive to it, a situation that can be considered a loss of freedom. The development of the "care" ideology, in spite of its humane and kindhearted concern for the individual, promotes such weakness of the heart. We now attempt to live in a protective and precautious society, trying to prevent pain, seeking for consolation, where victimhood is popular, seeking healing for every little existential anguish. An attempt which nevertheless does not prevent an omnipresent brutality, often hidden, since we do not want to be psychologically troubled.

11 - Reason - Insanity

From our birth through our childhood and adolescence we start to learn to take power over our reflexes, muscles, emotions, thoughts. We try to become masters of our own life and being, an endeavor which can be called rational or reasonable, which formally makes us free and autonomous beings. Fear of insanity has to do with losing these capacities or not acquiring them, with losing a certain necessary balance of our life and psyche. Such a disturbance is as well the scheme of the person who worries a lot, an uncontrolled mental process where unpleasant, dramatic or painful thoughts impose themselves to us, unwillfully determining the state of our mind, to the extent we feel alienated, decentered, impotent, since deprived of our own reason and free-will. Our thoughts and actions occur by themselves, generally in an unpleasant and chaotic way, like if our own being was not at our disposal anymore. Chaos rules, we are inhabited by multifarious forces and impulses, rather incoherent, a very anxiogenic scheme. The human mind a priori prefers order and stability, it enjoys harmony, which is why we try to understand the world, trying to structure reality through causality and systematization and lawfulness, shaping events and actions in space and time. We fear disintegration, arbitrariness and undifferentiation, when nothing is accountable, when nothing can be

held on, when we are being devoured by pure hazard and cannot control anything anymore.

Chaos is a fundamental archetype of being, encountered in numerous mythologies and cultural matrices. It is for one the origin of things, and archaic modality, what was there at first, a pre-ontological state of reality, before any ordering principle. For example the Tohu wa-bohu of the Bible, mentioned in the genesis, that describes the condition of the world before the creation of light, before the Godly intervention, separation and ordering. In the daoist scheme, it is Huntun, the "mother of all", from which emerges the Dao, the principle of all principles, what makes things the way they are, what makes them act the way they act. In ancient Greek mythology, Chaos refers to the void state preceding the creation of the universe or cosmos (ordering), or to the initial "gap" created by the original separation of heaven and earth. It means emptiness, chasm, space, the nether abyss or infinite darkness, rather formless and still undifferentiated. But it refers as well to some negative state or force, an active not-being, resisting or impeding the harmonious unfolding of being. It can designate an ontological principle, but most often it is a dark power residing in the human mind, which prohibits the accomplishment of his own humanity, the latter being rendered possible primarily through reason or an equivalent, a manifestation of goodness.

Internal chaos is an experience we have all had. For psychological and cognitive reasons. The first type is generally connected to strong or excessive emotions, to the multiplication or intensity of those stimuli. We react in a tempestuous fashion and our psyche is out of control: we are not ourselves anymore. Less intense but more persistent is worrying, anxiety. Our mind is taken over by sad or frightening perspectives or ideas. Those thoughts are obsessive, we don't know what to do about them or how to control them, since they have an obsessive character and they leave us powerless. They come and go randomly, they follow one another without any logic or clear pattern. The second type is most likely provoked by some dilemma, moral, practical or existential, where a decision is hard to reach, since both sides have strong advantages and inconvenients, which sometimes seems "impossible" to settle. Or when we have a problem to solve, a question to answer that bears some importance, and it seems our mind is spinning around in order to find an "exit", a solution. As well, some persons tend toward some extatic type of thinking, for example they have a quest or fascination for the absolute, a tendency that always leaves them in a state of "craving", of "lack". Strong greeds of different types (wealth, fame, love, knowledge, etc.) can as well engender such chaos, since one feels like he cannot reach his goal or fulfill his desire, which produces a spinning effect upon the mind.

Chaos is an unavoidable feature of the mind, even necessary as part of the thinking process. For example when the mind is challenged, when it is necessary to effectuate a paradigm shift and we undergo an internal resistance or what is called a cognitive dissonance: when a person finds himself confronted simultaneously with incompatible information or requests, producing an unpleasant state of tension. These can be opposing opinions, thoughts, behaviors or beliefs. Those moments are useful and healthy, since they allow the mind to progress, they are constitutive of the thinking process. Thus in determined doses, chaos is natural and necessary. But some persons

are more susceptible to chaos than others, find chaos more painful than others, are anxious about this chaos more intensely than others. Therefore they fear more than others that this chaos will completely take over their mind and determine their behavior, what is called “going crazy”. This expression is used explicitly when we feel overwhelmed by our thoughts and unpleasant emotions in a way that is intensely painful and frightening. A crazy person is “deranged”, which etymologically means “moved out of order”, or we say that a person is “out of his mind”, which implies that to be in our mind is to be guided by order and reason. The problem with this anxiety is that it feeds itself. The person who has a bout of anxiety about going crazy fears even more to go crazy, her anxiety fuels this fear even more. Thus, either she finds some activity that will help her overcome this painful state, unless it dies out by itself after a while if it is not too strong. But periodically those who suffer such affliction will artificially turn toward some chemical products, be they medical or others, for example anxiolytic in order to alleviate or calm their mind, in order to regain control of their own mind and avoid hectic or insane behavior.

12 - Potency - Impotence

According to Plato, “power” is the first manifestation of being. Whatever is has power, be it an idea, a thing or a person, it can provoke an effect, it has the ability to affect other entities, change other things, it can induce or influence diverse phenomena. German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz even claims that all things mutually interact with each other in being. Or following the idea of Baruch Spinoza about the conatus previously mentioned, all that exists tends to actualize and realize itself, its “power of being”, through applying its intrinsic power on the “outside”. For the human, this takes a very specific dimension, since we are the species most able or fit to modify its environment, for the better and the worse. The American statesman and inventor Benjamin Franklin also stated that “Man is a tool making animal”, which implies that our destiny is to invent instruments in order to act upon the world. Those different ideas indicate that we are granted with power, which implies at the same time freedom, obligation and responsibility. The passage from childhood to adulthood deals precisely with this apprenticeship, a self-transformation that is far from easy, that can represent some difficulties and anxiety, at varying degrees in different individuals. This anxiety can take the double form of “fear of potency” or “fear of impotence”, both being closely interrelated. They both include the same distorted parameters or subjective excessive perceptions about the issue of power. Let’s examine those different aspects.

Fear of impotence

- The world. The fear of impotence can be focused more on the world, or the mass of others, which can be viewed as a source of danger, as anxiogenic. Either because it is aggressive or because of its unmovability, its inertia. In both cases, we would have to be very strong, either to defend ourselves or to fulfill our desires, to satisfy our needs, since the world resists our wills and desires.

- Our self. The fear of impotence can be focused more on our own person, on our insufficiencies, thus we mistrust ourselves. Because we are weak, not smart enough, fearful, handicapped, alone, limited or simply condemned to fatality. In both modalities, although they “nicely” combine, we are anxious about our own incapacity to act upon our environment, we encounter difficulties to satisfy our needs and aspirations, we suffer from an anxiety that inhibits or weakens further our actions. A global situation which makes us feel even worse about ourselves, even more anxious.

