

OSCAR BRENIFIER

Apology of Metaphysics

Or the Art of Conversion



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Or the Art of Conversion**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Metaphysics oscillate between an erudite or religious sacralisation, and a rejection for cause of uselessness or difficulty. Although, through its dimension of gratuitousness and distance, it allows us to think the world and ourselves, to think our thinking, to contemplate its limits, its structures, its articulations. Without dogma or fear, it invites us to tackle the thinkable and the unthinkable. In this treatise, our object is not to defend a thesis, but to enjoy the very exercise of thinking, in all its reversals, by extracting ourself from evidence, by avoiding as much as possible the short-circuits of thought. That is what we name the art of conversion.

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

Metaphysics, what for?

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

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

Metaphysics is primarily a passage to the infinite, a kind of projection of our thought onto the backdrop of its own eternity. Beyond time, space, matter, even beyond the causal chain; beyond a linear and studious logic; beyond a self, given as primary evidence; beyond any formula taking itself to be a password to a hereafter, hitherto conceived as a preserve. It is in fact this ‘mise en abyme’ of any solid

attachment that provokes the terror inherent to metaphysics. But, we will be objected, how can the individual, with all his procession of mediocrities, of unconscious rationalities, of baseness, ever have access to such truths? Is it not completely ruled out to allow the mind to state anything universal when it is so easily lost in the vast stinking swamps that constitute the bedrock of its own articulations, those of an unconscious and unbridled subjectivity, guided by fear, desire and a reductive egocentrism? For if the sewers are found below, one preferably lives on the upper floors. And when, out of necessity, we have to go down to the cesspool, it is neither about pulling out some pride, nor about claiming to bring back any kind of truth from it.

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

Nevertheless, it is out of this chthonian fog that, children, we pulled out those ghosts populating darkness, that we use to invent games for ourselves, that we would metamorphose into knights and fairies, into princes and princesses; our imagination was running freely without us worrying about investigating, through some ingenious device, the fruits of our thoughts. But, while growing up, we've let ourselves be absorbed by what we commonly call reality. And slowly, this reality which was only a testing ground took precedence over any other mental function, severe

censorship established itself, forbidding the play which consisted in letting the realities which constituted our mind, emerge from it, prohibiting with the same decree any freely determined thought. It therefore became necessary that a thought ‘adheres to’, but ‘adhere to’ what, if not to the determinism of the banal and the daily. No more ways to question; now only the evidence criteria matters, that famous common sense ‘naturally’ accessible to everyone which supposedly saves one from wandering about in the labyrinth of illusion and subjectivity.

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

And hence metaphysics? *A priori*, it doesn’t refuse any way, it is ready to see everything, to listen to everything, it lets any reality come to itself, it requires no entrance fees, but once an object is caught in its web, it keeps questioning it, putting it to the test. Relentlessly, it is interrogating. Taking side with the subject, it questions the object, and then it reverses the roles. Similarly, it organizes a debate between the whole and the part, unity and multiplicity, cause and effect, matter and idea, freedom and necessity, finite and infinite, singular and universal, and other nonsense. Nothing can stop it, it stops at nothing, or only

for a brief moment, the time to breathe awhile, time to question itself, time to question the tools it has slowly and painfully forged. It does not deny testing, it simply refuses it to be erected as a mean of submission, which, under the pretext of a truth requirement, would force its unfortunate victim to self-impose, some prefabricated reality.

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

So, if metaphysics sometimes seems to alienate man from himself, to somewhat make him forget about his own wishes and necessities, one should rather not be surprised. For, this distancing, this remoteness, this passage to the infinite enjoined by metaphysics, very difficult to handle, sometimes causes a rupture, a complete 'mise en abyme' of one's being, a dive into the dark chasm of non-being, another restful nest where a complacent soul can be lost forever. But is this last posture not the mere risk of excess inherent to any perilous enterprise? Can we accept that the observation of these periodic outbursts be used as arguments, abusive arguments used again and again by those who, shivering, remain caulked at home, buttoned up in some greatcoat of thought?

That the human mind decenters itself from its own anchorage, alienates itself from its own formulations, that it abandons for a moment the oppositions and distinctions from which it makes its daily fodder, this is a measure that can only be salutary. That from this dizzying summit it

contemplates the valley of its little world and that it perceives all its absurdity; that it recasts its articulations into disturbing generalities that ignore all the subtlety of nuances – since from afar they fade out – what could be more desirable? That it allows the images that appear from nowhere to resurface, and thus supports its outlook on the evanescence of an elusive horizon, to better tackle the rigorous and imposing reality of proximity, to confront the heaviness of evidence, what could be more essential! A frail skiff offering as only safeguard the simple joy of the journey. And that, as only usefulness, it questions the very idea of usefulness, what could be more useful!

Foundations

Being, Matter, Life and Thought

Horizon of Being

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

Therefore, let's now dig, as far as we can. Till the stone, but without illusion, for no stone is kept safe from erosion, from some earthquake, from any disaster which we could hardly foresee and which we could not prevent anyway. Let's go as far as possible into this humus, this silt, this gravelly soil that constitutes the very matter of our thought. Let's not dwell on mere trinket, on some remnants we will unearth along the way; we have grown accustomed to the

practice of such dilettantism. Like when we look for a word in an encyclopedia and, along the way, we are attracted to various entries, distractions that make us forget why we were there in the first place. Let's not fear to seek. It is scarcely to conceal or to bury ourselves that we penetrate into this unusual den, but it is to better establish the premises that lead us to conclude in one way or another, so as to go back to the source from which our many contradictions flow out, without hoping for some ultimate and well-deserved rest.