Fear of potency

- First, fear of responsibility. If I can act upon the world, there can be a sense of duty, moral, psychological, practical or existential, an obligation that makes life heavier, that makes us lose some of our freedom. That is the reason why some people prefer to “follow”, or are “natural followers”, and refrain from leadership.
- Second, fear of judgment. If I act upon the world, I will be assessed, by others and by myself, I will bear the weight of scrutiny, I will take the risk of being criticized, or condemned.
- Third, fear of conflict. As soon as one exercises power, he will compete with others who do the same, he will antagonize those who want to exert their own power, a diversity which often will not coincide.
- Fourth, fear of exposure. When one acts powerfully, he will necessarily be noticed, a reality which makes him lose some of his privacy, he will uncover himself, with the risky or shameful consequences of such an exposure.
- Fifth, fear of jealousy. One who accomplishes things or imposes himself will necessarily provoke envy or jealousy, either from the ones who feel impotent and cannot do the same, or from the ones who try to exercise similar power and feel threatened by him.
- Sixth, fear of loneliness. When one exercises power he takes a unilateral decision, he commits himself to an action independently of other people, he is fundamentally alone. Even if he does it to help other persons, he does not know if he will be accepted or recognized or not, he is fully autonomous, a state that entails a form of loneliness. As well, the exercise of any power necessarily meets some resistance, since any action leads to a reaction in opposite directions.
- Seventh, fear of doubt. Acting powerfully is never a certainty, it always implies to take risks. Such decisions and actions will always make the person face doubt, a psychological situation that can be very undermining and heavy for the self. As well, as we pursue our goals, there is a natural phenomenon where we tend to attain our limits of competence, increasing the sense of self-doubt.
- Eight, fear of power, allergy to power. Some persons have a prejudice against power, they judge potency as unwanted, bad or evil, as a source of violence, aggression and conflict. The fear of science and technology is a good example of it. They extol the virtues of humility, equality and self-restraint, they are resentful against those who exercise power. They can become aggressive when facing power, since any such

perception is threatening. Fear and aggression are more closely linked than is often conceived.

- Ninth, fear of violence. Exercising power necessarily implies to exert constraint on others, to act in a way that can be considered unpleasant, troubling, violent or brutal, that probably will inflict pain on others. One can fear this violence in himself or in others, the latter being coupled with a fear of suffering. If we fear our own violence, there is a lingering residual mistrust, toward our own self, for being violent and bad, and toward others, for being fragile. One fears to occupy too much space and impose himself on others, therefore he restrains himself and even asphyxiates himself. This implies inhibiting one's own existence, since violence is constitutive of being and life. And of course, he will be quite nervous about any one else's expression of violence.

- Tenth, fear of guilt. Some persons with an exacerbated sense of ethics, or hypersensitive people suffer too much if their actions risk any negative consequences. They might fear as well their own excesses, what they would tend to do, or what they just might do. They project as well their guilt on others. They will fear to hinder them, to burden them, to pain them, since everyone is fragile. A phenomenon visible in parents that are reluctant to manifest any authority on their children.

But actually, fear of potency and fear of impotence are quite interrelated and often hard to distinguish. When we look at these different facets of the fear of potency, we realize that underlying all of them is a fear of impotence, the fear of failure, either in the endeavor itself, the fear of its excesses, or because of the difficulties that will be necessarily encountered. Some people fear taking power because they think they will fail, they fear their own impotence. Surprisingly enough for their surroundings, they fear success, they even practice self-sabotage: they will willfully fail in order to avoid failure. Some people fear impotence because they think their power will fail them: they simultaneously fear potency and impotence. A common manifestation of this fear of failing is the "loser" syndrome. Either because those people do not try to realize their own ambitions, they might even ignore or deny them, or they as well sabotage themselves in any attempt to realize them, or again they will simply give up at the first difficulty. The fear of potency tends to have more an inner sense of capability than the simple fear of impotence, but in actuality it boils down to the same type of anxiety. It has to do with the uncertainty that characterizes the conflictual relation and interaction between ourselves and the world. Aging is the moment where both forms very much distinguish themselves, when a profound sense of impotence about the self and the world invades our being, since our own power crumbles.

The particular anxiety of impotence related to aging can be called a sense of decrepitude. It is the wearing out of our mental and physical capacities, becoming weaker and even handicapped, a process of deterioration of the self that as well bears a smell of death and annihilation. As the body degenerates, its functions decline. This can take the form of pain, physiological and anatomical malfunction, inhibiting our actions and bringing hardship to daily life. Beauty fades away, our seduction capacities disappear, our "ugliness" can even provoke repulsion and disgust in some people. Fighting the appearance of wrinkles can be for some persons a daily struggle, as we notice when we see the marketing importance of "anti-aging" products.. Our mental

capacities fail, through lowered concentration, losing memory, lack of motivation, etc. Basic gestures can become difficult or impossible. And if some persons easily accept this decline and even enjoy their old age, many others remain quite anxious about this failure of their former potency. This anxiety is noticeable in the way that aging even becomes a social taboo, a natural feature of life that will be denied in many ways.

13 - Greed - Poverty

Greed is a very common feature of human behavior, which emerges out of a fear of poverty, out of a fear of lacking. Lack constituting a threat to existence, therefore fearing is normal and natural. Greed can be defined as an intense and selfish desire for something, be it wealth, power, fame, food, immortality or any other possession, even love or knowledge. In this scheme, losing, wasting, not getting, be it money, time, power, fame or else, is considered bad or even repugnant. Greed or avidity are needs, which should be distinguished from mere desire, conceived as more temperate and controlled. Although both terms are often interchanged, since desire can be defined as a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen. Even more distinct is a want, considered less intense and less obsessive. Greed can be thought as a desire or a want which has become a need, something we cannot do without. Its deprivation would be too painful, thus it becomes unthinkable, unacceptable. Furthermore, we never want what we like to ever finish. One wants infinitely, one wants the infinite, finitude becomes scary and threatening. Therefore all our energy and efforts will be channelled in the satisfaction of this need, which of course is an endless course since it can never be really satisfied. We find an echo of this phenomenon in the Christian religious tradition with the concept of lust, one of the seven capital sins, indicating an excessively strong desire for something, or a desire transgressing principles of morality or reason. In opposition to this, poverty is considered a necessary or desirable condition which must be embraced in order to reach an adequate spiritual, moral, or intellectual level. Poverty is often understood to be an essential element of renunciation in religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, and in numerous philosophical traditions such as Stoicism. In Roman Catholicism it is one of the evangelical counsels in order to perfect oneself, along with chastity and obedience. The main aim is to give up materialistic preoccupations and to withdraw oneself from sensual pleasures, considered illusionary and ephemeral. One of the considerations of such a virtue is that this temperance favors solidarity, the care and preoccupation of others.

To summarize, the problem of greed is its excessive dimension, its egocentric nature, its transgression of reason, its immoral nature, its obsessive quality, its limited horizon. From these different aspects, we can induce its anxiogenic potential. Let us examine those different points, their relation to poverty and the anxiety they can engender.

- Excess. A good example of this greed is the fact that animals gather food primarily to satisfy their hunger, when humans gather as much as possible for an indeterminate future, be it in the form of food or wealth to procure themselves this food and even more. Therefore this quest is immoderate and endless, it does not know any limit. The

consequence is that someone who suffers from this need has to permanently worry about gaining more, since any “lack” will symbolically signify a form of poverty, will evoke the painful shadow of poverty. Whatever object is being coveted, there will always be a tempting “plus” in the horizon. It as well represents an attempt to control the future on the part of fearful people, a guarantee of protection against gloom perspectives.

- **Egocentric.** The greedy person is fundamentally lonely, he eternally pursues what he wants for himself. Loneliness is in itself an anxiogenic feature, since man is a social animal. Unless one finds in himself some transcendent characteristic that he nurtures, some aspect of his being. But the greedy person is not into “being” but possession, obtaining and owning an object. Therefore, not only is he lonely, but he is in competition with others, either because they might want the same object, or because they represent an obstacle to his goal, or simply because they provoke envy through a permanent comparison between individuals.
- **Irrationality.** The greedy person is not concerned with reason, he just wants to pursue his desire, no matter how senseless it is. But if reason is moderate and peaceful, desire is an untamed horse, as Plato describes it. It causes havoc in the soul, and even wreaks havoc on it. His overflowing passion leaves him no respite, it is out of control, a chaos that can be quite ceaseless and painful. Such a person is not a master of himself, he totally depends on the outside, on results, and the effect those results can have on him: he is rather heteronomous.
- **Immorality.** The greedy person does not care about moral principles, be they rational principles or moral sentiments. He will not hesitate to breach social and ethical conventions, although he probably remains conscious of those transgressions. For him, the end justifies the means. This will create tension with others, and tension within himself. For unless one is a sociopath, an immoral behavior necessarily provokes guilt, shame, or at least a malaise. His anxiety will be grounded on the suspicion he is doing something wrong, even though he prefers to follow his impulsion.
- **Obsession.** Greedy persons have a monomaniacal functioning. They have a particular goal, and they want to realize it at any cost, forgetting other important or substantial issues even for themselves, if not for society. Of course, this intense and exclusive focus can fulfil their existential requirement, since they have a goal. But unless they get something out of the process itself, some sense of real accomplishment or self-development, if they are primarily centered on the results, they will necessarily remain unsatisfied. This type of “outcome based” obsession is necessarily anxiogenic. Its primitive nature can never be satisfying.
- **Limits.** Strangely enough, the greedy person always faces some limit, numerous limits of different nature and form, when his internal dynamic precisely abhors the idea of finitude and boundedness. First of all he will never be able to do all he wished and get all he wants. Second, his exclusive focusing will always make him encounter different frustrations, either as a consequence of what he pursues, or simply because he has no space for those other desirable things. For example, someone obsessed with knowledge or building an enterprise might be paying little attention to human relations, a carelessness that might bring him annoyances and disappointments. Or his exclusive

focusing on his career may imply to not take care of his health, mental or physical, bringing about some consequences he will have to face at some point, for example when he retires. The greedy person, drunken with his goal, might easily feel omnipotent, especially if he gets good results, an attitude that will necessarily lead to discontent and disillusionment, when he is forced to sober up and meet his limits. As well should be added the fact there is always a pre-reflective consciousness of the fragility of one's wishful thinking, a surreptitious cause of anxiety

- Possession

Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote: "The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared, had someone pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: "Do not listen to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and the earth to no one!" Thus the paradox of possession, at the same time a sort of necessity, but the source of anxiety and even violence. Owning, as we see very early with children, or even with animals, like a dog hiding his bone, is a fundamental instinct, but the source of many worries. That is why many wisdom or religious messages criticize such a human impulsion. Owning gives us a sense of certainty and comfort, it is supposed to protect us from direness and privation, we derive from it the impression of protecting ourselves and controlling our own fate. Be it the possession of money, of properties, of knowledge and even the possession of others. Such an expression as a parent saying about his child "He is all I have" is a blatant expression of this symptom. It signifies the despair of one's soul, the emptiness of one's existence, where the unconditional pretended ownership of another person is the only that gives meaning or value to our life, the only bond that connects us to our own self. And what is true for "my child" can be true for "my money", "my house", "my land", "my statute", etc. And possession is always reflexive, in the sense that we say that one is "possessed" by the demon. We are possessed by what we possess: we are therefore alienated by our possession. We can derive from this a strong sense of anxiety, since we can of course lose what we own. Either by abandon, by loss, by theft, etc. We are ready to kill to protect our ownership, since it is "all we have", our own existence being in itself devalued. To possess is to live by proxy, and this vicariousness of existence signifies that through this possession we are actually dispossessed of our own being. Poverty, loss, thus implies self-destruction, a vanished existence, quite an anxiogenic perspective.

Overall, the person who fears poverty and revolves around gathering and accumulation in order to avoid this poverty functions in a dangerous world, where there is either shortage or the danger of it. Abundance is absent, there he is mistrusting, toward others and reality in general. He has to survive, he has to struggle, he has to compete. The world is a dairy cow he has to milk as much as possible, in order to compensate for his insecurity, aspiring in an illusory way to calm his anxiety. The very idea of poverty is for him painful and humiliating. Indigence, deprivation, hardship are the monsters to be feared. Thus giving, the most enriching and humanizing activity, is not his cup of tea. He fears his own precariousness, he pretends to independence, but he is an addict. That is

for example the idea of Socrates, for whom ignorance, the consciousness and acceptance of one's poverty, represented a condition for thinking.

14 - Appropriation - Xenophobia

In today's common usage, the term xenophobia primarily refers to a strong feeling of dislike or fear of people from other countries, but it has a broader meaning and origin. It is the fear or hatred of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange, which of course includes the unknown or the uncertain. This otherness can refer to what is different from us, not like us, or to what is external to us, what doesn't pertain to us. This otherness makes us uncomfortable, ill at ease, since it can be dangerous, or disgusting. Be it speech, practices, habits or people themselves. When facing it, we don't know how to behave, it seems that we cannot control the situation. Human beings, like all animals, have a strong liking for routine, a tendency to repeat the same gestures and behavioral patterns. We expect our environment to be stable, predictable, controllable, otherwise we feel lost and lose our power to act. This endeavor can be called appropriation: we want the world to be ours, to fit our desires and expectations, what can be called a "domestication of the world". This desire is understandable, for if everything would change all the time and escape our control, the world would be chaotic, we could not relate to it and integrate ourselves in it, we could not satisfy our needs properly. At the same time, there is always an aleatory dimension in the course of events, accidents happen, people change, the world modifies itself and evolves in a way which sometimes seems random. We might enjoy the idea of difference, but in limited doses, for pleasure and distraction: this difference should not be too different. The true or radical other, the wild one, is scary. The strategy is either to avoid it, to keep out, or try domesticating it in order to appropriate it, to "naturalize" it, so that he would stop being so foreign. Hence the attempt at controlling, so the other can fit our standards. This can be done with people, with situations, with the future, with any entity or phenomenon in order for events to conform to our expectations, so that we can anticipate.

The foreigner is the one that does not behave with our established social or moral codes. He is a stranger, he is strange. Be he a wild beast or a god, he is not human, he is not like us; even seeing it is painful, if not taboo. What is strange is what is unusual or surprising in a way that is unsettling or hard to understand, hard to accept. It has not been previously seen or encountered, or rarely so, it is unfamiliar or alien. And what is strange often has the connotation of being unpleasant. That is what can be called a latent xenophobia in the human being: a general discomfort with the different and the unknown. But this dislike of the "strange", this fear or anxiety about otherness, the apprehension toward the unknown or the unpredictable, is stronger in some persons than others.