And then comes a moment, one amongst many others, but one of those rare and particular moments that give its being and meaning to time. It interrupts the endless process of indiscriminate succession, and it forces us to choose, in order at least to mark it, this very moment, to mark it with an indelible stain, so as to make it irreversible. It forces us to gaze at the horizon and orders us, as to poor 'sister Anne', to look away, far away, eyes full of hope, and asks us: "Don't you see anything coming?" And this is the moment where we live or die.

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

For the time being, as far as I can think of, I thump upon against some discontinuities, some asperities: there is being, there is matter, there is life and there is thought. These are the irreducible elements short of which I cannot elaborate any reflection, without sliding infinitely, without skidding uncontrollably. The inescapable archetypes that organizes and structures the world in which I move, which rhythms

the universe or reality in which I live and which lives in me. Everything else appears to me as derived from these four irreducible data, which for the mind constitute a receding horizon or the tension of the ridgelines.

The Radicality of Being

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

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

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

In reality, the essence always remains, because it cannot be named without being already. At least under the minimal form of the possible. Certainly, it needs nothing more than being named to convene, to confirm or to affirm its being, but much less still satisfies it. Moreover, in truth, as bizarre

as it seems, the essence does not even need to be in order to be. It is sufficient in itself. For, who or what could make it be? Nothing and no one. If we stare at the essence straight in the face, one can hardly think of it otherwise than as eternal: time becomes here meaningless. For if essences produce essences, why have the first essences not intervene earlier to generate the second? And if material things have generated essences, these essences are no longer essences since they are necessarily composed of matter, they are generated by matter, or they would be a mere predicate. Logically, temporality cannot have any function here.

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

Let's not forget that these hypotheses result from an exertion of our mind, when it tries to articulate the world and reality through its own resources, when it tries to give the wholesome architecture. It is confronted with entities, material ones for example, which can however not be considered as mere matter, but as a specific piece of matter, a kind of minimal quantum, determined and solid. And it is precisely this specificity and unity that the notion of being pretends to manifest. Because this piece of matter can never

be reduced to the whole of which it is constituted. A piece of plastic is not mere plastic. It has a shape and a maybe a purpose, or a function, however undetermined. Furthermore, any conceivable object is both one and many, a finding that has fascinated many minds since the dawn of times. But our era is rather beguiled by multiplicity. It is not surprising that this unity representing being embarrasses the contemporary thinker, the one of postmodernity as it often called. It goes in the same way as when the singular was embarrassing thinkers of another era, for whom only the universal or the absolute could represent adequately reality.

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

Language and Poetry

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

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

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

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

In any case, truth is not a literal representation. How to postulate that the concept of universe can adequately represent the universe, whatever the phrase that encompasses the concept may be? What we call a 'term' is often something that we can hardly conceive, yet we call this a concept, that is to say that it allows us to conceive, to understand. Here, to conceive rather signifies to imagine, to invent, even though such excesses help us to understand. A double problem arises: we bestow trust on our perceptions; we bestow trust on our words. If we combine this with our congenital anxiety, which generates our desires for certainty, the result is catastrophic: we believe in what we

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

An objection is raised. What about the performative dimension of language? Is what we state valid only within the descriptive dimension of speech? When it comes to bringing about an action, does the metaphor disappear behind the expected ‘performance’? It seems that the problem remains the same: is the meaning of the enunciation contained and exhausted within the speaker’s intension? In the principle of language as a communication tool, it is the case. In fact, the purpose is to reach maximum transparency, optimal efficiency, as if the speaker had to manipulate and control his public as best as he could. But if we stick to language as an expression of primordial truth, there is no question of subjugating or limiting a content to any subjectivity or singular reduction. In this perspective, a content can never be subjected to territorial claims. The

verbal gangue can only burst into a multiplicity of meanings, which intercross, oppose and overlap each other. How many formulations announce the opposite of what they state! Let's simply look at common examples, like: 'It's fine!', which often signifies that 'it is not fine at all'. "Honestly", often means 'I will sweet-talk you'. 'Not at all!', often means 'Absolutely!' On the one hand, one could not do away with equivocality, this ambiguity constitutive of being, of which the most appropriate image would be a kaleidoscope. On the other hand, without even admitting it to ourselves, language often serves to exorcise, to convince, or to comfort, so many motivations that lead us to hide obscure intentions behind some alleged clarity or sincerity. One only has to observe the strange and sometimes perverted motivations of those who want to teach us or inform us. So much so that we can very well ask ourselves to what extent does any linguistic consciousness operate in the act of speech.

Matter as Resistance

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

while, for others, materiality embodies decline or insignificance, nothing essential or substantial. Entities are not opposed within the imagination, neither in God nor in being: opposites are the criterion for what is tangible and rational, for what matter is or for what is real, as some may say. But perhaps the real is suffering from unreality or want, for its absence of plenitude.

Being is the archetype of matter, non-matter, non-material matter, the principle of matter. Without being there cannot be any matter or, rather, without being and its unimultiplicity I cannot think matter, because without singularities matter would be senseless. Let's not forget that matter is a concept, which we have invented, which attempts to combine a number of features, deriving from our invention. What are the principles of matter? First of all, continuity: unlike 'beings', I do not say "the matters" but "matter". By saying "matter" I presuppose a kind of continuity or a quality common to everything material. This quality cannot be material, else it would be separable from matter by leaving behind some non-material matter that would pretend to be material, something that is impossible. This leads us to a first epistemological consideration: the principle of any entity cannot be of the same order as the entity itself. This is what we will call transcendence: a reality legislating an underlying order, an underlying order which allows the principle to be manifested. The point here is not to hierarchize – let's keep safe from this terrible and endemic virus –, but to articulate the specificity of every mode, of each entity. Thus, the transcendent does not fully determine what it transcends, since its transcending action is solely the principle of the transcended, which is not enough to substantiate this transcended. In this way, the throw of a ball does not fully determine its fate: the accidental constitutes space and time. Certainly, a kind of nature or substance is given to the animal at birth, but it does not fully determine it. Contingencies equally determine its existence.