People who are particularly xenophobic have a more domestic view of the world. And we can take this term in its different meanings. They think that things should be like in "my country". They feel well at home, in their usual interior, with their family. My little fortress is a clean place, not like the outside, or people next door. Those people are attached to the "Home, sweet home" principle, or "My home is my kingdom". And they

don't like those wild creatures who are not tamed, not obedient, not domesticated. Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi views these people as moralistic: they have fixed principles about the order of things, they know how things should be done, meaning they know what fits them, they know their own self-interest. For him, they are not available to the Dao, to the various, bountiful and unpredictable realities of things. They want to protect themselves, they want to control and satisfy their expectations, they want to be sure and they cannot stand uncertainty. They cannot greet the world as it is, everything has to fit the matrix of their own schemes, which of course is an impossibility. Everyone has to be nice, to be polite, to play the game according to the rules. So they will try to control as much as possible, although they cannot not remain conscious that their power is limited. So they will worry, they will be disappointed, they will be resentful, they will be angry, they will desperately try to contain the flow of foreignness, of disorder, of dirt, or immorality, all what they consider dangerous, bad or evil. They want cleanliness, purity, goodness and order, or what they conceive as such.

Most often, xenophobic people have a rather superficial and formal reading and interpretation of the world. Their desire of control focuses primarily on external and peripheral issues where they think they exert some power, rather perfunctorily. In fact, they use those preoccupations to avoid dealing to more profound and substantial issues. The quest for cleanliness and order in the house, an everlasting endeavor, compulsive if not neurotic, is one of the classical ways by which one avoids his crucial existential issues, a less controllable challenge, thus having the impression of fixing things and accomplishing oneself. In the same fashion one prefers to remain with what he knows, his own opinions, his moral perspective, a pre-established mental apparatus he is willing to defend tooth and nails, rather than engage in a true thinking process, considered unsafe, unhealthy and too hazardous. Such a belief system, with its connotation of certitude, firm and unquestionable, seems to protect us from the incertitudes of the world, allowing us to hide and deny our own ignorance. Any opposite opinion is badly received, which explains why people fight about differences of perspective instead of enjoying it, a typical trademark of this latent xenophobia. This behavior is engendered by anxiety, but as well it produces anxiety, since on a pre-reflective level, the mind remains conscious of the frivolity, vanity and absurdity of such an attitude. Building houses of cards and sand castles allow only an ephemeral sense of satisfaction of security, which cannot last, which does not function, which furthers the anxiety.

15 - Existence - Disappearance

Earlier on, we have seen the fear of not being recognized, in the sense of not being noticed. This echoes another anxiety: the fear of disappearing, the fear of not existing. The verb to exist comes from the Latin *one exsistere*, which means "to come into being", from *ex* (out) and *sistere* "to take a stand". To exist thus signifies "to stand out", in the sense of coming out of undifferentiation, this to separate from some previous entity in which we were amalgamated. Metaphysically, this can refer to a state of non-being, deprived of any differentiation, or to a primordial chaos. Psychologically, it

can refer to the emergence of a separate place and personality when we grow up and come out of childhood, out of a fetus-like integrated self. Existentially, it can mean to define our own specific values and identity, distinct from the one of our surroundings, or to gain a specific status.

This to exist implies a form of distinction, of separation. We are real when we constitute and represent a truly distinct entity. Then we can be present in a given place or situation because we are a definite and distinct subject, separated from the rest, from the world or others taken as an object. To exist implies a scission between a subject and an object, a disintegration of the undifferentiated totality, a tearing away from the continuous and vapid mass. It implies a separation from otherness, a distance, and even a confrontation with the "rest". Although this differentiation process can as well be described as an escape from a blurring sameness.

We have a real presence because there are two distinct entities, in opposition to a mere fusional state where all is one and presence disappears. Someone is present in a context or a place because he can manifest himself, even if it is only by raising his hand when his name is called. Naming is a well a proof or manifestation of existence, which explains why many people are so edgy when their name is forgotten or mistaken, when it is simply mispronounced or misspelled. The issue is not even the value of the self, but its presence, its manifestation, even though we might presuppose the attribution of some value to this self. But the logic is that existence is primary, not value: the value derives from the mere fact that "I exist".

Nevertheless, in order to exist, we have to be special, we should not be like others, we should not resemble anyone, we should be a specific and incomparable entity. That is a reason why some people get bothered when they are compared to anyone else, beside the competitive dimension of the comparison, or when children always have to look like a parent or another, or some particular ancestor. In fact, we have to be extraordinary, since the ordinary is dull and boring, and our particular existence is by definition remarkable if not astonishing. There is a strong egotistic tendency in the human being, which implies that the "I" is the center of the world, and there can not be multiple centers, logically and psychologically. Although can easily justify it by explaining that this comes naturally with the emergence of a conscious subject and subjectivity.

Thus with existence is born a fear of non-existing, since this existence is not a given: human existence is not natural, it remains fundamentally an individual enterprise, in spite of the environment, be it cultural, social, familial, etc. One has to deliberately exercise his freewill and self-determination. "We are condemned to be free", as French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre phrased it. And as with all forms of purpose, as we have seen already, there comes different forms of anxiety, and different degrees or intensity of this anxiety. Some people are indeed quite desperate to exist, others not so much. In a way, everyone more or less wants to be special, some more, or much more, than others. Funnily enough, this need does not depend at all on an objective situation, for example a lack of social recognition, since some persons who already have gained a significant status still crave for distinguishing themselves. Although one can reverse the logic and explain that their accomplishments directly came out of this craving for "existing", a craving that fundamentally, like all cravings, can never be satisfied. We can

therefore be sometimes surprised by the extent of the ceaseless ambition and eagerness of some persons which from our standpoint had already accomplished significant feats. On the reverse, we can be astonished by some very banal individuals, deprived of any drive or talent, who feed themselves fantasies about their own person, about their skills, about their potential or even about their own genius. It seems to them that in spite of all evidence, one day will come, quite unspecifically and for a very indeterminate reason, where they will be recognized for what they truly are: a great, unique and wonderful person.

In a way, we can say that all human beings believe that they are better than what appears, better than what others see or believe: rarely does someone think he is globally overestimated, except when he is depressed. Therefore there is a desire for this "greatness" to be seen, although it is often mixed with opposite tendencies of self-depreciation, particularly strong and overwhelming in some persons. But the one who clearly wants to stand out and be noticed believes he has some special quality that is undervalued and misestimated. A common example is what we call the "genius syndrome", which some people are afflicted with. For some reason, they are convinced that they know better than most people, that their ideas are great, that whatever comes out of their mouth is precious, that what they write is unforgettable. They might believe they have some connection with an inspiring "Holy Spirit". Of course, some of those are actually genial, even if no one notices them at a given moment. For example, numerous talented writers were recognized posthumously, who went unnoticed during their lifetime. But luckily enough, they followed their vocation, in spite of the criticism, the scorn or the general indifference they met. Even though they probably were not pleased with the reception of their work by their fellow men, they had sufficient stamina and self-confidence to ignore those aversive reactions and pursue the task they were engrossed in. Their creative production was the mark they would leave of their presence on earth, their claim to existence, and beside their talent, we can be admiring of their tenacity, of their composure, of their belief in themselves, in spite of the doubts that necessarily worked them over. An anxiety which could play the paradoxical function of inhibiting and stimulating their work. But most people that manifest the "genius syndrome" are far from having such talent. For some inexplicable reason, they are convinced they are endowed with some special quality, even though objectively nothing in their accomplishments can justify such belief, even though they receive little or no confirmation of this conviction from the outside. Beside maybe some over enthusiastic relative or friend motivated by sentiments or personal interest, often parents feed such a scheme for their own obvious reasons. Their general dynamic when facing criticism or indifference is that "those people are stupid", "they cannot understand", or "they are jealous", different thoughts that can maintain the illusion. They just know things that others don't know.