One must distinguish here between the condition and the cause: the first one is merely necessary while the second is in addition sufficient. *A priori*, the principle indicates the theoretical, while reality is practical and *a posteriori*: a quasi nothing is enough to modify the situation.

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

This raises a question. Since the idea of the relation of transcendence seems to be articulated at the heart of our system, let's wonder if what is transcending is more real, or less, than what it transcends. This is a mere hokum. This question makes no sense, because if transcendence is the dynamic of our system, it cannot be conceived without a transcending and a transcended. In this sense, one can hardly speak of any single primacy, but of a double primacy: transcendent/transcended, or principle and manifestation, without which there can be no transcendence. In other words, transcendent and transcended condition each other, and this, in the end, allows one to assert that there actually is a double transcendence, or a reflexive transcendence. This should calm fears and appease those for whom the mere evocation of transcendence signifies in fact the dissolution of their existence and everything else into some almighty and divine principle. But, above all, let's not forget that, when we talk, when we think, everything that we postulate is postulated within our mind, which implies nothing objective, even if I postulate the coherence of my thought and of the world that surrounds me. All this is only a game, an attempt, a speculation almost totally free.

Distinction and Indistinction

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

The distinction of being allows to distinguish, but being is indistinct in itself. Within being, A and B can possibly be distinguished, but nothing distinguishes them yet: both are letters. They are only one within this very possibility. And it is through this community that they can be distinguished. Without community, there is no possibility of distinction; without alterity we are deprived of being. For example, this community is their glass nature, a nature that will never be materialized in itself. But thanks to this nature, one can distinguish them as glass A and glass B. What matters is then to know if for the ones or the others this distinction has any reality, or if the glass nature, like any community or concept, is merely a mental construct. As for us, we will answer that since the beginning of this reflection, by convention or by definition, when we think, it is only a matter of mental constructions, and it is unclear what could qualitatively distinguish this construction from another one.

Neither what would make us move forward more in the fact that such a system corresponds to ‘reality’ whereas the other corresponds to a simple categorization of the mind. It is not by referring to some objectivity of matter as an alibi that it will prevent the notion of matter from being only a concept, and nothing else. The crucial point is to deepen the functioning and usefulness of a concept, whatever it is, without ideological prejudice or rigid philosophical bias.

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

If we think about it, being, taken in its general meaning, just as matter, life or thought, is not something which we are going to define, or reduce to something else, but a mere unavoidable thought operator. Being is a condition of thought and matter, irreducible to anything else than itself. It is neither material nor spiritual. This notion simply means that nothing can be neither thought nor materialized, without there being a form or another of community

between everything that is thought or materialized. Being is necessary both because it is general and specific, because it is absolute and relative. There lies its essence, its identity. As such, it is a condition of thought, matter and life.

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

Reality of Thought

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

decided to turn matter into a God or some other form of absolute, the sole foundation of reality, while others, for the same purpose, will chose being, thought or life. As for us, we choose to let ourselves be constantly jostled by each of these concepts while trying not to get carried away in the turmoil, even if these concepts are suggested at the outset of our work as the most intimate foundation of our reflection. Let's say that what has been the culmination of our reflections till today does not mandatorily constitute, even for us at the present moment, neither the eternal panacea of a faltering thought, nor some guarantee of certainty. This is a mere attempt at articulating some coherence or sense in our existence.

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

A quite relevant question could however be asked at this point in the discussion: can we trust in these constructions

of the mind, or should we be wary of them? Neither one nor the other. Do we trust a hammer? Or are we wary of it? A hammer has its uses and limitations. While the opportunity of what can be accomplished with this tool obviously depends on its hammer nature, it also largely depends on the decisions and capacities of the user. The difference with the human mind is that the user and the instrument are identical. This situation creates the following paradox: is the instrument determining the user or is it the user that determines the instrument? The limitations of the mind, are they pertaining to the user or to the instrument? To answer that the two propositions are equivalent is an escape, since these two realities are somewhat distinct within us. Does our 'will' transform our own nature? Does our 'acceptance faculty' seek to temper our 'will'? In each alternative, the two modalities are not identical, neither on the psychological level nor on the philosophical one. In fact, they articulate what we call the double perspective.

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

Fragility and Power of the Living

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

With this individuation occur several other features: dynamic, fragility, finiteness, begetting, which is quite coherent. The unity of a living being presupposes a high degree of interactions from its constituent parts, a unity which can easily get lost, thus the living cares much about its self-preservation. In opposition, the unity of being is a given, since radical being is a unity devoid of parts; for the same reason, because of this total lack of interaction, this lack of power to act, in the register of pure being, singular beings, as pure concepts, do not act upon each other. In the case of the unity manifested within matter, for living beings, unity is the result of an act that constitutes and maintains it. In fact, life differs from strict matter by its infinitely more dynamic aspect. The transformation of the living and the transformation effectuated by the living on its surroundings are proportionally more intense than those caused by inorganic matter. One could also say that matter is alive, since it transforms itself, interacts and even comes to generate life, but it should be specified that matter as such is

infinitely less alive than the living. Its life is mute. Can we then still talk about life when speaking about matter? Only in a very metaphorical way.

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

The finiteness of the living, as well as its ability to reproduce, partakes of the same quality. The living is in fact a hybrid crossing matter with being. By the fragility of its singularity and its capacity to act, the living being will produce another himself, if not many others, so as to extend his own being. This is what we call reproduction. A solution specific to the living, with the intimate relation to alterity that such a solution implies. To reproduce oneself amounts to being through the other. This notion of ‘being through the other’ might bother us, because the other is not me and vice versa, but maybe now is the right moment to question the

very notion of identity, tested by the living, which finds its identity outside of himself. Life is a challenge to the principle of identity.

Singularity of the Mind

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

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

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

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

Our mind is a reality in itself and, in terms of the real, we do not have to oppose thought to material reality any more than we have to oppose the material or the living to reality. Yet, numerous persons, depending on their temperament or

on their inclinations, will feel compelled to practice these oppositions, indulge in them, by some kind of pure subjectivity often ignoring itself. There simply exist different orders of reality, and this particular arrangement structures reality, it draws the articulations and determines frictions, just as flesh and bones structure the human body in its coherence and its differences; the flesh is neither more nor less real than the bones, or vice versa. It would be like comparing vowels and consonants. The outlook of the individual is part of reality, it constitutes it, even if reality is not limited to this view. It would be absurd to oppose a reality in itself, external and objective, to a reality entirely determined from within, purely subjective. But it is, alas, what is often being done, not least in the very grotesque contrast drawn between the scientist and the artist.

Subject and Object

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

However, two phenomena are noteworthy. First, the more technical devices are sophisticated, the more they require that the analysis be superposed to observation and thus the more analysis becomes a significant part of observation; accordingly, the computer data which are used to convey or restore information require a greater part of subjectivity than direct contact with the sensory apparatus,

if only because this information technology is a language in itself, with all the particularism and subjectivity of language, and the risk inherent in interpretation. Second, since several years, a kind of cultural rejection of technology has emerged which, in reaction to a growing 'objectification' of reality and of being, proposes schemes where precedence is given above all to imagination and sensitivity, with the serious risks inherent in a headlong rush into arbitrariness and the felt.

So what is the nature of the exercise proposed here? In a way, we return to the technique practiced by the elders: trying to develop for ourselves a 'worldview' from our mind and the data assimilated on this world. But this 'view' should not be a mere list of things or of precept codes, it must be the articulation of what is central to our mind, a sort of hinge around which operates our thinking: a naked architecture consisting in the weaving of its founding hypothesis. This is what we call a foundation, even if this foundation is in fact bottomless. It even seems to float in the air. However, what differs from the practice of the elders in the present exercise – although some of them have had the deep intuition of this aspect – is that we shall have this view play a rather critical role, instead of concocting some kind of unquestionable absolute out of it. Metaphysics is then no more conceived of as some established backworld, but as a dynamic, as a dialectic, which plays with everything, which plays everything, including itself.

Let us clarify, for a moment, the problematic of foundation. When I think about an apple, does this thought have a foundation? I can suggest the idea that this apple did not fully emerge out of my mind, unless I enter into a system of radical subjectivism where I would pretend to have invented the entire world, including myself. We will leave this hypothesis aside although it has something amusing in it. In other words, there is a certain reality outside my mind, which escapes and transcends it, a

specific reality that I conventionally call 'apple', an entity to which I attribute a number of predicates. However, I must admit that whatever my mind can perceive of this apple is but a representation, the apple itself will never be inside of me. I could also use this last argument to conclude that the apple will always be foreign to me, and stop there. Or I could use this very interesting situation to play a game: the game of foundation.

The foundation game consists in taking whatever data arises around this apple, to accept it *a priori*, and to try to play together this multiple information in order to reconstruct the nature of the apple and to rebuild the nature of the tool that I use to understand the apple. Since I am starting from the principle that I did not invent the apple, but that I can only grasp it through my subjectivity, I conclude that whatever I will have in mind will always be the interweaving of the apple and of my mind. The whole game is to try, as best as I can, to sort out this interweaving in order to simultaneously understand the apple and my mind. For example, imagine that the only apples I know are red and ripe. Every apple will necessarily have a color, a form and a given shape, a given taste. But one day, by chance, I find a small fruit, all green, tiny, acid in taste: I will have little reasons to call it an apple, except for a vague resemblance in shape. It will be the same for an old rotten apple that I shall never dare to taste. In order for me to equally call apple these two 'apples' which differ from my idea of apple, I will have to learn or invent a certain set of new characteristics regarding apples, and especially, thanks to study and reflection, I will have to understand the genesis of an apple, from its birth to its destruction. Henceforth, what could not previously be an apple in my eyes now becomes an apple; this moment could in fact be called a dialectical moment: the moment where a glimmer of light arises in me, because a certainty has just been short-

circuited, an opposition has fallen, a link has been established, a process is born in my mind.

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

To recognize is to place oneself within continuity, it is integrating novelty in the pre-established by discovering or granting it an unprecedented specificity. Without this new facet, I would truly have learnt nothing; my new knowledge would have nothing new. It is in this way that to recognize is to understand: recognition must shake up what is already in my mind, which must surpass itself, reorganize itself. In this confrontation lies the difficulty to recognize. But without this confrontation there is no learning.

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

Seeing and Thinking

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

Some will challenge such a vision, for, according to them, if there are distinct forms, they are superposed unto an initial chaos that is the real substance of things. In this perspective, forms somehow always remain artificial, superficial. They constitute the appearance that we need in order to be reassured, in order to act, since for our existence we rely on these forms without which we would be lost. However, in this perspective, these forms resemble the breadcrumbs of 'Tom Thumb', they serve to show a path,

even if the birds can eat them. In other words, we organize our lives around some benchmarks, but we must continuously witness how they periodically crumble. It is generally a matter of time. It is only for reasons of scale or of focus that some marks assume the form of certainties. Indeed, their truth is actually within their limitation, what could be called their purpose or outcome.