Nevertheless, as a consequence, there will be a conflict between their belief and reality, rather anxiogenic. This tension might exacerbate their efforts to prove their worth, culminating in a rather excessive behavior, or an autistic relation to others since they are blind to rational argumentation. A more common form of this syndrome is the more sober and quite common belief that "Mother knows best", particularly shared by mothers

themselves. This principle represents the wishful thinking dimension of the obsession with perfection rather widespread among mothers, quite anxiogenic. In this archetype, mother exists through her necessity to the family, through her utility, and she has to take responsibility for everything, take care of everyone, otherwise she does not exist as a mother: she is a bad mother. In her little world she is a queen, but as well a servant. Thus divided between her feeling of “greatness” and the ghost of “worthlessness”, she permanently has to prove her existence through her unfailing necessity to others, therefore always making sure she is needed, a phenomenon we have already mentioned when dealing with the “fear of uselessness”.

Overall, people that fear not existing will tend to take any opportunity to manifest and prove their existence. By being smart and knowledgeable, by being funny, by being useful, by seducing, by taking power, by harassing everyone, by getting into conflicts, by being gross, anything that can make them noticeable and special. In a sense, it overlaps the desire of recognition, except it is not necessarily about confirming the value, worth and goodness of the self. It is just about singularizing oneself. For example a child that does everything to irritate his parents does not wish or expect to be told he is good and get confirmation of his value: he just wants to exercise his power and exist, whatever it takes to do this.

Lastly but not less important in this context, the anxiety of disappearance, we should mention the concept of identity. Someone’s identity is what he is, who he is, some particular characteristics specifying his being, his nature, his personality, through his actions, feelings or beliefs. This identity protects this individual from being confused for others, or being swallowed in the indistinct mass of “people”. But the concept of identity, the search for identity is a mental construct, otherwise we simply are what we are, we do not need to be defined, to be distinguished, to be identified. And some persons, although it is a common phenomenon, are more worried than others about this identity issue. As a mental construction, it is primarily an image, like a visit card that we hand out to everyone so they know who we are. Although in fact it is not who we are: it always presents some features of our being, real or fictitious, objective or thwarted, that make us worthy and socially saleable. The anxiety of identity is an attempt to socially survive, to be recognized, accepted, admired or loved, to be worthy and not nothing. It overlaps different types of anxiety, although the central one seems to be not to disappear. But the way one modulates his identity will reveal a particular slant on our existential concern. For example some try to fit social expectations in order to be a “winner”, others simply want to be different, even if that implies a rejection from these others, as being a “real loser”, an evil person or a freakish character. One irritating situation for people who are concerned about their identity is to be classified in a category, to be bound to general characteristics. They feel reduced to being the mere element of a group, thus dissolving their specificity, threatening their marvelous and indispensable individuality. They are fragile, since they depend on the social recognition of their mental construct, thus what they call “labelling”, the dangerous judgment of others, makes them become a sheer “object”, depriving them of their aspiration to exist, a true cause of anxiety.

16 - Good - Evil

A fundamental dichotomy in one's relation to the world, even in animals, is the one between "good" and "bad". "Good" is pleasant, satisfying, comfortable, right, etc., bad is the opposite, what we don't want, what we fear, physiologically, ontologically, psychologically, morally, etc. In all cultures, we encounter this anxiety through archetypes representing this "bad", the evil, diverse shapes and figures incarnating what is morally wrong. Bad is the absence of good, the cessation of good, but most often it is the opposite to good, its enemy. Those incarnations of the "bad" are typically formulated in great myths, religious narratives or folklore, popular stories. For example, in christianity, we encounter the devil, the enemy and counterpart of the divine, in the form of the snake who induced the original humans in temptation, betraying the trust of God. Or in Lucifer, the fallen angel, proud and rebellious, who cannot understand and refuses God's love for man. In Greek mythology, the Titans, the older generation of gods who represent archaic and chaotic forces, such as Cronus - time and destruction - were fought by the newer Olympian gods, who represent creation and order. In Egyptian mythology, the god Seth, powerful, aggressive and brutal, who represents authoritarianism, fury, cruelty, crisis, tumult, disaster, suffering, disease, storm, etc. In Buddhist cosmology, Mara, the demonic celestial king who tempted the historical Buddha with the vision of beautiful women, in order to distort him from his path. He is the personification of the forces antagonistic to enlightenment. In all of these cases, one can defend the idea of integrating those evil forces in the general cosmological plan, a necessary feature of reality. But in general, those forces are dreaded, their power is feared. In a more psychological dimension, These figures echo the sense of internal badness, the evil potential, that each one has in himself. A classical interpretation of those representations is that they are mere projections of our own self. And once again, some persons are more sensitive and therefore more anxious about those issues than others.

Children naturally divide people between "good" ones and "bad" ones, they even apply this to animals, opposing the "mean" ones and the "nice" ones. They easily attribute intentions to actions, hence the importance of moral judgments. Although it is true that they frequently hear such comments from their parents, to qualify their actions and teach them the moral principles they deem constitutive of a good education. Thus children are taught to despise or fear badness, if only because it will provoke scolding and punishment. And if growing up some adults get over these precepts and even reject them totally, others rather cling to such a strong and determined moral perspective. They have an acute sense of evil, in themselves and in other people, a frame of mind that will provoke disgust, repulsion, anger or hate toward any reprehensible behavior, action or person. They will be obsessed and fascinated with such human features, an anguishing preoccupation.

Guilt and shame are the two primary manifestations of this anxiety. The first one is primarily in relation to oneself, the second is a more social and other directed scheme. Western culture, more individualistic, is more inclined toward the former, but asian societies, quite socially determined, are more inclined toward the latter. This feeling of

internal badness can be identified in two ways, although they can overlap. The first one is a hypersensitivity toward this negative dimension of being, thus the perception or consciousness of any defect or shortcoming in the self will be taken dramatically. The second one, more radical, concerns people who do not need any reason to “feel bad”: it has an ontological structural dimension, it is built in the very idea of existence, the mere principle of being a singular separate being. That is for example the principle of the “original sin”, according to which man is born a sinner, since he descends from a sinning couple, Adam and Eve. As well, we encounter this anthropological vision in different philosophical works, such as English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who claims that “Man is a wolf for man”. In his famous book “Leviathan”, he expounds the idea that human beings are fundamentally selfish, thus he refers to this feared biblical monster to explain and justify the existence of an absolutist state that would subjugate its citizens.

In the same way, numerous individuals have ingrained in them the idea of an intrinsic badness of the human. Among those, some will find in this state of things a reason to act, a justification for their own egocentric quest, since we live in the law of the jungle. They do not feel bad about this reality, they accept it, they might even enjoy it, for different reasons, even perverse ones. But some others experience a profound feeling of sadness, resentment or anger toward this internalized evil. Because they perceive it in themselves, and they don't appreciate their own being. They will mistrust themselves, they will censor or suppress their inner drives, thoughts or expectations. They will try to hide their despicable self, disguise it with whatever formal apparatus, for example with various obligations. Through these constraints, they will justify themselves, they will be “good”. And the harsher they will treat themselves, the more justified they will become, as a sort of redemption of their sinful nature. In other times, in a religious context, this implied for example self-flagellation, ascetic practices or puritan life principles. Hell, devil, karma, eternal damnation are speaking representations and powerful incentives in such a worldvision.