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

At this point, in its foundation, nothing distinguishes our hypothesis on chaos from the one on forms. Because, with the latter, there is no reason for chaos to be relegated to a kind of 'nothingness'. After all, it is the daily matter with which we constantly fight. The unknown is not nothing, the unpredictable is not nothing, the 'not-yet-happened' is not nothing, the 'purely possible' is not nothing. The invisible is a reality, as much as the indivisible or the undetermined. While the known threatens without notice to become ignorance, pure negativity, what already exists also

threatens to turn into nothingness at any time, whereas the possible threatens to confine itself forever in a kind of dark primal refuge. Everything seems to spring out from the invisible and to return to it, promptly, as a kind of metaphysical black hole.

There is no painting without a background, no painting without canvas, without borders, although the painting is neither a background, nor a canvas, nor a border. Why does the gaze tend to exclude? Probably, by its very nature, it must exclude: an intrinsic inability prevents it from fixing its attention simultaneously on the painting, the background and the borders, on the details and the vanishing point. A glance cannot embrace all things at once, nor simultaneously, nor with similar intensity. Here lays, perhaps, the challenge of the intellect, both for intuition and for comprehension: to acquire the capacity to grasp differences within simultaneity. For example, the perception of the mind would be the one unifying the perceptions of the different senses. But do not forget that sensory perception has already this artificial function: to unify chaos. For example, in its very structure, beyond the pupil which has the mere function of a mirror, the human visual system does not perceive points, but forms, whether geometrical or hues. Finally, the relationship between mind and vision would be the same as between vision and the world reflected on the retina, between the visual cortex and the eye. To recover the forms that make the world is a world, and not chaos, even is somehow the world finds its justification in chaos: it is its location. Without chaos, there would be no genesis, but a simple rigid state of things. Without the substantiality of the formless, there would be no room for the simple possibility of the forms that prelude the emergence of forms. This mysterious place might as well be called nothingness, to the extent where we admit that nothingness is tightly contiguous to being.

Order and Chaos

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

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

The limitation of our being allows us to be, our limited perspective allows us to exist in our individuality and not to drown into chaos. But this limitation also makes us perish, because only chaos remains eternal and unchanged. For one simple reason: chaos is equipped with all the prerogative of the unknown. The small shore of chaos to which we have

access, very restricted, does not change its substantial nature of chaos in any way. In this unbearable situation, in this limitation that makes us be, lies the paradox of our existence. Everything that is exists solely through this paradox. Everything that is matter incarnates it, everything that is alive lives it, everything that is thought thinks it; our lot is to be aware of it. For example, what the animal partly solves through reproduction, we also accomplish it by thinking the universe and by acting on it in another way. The mind does not have the same means as life, but it fulfills the same destiny. Projections of the self on the world; relative continuity and eternity of our being. Nothing of this is extraordinary, these are only our humble attempts at satisfying our meager part of form-generating chaos while fighting against it.

To not prevent ourselves from seeing, from imagining, to expect everything, to look at the invisible even when we do not see anything, to believe that something exists which does not exist, without trading the prey for its shadow. To focus on the mysterious and unknown wave in order to recognize ourselves without indulging in the reflection of our own face. For, if the wave reflects back our own being, it is not at all because it is there for us, but in spite of appearances, precisely because it is there for us. If we admit that water is so well done that it returns us our own image, why not infer that it must send us back the image of the world, this world of which we ourselves are only the pale, uncertain and marvelous reflection. Indeed, the mirror sends us back our own reflection, but if we know how to look, it rather sends us back the image of the world. For this, one must not be obsessed with one's own reflection, one must know how to look at the mirror itself, admire its power. One must accept to really see oneself, to see through oneself, to see oneself as an accidental culmination, an accident of being, an accident of matter, an accident of life, and an accident of the mind. So, from this perspective, the wave is

truly there for us, for this ‘us’ is other than ourselves. If the ‘us’ is merely ourselves, the wave is not there for us. And, in the same way, if we are only a reflection of the world, the world is really there wholly for us. Because he looks at itself through us, and we know ourselves to the extent that we grasp ourselves in this mirror identity.

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

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

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

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

The nature of time

A problem arises. One could say that for every being, all that is needed for the next moment to be is already available in the present moment. This is not entirely wrong, although it is necessary to moderate the claim, to avoid that the tumult of confusion rushes into the wide-open breach. For, already, to speak in such a way hypostasizes time, turns time into some kind of a thing in itself, a mechanical series of moments, powerfully hovering like a god over the world and going about with it like a child's toy, with the relentless

regularity of the all-mightiness to which no being nor form can resist. Indeed, if all being already contains everything in itself, why would it become anything else than what it is? By granting too much to some entity we make it self-sufficient and we wonder why it is not immutable and eternal. And time would thus have no reason to be, unless it is him who, as Santa Claus, brings novelty by distributing it to everything and every being.

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

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

the centuries we have never stopped to transform into a cult the admiration which we have for every entity whose liminal side, because of its borderline aspect, fascinated us a bit more than others.