The main enemy is often pleasure: one should not satisfy his inner drives, which are highly suspicious. One should rather follow established rules, obey formal moral canons, or submit to some authority. One should preferably suffer, since pain, going against our intimate bad nature, represents salvation. Of course, such a person lives in a state of permanent tension, since the subject is permanently fighting with himself, surveilling himself, forcing himself. A tension that will periodically explode in fits of anger, although in some cases the capacity of self-restraint is quite powerful.

Some others will focus more on the immorality of others. They will see evil everywhere and be quite sensitive to it, thus they will react to it. They will fight it, denounce it, become indignant, they will easily develop a sort of misanthropic tendency, since they perceive malicious intentions in everyone. Or they might develop some empathetic scheme, where they are more concerned with the victims of those evil deeds. They will be attracted to the weak, to the suffering ones, as a way to self-justification. They will defend others the same way that they defend themselves. They will denounce the unfairness of the world, they will take sides against the powerful and the well-off, they will naturally take sides for the meek and the humble, identifying with them. Their

permanent anger will be blessed, if not godly. Of course, one can see how such an attitude can constitute an existential drive, fighting for justice, against corruption and prejudice. But one has to be conscious of the permanent anxiety such a dynamic produces, which can easily become excessive. Moralists of all kinds, revolutionaries, often enter in this category, which easily manifest a form of resentment. Their inner violence will often express itself through a battle against the bad people and a desire of punishment as the way to destroy evil. Generally, such world vision will articulate itself in a very close and clear cut determination of the right side and the wrong side, obviously identified, what can be called a manichean outlook. One way to deal with such pain is what we have called earlier the “Disney syndrome”, where one will refuse to envisage and face the negativity of the world, as a means for sublimation. Anything dark will frighten them, will be unbearable to them, they will prefer to deny it, to obfuscate it, to ignore it. Their ingenuous, magical thinking will protect them from the omnipresent evil. Like the Chinese three monkeys, they will practice the “wisdom” of the “don’t see, don’t hear, don’t tell”. Any open relation to negativity risks to overflow, it will remind them too much of their inner wickedness. Indeed, as all such schemes, it can operate to a certain extent, but the price of ignoring the world, which permanently displays such negativity, is quite costly and anxiogenic. This reminds us the story of the historical Buddha, whose father was protecting him from human “evils” such as pain, aging and death, who got traumatized when he escaped his “golden prison” and discovered this fundamental human finitude. Like him, such people cannot stand the sight of pain, death and other such realities, thus they desperately try to maintain an illusory fortress. Fundamentally, they know their “battle” is lost, by they try hard to maintain the appearances, a heavy psychological burden.

17 - Grounding - Lost

Another form of meaninglessness of nothingness that has its specificity is the sensation of being lost, of being separated or abandoned. Since meaning and being implies integration, relation, correspondence with the world, or grounding. Some persons experience a worrisome or painful sense of disconnection, they feel abandoned, misplaced, disorientated, they lack any landmarks or reference points. They are not grounded, they are not anchored, they float along haphazardly, drifting like a raft. They have the impression of wandering aimlessly in a chaotic world, they lack involvement, implication, inclusion. They easily feel left out and excluded, a sentiment which provokes a sensation of fading or vanishing. They can as well become paranoid, by assuming that the world does not want them, they feel rejected, there might be a conspiracy against them. They are not included in the “paradise” of the “all”, they are not allowed in the great club of the “others”. They don’t belong, they are forbidden to belong, they are left out in the cold. This situation makes them doubt their own self, the same doubt which already makes them feel they desperately need this inclusion. In the existentialist vision of German philosopher Martin Heidegger and French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, the human individual is “thrown” in a world that is imposed on him, he feels abandoned, plunged in a state of dereliction. His existence

seems false and artificial. Its contingency, its unnatural presence is hardly justified. It is a pure fact, a given, an obligation. Plus he is permanently threatened by his finitude, his limits and his disappearance. Oblivion and death end up annihilating all his accomplishments. Thus he constantly experiences worry and anguish, since he does not “belong”, he is not truly legitimate. But it is precisely this experience of groundlessness that gives him access to “being”, a radical sense of freedom. Therefore, intellectually, one can perceive this feature of the self as a condition of his own humanity, as man’s letters of nobility, in spite of the pain it inflicts. But most human beings who undergo this anguish do not know what to do with it, they are surprised by it, they feel abnormal, indisposed or diseased.

Numerous great historical narratives depict such humanizing of man through the adventure of groundlessness, searching for oneself, searching for being. The story of Odysseus, the ancient Greek hero, a fundamental epic of the western culture, is a good example of such a myth. King of a small island, known as Odysseus the Cunning, he is renowned for his intellectual brilliance, his guile and his versatility. After being forced into a long and brutal war where he will deploy his astuteness and wisdom, he will spend many years wandering around the world in strange places, among extraordinary creatures, to finally come back to his homeland, although he will have to battle again in order to regain his rightful place, reaffirming his true identity.

Even earlier than Homer’s Odysseus, four thousand years ago, we find in Mesopotamia one of the oldest written texts, the epic of king Gilgamesh. Described as physically beautiful, immensely strong and very wise, godlike in body and mind, he began his kingship as a cruel despot. Different episodes made him travel to the edge of the world where he learned about the days before the deluge and other secrets of the gods. He finally comes home, disillusioned and empty-handed, but reconciled at last to his mortality. He knows that he can’t live forever but that humankind will. He realizes that his original city, that he had initially repudiated, is actually magnificent, and represents the closest thing to immortality to which a mortal can aspire.

Thus, like our mythical heroes, some persons are haunted by the spirit of “belonging”. Belonging can relate to different entities and be of different nature. The famous portuguese feeling of *saudade*, originated from “solitude”, is a classical expression of it. It designates a deep emotional state of nostalgic or profound melancholic longing for something or someone that we care for and that is absent. It often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never be had again. It might refer to the motherland, to one’s village, family or friends, or to a particular situation. One thus recollects feelings, experiences, places, or events that once brought excitement, pleasure and well-being, which now makes one experience the pain of separation. *Saudade* is a bitter-sweet feeling, since it simultaneously implies happiness and sadness.

Being lost can refer to some nostalgic memory of a bygone reality, connected primarily to childhood or to a first love, although those memories are often heavily romanticized. But it can as well refer to something that never was, somewhat like the “Ugly duckling”, that was never “at home”, never included, always rejected, until one day... Thus “lost” persons often long for a reuniting that might never occur, since they don’t even know

what they long for. For example, very early some children might have the feeling that their family is alien to them, that they belong elsewhere. People that feel unrecognized, consciously or not, hope that someday they will be in the right environment, with "theirs". People who feel lost often do not know what they hope for, if it is a place, relations, an activity that they call their "vocation", if it is of a concrete nature or a purely metaphysical expectation. Religious emotion can be grounded in such an anxiety, with the perspective that one doesn't belong to this world, as Christ repeatedly said about his kingdom. This anxiety can be called existential anguish, that was described at length by some philosophers like the Danish Søren Kierkegaard. It cannot be resolved, since our very existence is one of solitude and wrenching separation. Unless one identifies to some primordial or ultimate unity, providing a metaphysical solution to this painful preoccupation.