Thus, within our system, time is an intrinsic modality, which we can abstract in order to think – as we can and must abstract any quality that stands out as a quality –, without necessarily considering it in an autonomous and radically separated manner. On this issue we must constantly stay vigilant: we so easily allow ourselves to be carried away by a tenacious desire to hold the object of our reflections into our hands, always drawn by the strongest desire to possess a solid seat on which we could settle down without fear nor after-thought. Moreover, as a general principle, as soon as we try to define an absolute concept, as untouchable an immovable, a small alarm bell should automatically ring in our head to warn us, to force us to review our position, to make it more dynamic, less rigid, more dialectical, to incite us to give back to this bronze statue the living and palpitating flesh of which we deprived it.

Hence, what happens with time once we have forced it to reintegrate the global entity from which, for a moment, it thought it was emancipated? What form does it take if its identity is not this enormous linear and graduated rule which bears witness to the changes in all things anymore? For, to find our way, to make our existence easier, we made choices: the cycles of the sun, of the earth, and of the moon have long punctuated our daily lives, even if new technical data intervened in recent years. But in itself, before any specific choice on a metric, what is time? What does time look like before being time, as we know it in daily language and practice? Or rather, if we go back to the root of time, let's consider what makes time sprout, which gives it its mere possibility. We are forced to imagine that time, before time, the principle of time, is sequentiality. But how does is

come about? By what chance does a state become another? Would it not be magic if we were to believe that a transformation happens by itself, without anything to motivate it? And if we do involve a notion of cause, or of structure, or of condition, what does it mean and imply? We postpone all decision on the nature of time: it remains a problem, and it must stay that way.

Cause and Condition

Here is a proposal. To the extent where there is multiplicity, the act or interaction would be a primary data of the real. Each singularity interacts with each singularity, and simultaneously each part interacts with its whole and with its subparts, which happens in a world infinitely divisible and multipliable. Said otherwise, each singularity acts simultaneously as a single and autonomous singularity, as a divisible totality, and as part of a whole. Therefore, there is no cause in a unique and unidirectional way, but a reflexive interaction of which some aspects might appear more decisive than others. It is no longer a cause, or causes, but an intertwining of conditions. Any transformation would be the result of a dynamic and fluid geometry. Time thus becomes the internal regularity of a system – for example the rotation of certain celestial bodies - whose nature and parameters are arbitrarily chosen, a regularity in motion itself, since it could very well speed up or slowdown in relation to the system as a whole.

In this perspective, there is no more absolute time than there is an absolute cause. Insofar as the different temporalities self-reference themselves, they are arbitrary. Insofar as they are measured against other metrics, they are changeable. Thus, there can be no absolute time, but solely a concept of action unit, arbitrarily chosen, out of which flows a regular sequentiality which we call time. Any useful time is thus based on a cycle that repeats itself and that can be counted, and in the absolute this cycle can be modified.

Even if this time would not be modified in itself, what happens during this time could be modified, which would *de facto* accelerate or slow down our time since it is an interaction. Just as the value of a golden coin is modified by its commercial exchange capacity, despite the constancy of its gold content. Only eternity would be invariable, because devoid of any comparison. An absolute time would come to be totally unusable and would amount to a denial of time: in order not to be counted it should not repeat itself at all, since any repetition always finds somewhere a limitation to its own regularity. Absolute time has no physical nature, an abstract vision or theory, when repetition is necessarily a physical phenomenon. The useful time, the one we can quantify, bears sense only in the constancy of a relationship, in the regularity of a frequency, which make it all the more fragile. Any disruption would make it inefficient. We realize the problem when we wish to transport temporal values into space, or by modifying the parameters of interaction such as speed or acceleration: we get lost.

Thus, a cause is a predominant trend of action that provides a form of unity to being, or to a being, or to a phenomenon, including the production of singularities. There is continuity in being: a particular cause interacts necessarily with the matrix or the whole of what there is. But this cause is relative since it is predominant only in the context of a specific relation, which is itself determined according to the type of already existing singularities. Thus, if there are no living beings, or if the physical conditions of life are not met, life is not a cause, it does not generate anything. Or at least it does so only potentially. To think of an absolute cause would for this reason imply thinking the absence of cause, since no absolute cause should depend on any condition: it would generate all its own conditions. Nothing would delay or affect this cause, its potential for realization would instantly come about, outside of any temporality,

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

We must thus infer that all cause is relative. Thus life could emerge out of matter proportionally to the life or life-potential contained within matter. At every step of this transformation belonged a certain capacity to emerge. And this interaction, this resistance of matter to life, of matter to mind, etc., defines time. In that sense, it would be false to declare that the notion of being, itself, has some finality; being is, simply. Only the specific has a finality, since it becomes, whether it likes it or not, the mere means of its cause.

However, since the cause can only be partial – a cause cannot exhaust its effect, just as the effect cannot exhaust its cause, product of a mutual transcendence - every specific being is also a being lacking cause, or a mean of its own cause, *causa sui*, that is to say that it is, without any other concern than being, being itself. Its acausal dimension provides it with certain autonomy.

Thus can we easily proclaim or reclaim autonomy of the self, as an effect of its own cause. Thus the cause needs an object to relate to and an effect to be produced in order to be a cause: the causal principle is necessarily a relation.

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

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

And matter? Matter resists, this is its main quality. In other words, matter is what prevents this from becoming that and forbids that from becoming this. It is what guarantees the integrity of this and that. But, in our conception, because ‘this’ is always contiguous and

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

Within these conditions, what does immateriality mean? And can this immateriality be considered as belonging to the order of reality? The absence of materiality could mean that being does not act, that it cannot act, or again that it acts fully to the maximum of itself, that it is already fully realized: it is, and no becoming dwells in it. Indeed, immateriality implies atemporality since time is determined by an action and immateriality excludes any transformation and thus any action. At best, it is a potential for action, but only a pure potential, a qualitative kind of potential. In this way, the metaphysical entity is fully itself, it cannot lack anything. Yet it is determined, limited. Thus, the triangle as a triangle cannot the least become square-like without abandoning its triangle nature. The material triangle, however, is always more or less a triangle; it always suffers from some distortion. The metaphysical triangle, defined as a triangle, is a triangle or is not one. This corresponds to the singular and irreducible integrity of any entity, which we can name transcendence or archetype. Metaphysical form does not mix, else it becomes something else. Metaphysics,

as we have seen, operates within discontinuity. Of course, metaphysics only makes sense in relation to physics, just as physics makes sense only in relation to metaphysics. A human being is such only because a 'human being' is a reality, else we would only know Paul, Peter or John, all entities without any particular relation with each other. Similarly, 'being human' is a reality only because there are human beings. Materiality is thus the relation between a power of action, meaning a metaphysical reality, and the act itself, a physical reality. And it is in the same way, through action and transformation that time and space are generated.

Physics and Metaphysics

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

It is said of metaphysics that it only deals with what is not material. But are our thoughts on such and such issues material? Only a neo-realist or a pseudo-realist ideology can pretend that thought is objective insofar as it deals with material questions. It is not because a thought observes, calculates or measures that it is more objective than when it speculates on the nature of the soul. For this, one only needs

to look back at the numerous mistakes of the past committed by physical sciences. As we see it, everything is representation, even if this or that particular scientific hypothesis or postulate seems to materially operate, by flying airplanes or moving cars. A particular theory works until it does not work anymore, for the good reason that it has reached its limits. This is probably one of the phenomena that best characterize the history of science.

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

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

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

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

Theory and Practice

However, without adopting a radical rupture, one must admit that something separates the two domains, physics and metaphysics. Let's put forward the idea that it is their center of interest that distinguishes them. One is oriented towards the exteriority of the mind, that is to say its deployment in the world, the other is more focused on the

interiority of the mind, that is to say to have the mind turn onto itself, to think the intimacy of its own process. But how to think of a deployment without a return on oneself? And to think of such a return without thinking of a deployment? How to avoid the permanent confrontation between the singular and the universal, to the extent that a singular thought permanently tries to think the world, to the extent where, through singular experiences, we try to establish the universality of phenomena. Multiplicity of the unity and unity of multiplicity. This problem has been identified long ago, and it appears that we can't escape it; it is even desirable to not let it rot in the dungeons of the mind.

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

But, what is the soul, if not the unity of the body? And what is God, if not the unity of the world? Many will jump,

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

Man reflects, and he would like to take his reflections for the foundation of all reality. Man has sensory perceptions, and he would like to take them for the foundation of all reality. Man has intuitions, and he would like to take them for the foundation of all reality. It is for these reasons that some, idea supporters, will emphasize analysis, logic and forms; while others, matter supporters, prefer utilitarianism, empiricism and pragmatism. And the last ones, subject supporters, will opt for the will, desire and belief. The intellect, the world and the individual. Or else, the transcendent, the whole and the singular. Or again, unity, action and multiplicity. These various poles somehow characterize the philosophical options that have defined human activity. Everyone is opting in his own way for one such axis or a combination of these axes, without really realizing the axiomatic and derisory aspect of the issue. Any of these working hypotheses foster their own inner coherence, which in every mind strengthens the conviction of righteousness associated with its choice. The 'other one' cannot be true. Much like when we think that our house is

the most pleasant of all, or that our field is the best cultivated in the world; much like when we defend what we like because we like it, a mix of legitimate choices and of judgmental confusion. When we like, we discover the good in what we like. Does it prevent us from seeing it anywhere else? There lies all the difficulty, which is a source of clashes and of misunderstandings. All are right in their formulations, except when they refuse the reason and formulations of others.

Arbitrary and Precarious

To turn back on oneself, to become aware of the premises of our own thinking, to realize that it is only a choice, and that there are other choices. To have a glimpse at the precariousness of our position. To understand that to provide any basis to our existence consists in practicing arbitrariness, just as much as the choice of our love is arbitrary. Willy-nilly, we have 'fallen' in love, a choice which is simultaneously the most beneficial and the most difficult to accomplish: the test par excellence, the commitment that gives substance to our existence. Some will fear to see in this state of mind a kind of skepticism or nihilism, but this is due to an insufficient reading of our discourse. Certainly, for the one who is convinced about the absolute truth of such and such an intellectual posture, such remarks may seem destructive. But for the one who assumes that what is true is yet to come, or never to come, and therefore engages in a dialectical path where any thought is only a hypothesis waiting for another, to grasp the derisory nature of his own thought does not frighten him. He dares and engages upon the most serious of thoughts knowing that it is only a game, and exactly because it is such, even if life itself is the main stake of this deadly game.

Let's therefore come back on the subject of life, since this essay begins on the quadruple hypothesis of being,

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

Compared with matter, life introduces unity, since a living being is relatively indivisible with respect to a material thing. At the same time, it introduces dependency, a much more intense or extended relation to alterity. But who says dependence of alterity also says interaction: a

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

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

The Scattering of the Senses

We have three ways of thinking: the senses, intuition and reasoning. What about sensory perception? It is oriented towards matter, since like this one, the senses work within multiplicity, in opposition. Vision is not smell, which is not taste, which is not touch, which is not hearing. Everything

perceived is not only perceived separately from the other, but every perception, however small, is perceived relatively independently from other perceptions. The world looks like a flux of various perceptions, the coherence of which need not be sought; we can at best try to regroup them by associations of circumstances and resemblance, while being aware that it is no longer the work of the sense, but of the mind. Indeed, senses need not to classify or organize, this is only a need of the mind. Senses know, they receive, they do not recognize, or hardly so. It is in this sense that they can be considered as being relatively passive, since everything is always new to them: they undergo things.