18 - Plenitude - Nothingness

Nothingness, void, various forms or determinations of radical absence and indetermination is a concept, an experience or a perspective, that is inherent to the human mind. In opposition to this is the sentiment of plenitude, which designates a feeling of wholeness, of completion, when the self is fully realized, where one has a sense of total accomplishment and complete joy of being. Rare and ephemeral are the moments of plenitude, if they ever come about: it might just be "pie in the sky". Although some artificial paradises, narcotics for example, can indeed make us access this blessed state. The feeling of absence, of hollow, of lack, of incompleteness, are different common manifestations of nothingness within our soul.

What is a painful feeling of anxiety for many persons is a source of reflection for numerous philosophers. "Why is there something and not nothing?" is for example a recurrent question. In a paradoxical way, nothing is nothing, and therefore "nothing" does not exist, but at the same time it is a common and useful concept, it has a meaning, thus it necessarily refers to something. Therefore one can claim that "nothing" exists, at least as a common experience. In the English language, the word "Nothing", is a pronoun, meaning what stands for a noun, be it something or someone. Nothing, as "no thing", refers to "something", an object, although rather indeterminate or unidentifiable. As a subject, first it indicates the absence of a particular thing that one might expect or desire to be present, or the absence of any particular thing: "I got nothing". Or it can represent the inactivity of a thing or things that are usually or could be active: "Nothing happened". As a predicate or complement, commonly used, "nothing" indicates the absence of meaning, value, worth, relevance, standing, or significance, or something we wish to negate. If not, the expression "This was nothing", is formally absurd. This second meaning as a predicate is not accidental, since being "something" must necessarily include some qualities which makes this thing relevant, valuable, irreplaceable, etc.

"Nothingness" is the quality of being nothing. But most often, it is a philosophical term designating a general state of nonexistence. Ontologically, it can be reified as a domain or dimension into which things pass when they cease to exist or out of which they may

come to exist, a locus or space of indetermination, often associated with chaos: “God created the universe out of nothing”. Vacuity is another way of naming it. Physically, vacuity usually designates a total absence of matter, an empty space, and absence of everything, a vacuum. Mentally, it designates a total lack of ideas, an emptiness of mind. Practically, it designates an absence of meaningful occupation, or idleness. More generally, it qualifies an absence or a meaninglessness. But in many mystical traditions, the contemplation of this “nothingness” is the ultimate way to relate to God, beyond any logical or rational endeavor. It implies a sort of abandon of the self to a higher undefinable power, the adequate perspective to reach a higher spiritual level and pacify the soul.

We should address as well the particular understanding of vacuity central to buddist philosophy, rather distinct from usual representations of emptiness, physical or else. In Buddhism, this “absence” defines the “unconditional”, a form of unbounded absolute, the ultimate nature of things. Although one is then tempted to perceive this vacuity as a sort of eternal existence, which is not the case either. Vacuity rather means that all phenomena are without individuality, without substantiality, without permanence, since all things are linked, interconnected, interdependent, interactive. At the origin, it rather indicates a psychological phenomenon which later on, in some schools became an ontological or philosophical concept. Although one can argue the difference is slim, since in this context “outside reality” is nothing but a mental construct. The main issue in Buddhism being what can be called a “therapeutic application”: it is always the issue of freeing oneself from suffering, liberating oneself from illusions, what constitutes the awakening of Buddha. Such an attitude implies letting go, not being attached to the things of this world and our self, not only on the material level, but also on the mental level: ideas, assumptions, memories, expectations, emotions, etc., all of which engenders suffering.

Intuitively, without naming it and analyzing it, we all have some experience of nothingness. Either void of ourself or void of the world. Ontologically, it can be represented or formulated through the expressions “beyond the limits of the world”, “before the world”, “the cause of the world”, “before birth or after death”, etc.. This transcendent “outside” or “beyond”, as a “solution” to a problem or as an answer to a question, generally undergoes a metaphysical turn. “God” provides a good example of this answer or resolution, where we grant a name or a definite form to the “nothing”, we even grant it some attributes and powers in order to master it better. The groundlessness of our being, our radical freedom, our lack of “essence”, is another experience of nothingness. Thus narratives are invented to calm our anxieties, that is the function of myths and religious dogmas. Such a relation to nothingness can be interesting, useful, pleasant or challenging, it is healthy and necessary, in spite of the illusions it can engender through those “easy” solutions. But most of the time, either by mental inertia, bad habits or intellectual limitations, we try to ignore this fundamental dimension of our being, it bears too many significant consequences for our existence. Contemplating the infinite horizon gives us vertigo, it challenges too much our routine. Sartre would say that we commonly try to deny our own fundamental freedom and fall in the trap of bad faith, by identifying our own self to a fixed identity or function, which can

be qualified as a comfortable process of reduction of our self. Then the intuition of nothingness takes on a more pathological turn: as all compulsive avoidances, it ends up imposing itself on us in a more perverse way.

So we often encounter nothingness psychologically rather than intellectually, for example through an excessive and bothersome feeling of boredom. In such a state, nothing happens, nothing stands out, nothing has any particular value, hence engendering lassitude, melancholy or despondency. A common phenomenon, since most people are not so preoccupied with ontological issues but undergo emotional processes of which they ignore the nature and the cause. Boredom is painful, and we go out of our ways to avoid it, and the mind, in order to compensate, searches for occupation or excitement, at the risk of addiction or dependence. It falls in a double bind of anxiety: anxiety of boredom and anxiety of dependence, meaningless void and meaningless activity. The anxiety of nothingness is quite visible in those persons that permanently look for some type or other of excitement. Their "usual" life is considered senseless and insignificant, they despise their routine, so they endlessly hope for special moments, with the ever depressing aftermath: "coming back" to the usual reality. They are stuck in a permanent manic-depressive scheme, what is today popularly called "bipolar", determined both by internal reasons and by external circumstances. Meaningless and loneliness are other such experiences, since both imply an absence of relation or connection, provoking a sense of absurdity. When reality is randomly scattered in an incomprehensible and painful way, it becomes rather anxiogenic, since we can make no sense of it, nor give it value or control it. This experience of void and chaos can easily lead to depression since one finds neither reason nor grounding for his very being, one is deprived of any incentive for action. The experience of death, of finitude, can as well induce in some persons an intuition of nothingness, since in such a perception we ineluctably tend toward a vanishing or dissolution of the self and even of the world, a very acute feeling in some cases. Encountering or envisaging the absolute can as well provoke this sensation of nothingness. First because its representation seems an abyss, producing fright and vertigo. The sublime is painful. Thus God does not let Moses see his face, since it would kill him. Second because the perspective of the absolute, its infinity, its idealness, makes the finite look worthless, meaningless. Actually, the fear of nothingness is the matrix or the root for numerous other fears and anxieties, like death, loneliness, insanity, etc. But since it is a very abstruse and distant concept, it does not speak to many persons, who therefore are not conscious of the concept. They rather connect to the specific form nothingness takes, some manifestations of it who are more existentially or psychologically speaking to them. But let us show how this "reduction" can take place. But before we start this list, we should remind the reader that "nothing" designates both a subject which indicates the absence of a being, a thing or a phenomenon, but as well "nothing" indicates the absence of meaning, value, worth, or relevance, since as we already stated, since being "something" must necessarily include some qualities or predicates which makes this thing relevant, valuable, irreplaceable, etc.

Therefore we attempt in the following list to show how the numerous anxieties we have already described can be reduced to the anxiety of nothingness.

- 1 - Death. Death means falling into nothingness or going back to it. Death means to be valueless, since we lead an ephemeral life in an eternity of nothingness.
- 2 - Not being loved. When someone is not loved or not lovable, not even by himself, his worth is negated, his being is reduced to nothing, it is valueless.
- 3 - Loneliness. When someone is lonely, it means he is of no interest for others, he has no value, and he lacks the necessary psychological and ontological connections necessary in order to be something.
- 4 - Not being recognized. One does not acknowledge his own value, neither do others. Like loneliness, absence of worth and absence of connection. But it is connected to the qualities of the person more than to the person himself. Therefore he is nothing.
- 5 - Uselessness. Same pattern as the two previous ones. When one is useless, others don't value him and don't connect to him, therefore he is annihilated.
- 6 - Lack of freedom. Through the denial of freedom one encounters the suppression of his subjectivity, of his specificity, or his power, therefore annihilation.
- 7 - Worthlessness. This fear is like "nothingness" a root concept, underlying some other anxieties, as the second meaning of nothingness: the lack of worth. It is expressed differently and specifically in different ways.
- 8 - Meaninglessness. What is meaningless has no value, and it does not connect to anything. It is not incorporated in the "great scheme" of being. Therefore annihilation.
- 9 - Stupidity. Being stupid, like looking stupid, implies worthlessness as well as disconnection from the world and from others. The etymology of the word "idiot" as "particular, private" captures well the issue.
- 10 - Suffering. When we experience a strong pain, everything else disappears: we are alone in this pain, separated from the world. And we are deprived of freedom since we are a victim. We stop existing since we are stuck in an immediate sensation. The painful dimension implies a rupture with the order of things, including with our own self. Everything vanishes and becomes absurd, reduced to nothingness.
- 11 - Insanity. Reason is both what gives value to things and what makes them exist. It is the great connector, through principles like cause and effect or logic, it provides legitimacy to beings and their actions. To be deprived of any access to it signifies annihilation.
- 12 - Potency - Impotence. Power expresses is both the primary manifestation of being and its worth, through defining for a subject his capacity of action upon his environment. Deprived of it, we are nothing. Fearing it, we don't dare exist and are reduced to nothing. Two opposite anxieties that intermingle. The horizon is failure, an existential collapse.
- 13 - Poverty. The one who has nothing is nothing. He cannot survive, he will die of depletion, and he is not honored, since only the "owners" are worthy: they are the "winners".
- 14 - Xenophobia. Life is about survival. What is same and habitual is on our side, what is different and foreign is dangerous. We can not appropriate what is radically "other", we don't know it or understand it, we cannot control it, it threatens our existence.

15 - Disappearance. To exist is to stand out, to distinguish our self. To be engulfed in an undifferentiated mass, to be assimilated in a group makes us disappear as a singularity, we vanish into nothingness.

16 - Evil. Evil is the opposite of good, an absence of good, while "being" is the good. Evil is in this sense an anti-being, a not-being. That is why evil, immorality, is revolting, disgusting, despicable. Evil is a radical threat to existence, it is the emanation of the dark, unfathomable power of annihilation: nothingness.

17 - Lost. By being lost, we have no grounding, no relation, we are estranged from the surroundings, from the world. This implies meaninglessness, since there is no echo of our being in the world. Our relation to otherness is not existent, bygone or impossible. We encounter an absence of legitimacy, of reason, of connection, we are plunged into a chaotic, brutal and arbitrary world, a true feeling of nothingness, an absence of being.

Conclusion

In guise of a conclusion of this reflection, there is a question one might ask about the combined nature of anxiety and existential purpose. As we have seen, all individuals aspire to some fulfillment, the realization of which will provide him some pleasure, satisfaction and peace of mind, while the failure, lack or absence of which will make him feel anxious, failed and unsatisfied. But we notice that whatever the nature of the expectation and the degree of its accomplishment, the results seem to never be sufficient, never be good enough. We could almost conclude that the desired object is therefore not a real purpose, since reaching any goal cannot bring us plenitude. Or conclude that the goal we pursue is so absolute and infinite that it cannot be reached. Thus we can wonder if our real attachment is toward fulfillment or rather towards the anxiety attached to this fulfillment or its absence. That is somewhat what we can identify in the background of the Schopenhauer idea that the human mind oscillates between desire and boredom: in order to avoid the nothingness of boredom, we have to maintain the presence of the desire, keeping alive the burning sensation of unaccomplishment. Like if we needed discontent, disquiet, unhappiness, frustration, etc. And indeed we often seem to observe in the human psyche a difficulty to enjoy and appreciate what it has, being rather inclined to preoccupy itself with what it does not have, with what it is still missing, even if what is missing is impossible to obtain. For example, instead of enjoying the life we have, we prefer to worry about the life we will not have in the future. Or instead of enjoying the possessions that we have, we prefer to worry about the ones we still don't have. Thus the preoccupation, the pain and the drama probably protect us from the sense of nothingness that would come with any lasting impression of having reached the goal, with a sense of having crossed the finish line. This idea would explain why most people recoil at any attempt to deprive them of their anxiety, no matter how aching or agonizing this anxiety is. Anything is less frightening and painful than the abyssal feeling of nothingness. Nothing to expect, nothing to worry about, nothing to long for, is an unbearable perspective that most of us cannot cope with. Therefore we cling to anxiety as the drowning man holds on to his buoy, or to anything that could seem a buoy, a sign of real desperation. In this sense,

we could say that anxiety protects us from anguish, the latter being defined as an anxiety deprived of any object, the anxiety of no anxiety. Another reason why we claim that the fear of nothingness is the fundamental matrix of the diverse forms of existential fears.

Notes

Mistake - Perfection

A common fear that can be observed in human behavior is the fear of mistakes. It has a name: atelophobia, which is defined as the fear of not doing something right, or the fear of not being good enough. In other words, it's a fear of imperfection. Etymologically, the word atelophobia is composed of two Greek words: the prefix atelo indicates imperfection and the suffix phobia means fear. It can be connected to its consequence, the fear of failure, that we have examined in the context of the fear of impotence. But the fear of imperfection is more ontological, it is more a way of being, rather than referring to some concrete action. Even though making mistakes can as well be thought of as a form of failure in the action, it is closer to an inner value than to an external manifestation or accomplishment of our own self.

People with such anxiety can suffer and can develop debilitating depression or anxiety when their perceived expectations do not match reality.

An atelophobe (or atelophobic) worries that whatever he or she is doing is in some way not okay, unacceptable, or completely wrong. Everyday tasks such as making a phone call, writing an email, eating, or even talking in front of others can be very challenging for atelophobes because they fear that they are making some kind of mistake and falling short in their task. This type of thinking is a breeding ground for extreme self-consciousness and feelings of being constantly judged and evaluated.

For example, there have been case studies of incredibly talented painters who give up painting or hide their work because they believe that it is not "perfect." Instead, they remake their art over and over, and change it again and again, but are never satisfied. Thus, this fear of imperfection can inhibit people from doing anything productive at all because they fear that they may not do it right and disappoint and let down those around them as well as themselves.