'And the animals!', will be objected. Even if claimed they have no mind and do not think, even if they do not classify, they do recognize, since they prefer some food to another; even plants can choose. We will use precisely this argument to reintroduce the archetype of life. Indeed, thanks to the principle of unity, which unifies multiplicity, life can recognize since, because of that same unity, life makes choices. Who states unity states a subject, and implies a subjectivity, as we have already glimpsed. That is to say, a position that subordinates every part to a central flux, to a hierarchy of being, much more structured and hierarchical than in the simple matter. Parts have no more meaning in themselves. It is because of this that life is more active, less passive than matter. What made a choice is necessarily more active than what is relatively more neutral. It is true that matter also makes choices, as such metal is not such gas, which is not such alkaloid, and none of them reacts like the other; for example, they do not have the same chemical affinities. But every part of these different material beings is not subjected to a transcendent unity that differs in nature from its parts. Thus, to the different local affinities of the different parts of being, a general affinity of this being, which differs from and can even oppose local affinities under some circumstances, is superposed. Thus an animal

will suffer while accomplishing some acts, but he will execute them nevertheless because the vital principle in it has priority over the suffering conveyed by the nervous system. For example, a mother which, to defend her children, fights with animals against which she would have never fought under other circumstances out of fear of pain. Love, in its general sense, desire or identification with another similar one, represents the best manifestation of this 'alterity' characteristic of life.

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

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

know that it must fall – it does not know the universal law of gravitation more than it knows Einstein and Newton – we do not have to ask ourselves why instinct or intuition knows what it does. Although this should not prevent us from exploring the issue.

Possibility and Circumstances

Life knows, although matter knows as well, in its own manner. However, in life, we notice a ‘novelty’ or ‘originality’: the knowledge of the integrated whole which makes the living being is not the sum knowledge of its parts; it is a new form of knowledge which does not cancel the previous one but is superimposed over it. It is for this reason that life transcends the matter of which it is made. This is why life is characterized by unity. And for this reason, due to its immediacy, all knowledge apprehended by this unity is not reducible to anything else than itself: it is what we can call subjectivity, the emergence of an integrated subject. Why does life want to preserve itself? One could as well ask why there is being rather than nothing. Or why are there animals and plants? These questions are of a similar ilk, almost impossible to answer. Even if all of this, the universe, the genesis and the proliferation of life, once accomplished, make a lot of sense. Out of habit, perhaps...

However, with the mind as such, a new step was taken, because the mind has the specific capacity to break away from life, even though we can claim it emanates out of it. This is what gives man the incredible power of wanting to stop being alive, to deliberately wander, to hurt or destroy himself while being aware of it. Of course, this allows him as well to de-center in relation to himself, resulting in an immense openness towards alterity within the unity of his being, as we mentioned it before. This new form of knowledge or thinking, spiritual or transcendent, allows a distancing, with the advantages and disadvantages coming

along with it, which sometimes becomes dissociation, unlike instinct, this thought of the living which operates within immediacy. The eye does not see itself seeing, instinct does not see itself knowing, but the mind sees itself thinking and it is even there that it finds its specific identity. It is in this duplication, a transcendence generator, that this new form of being discovers its own nature and its foundation. The problem of foundation arises only for the mind, since it alone can question its own grounds, it alone can duplicate itself and stare at its image in the mirror of which it is made. The mind is indeed a mirror, which reconstitutes everything according to its own nature. And by some magical dialectical trick which some will obviously dispute, one can state that precisely because the mind only is able to consider its foundation, it must constitute this very foundation: there is no foundation of the mind beyond the mind, there is no objective exterior socle to it. And one will do what he wants with such an idea. But the temptation is strong to grant one's favors to such a perspective.

Of course, this last statement raises the question of knowing how what remains posterior in time and emanates from what it is not could ever be the foundation or, said otherwise, how could that which is not chronologically the first be considered primordial. It is precisely here that things may become interesting. The time of short-circuits, where theories break apart, is the true test and the great revealer. It is maybe the very notion of cause or finality that will require to be reviewed in another way than the one common sense usually means it. It is the notion of 'possible' which will have to be thought over, with all the implications for the very nature of metaphysics inherent in such a revision. For, if we want to draw a rough diagram of the usual and common way of expression today: there is reality – implied here in the physical sense –, and there are ideas, which are merely that, just ideas.

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

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

simultaneity or sequentiality of a certain number of presences. Thus no interest, if only for the sake of curiosity.

Primacy of Relation

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

But then, if nothing exists outside of relation, what is a relation? What makes this relation so essential to existence? Can we find a metaphysical foundation to support this evidence? Even if this evidence is so often occulted, for reasons on which we will come back. For, if relation is purely accidental, contingent, that is to say that it is dependent, amongst other things, on the vagaries of time and space, how could it articulate itself within a register where time and space do not exist as such? As we saw, metaphysics is the kingdom of permanence. But what characterizes relation is the interlacing, and thus change. A given entity is differently associated to an almost infinite multiplicity of various entities. Simultaneously or alternatively, in the same place or in different ones, in the

same manner or differently, everything that exists entertains a terribly complex relation with its surroundings. If we push the reflection till the end, we see that, for example, on earth, there is nothing that can ignore anything else. Directly or indirectly, everything is in relation with everything. This observation is even more undeniable for the man of our time than for his grandfather. Probably, one of the best examples remains the whole economic process, where one realizes that in the manufacture of any product huge production networks covering the entire earth are taking place. Between raw materials and their means of extraction, production techniques and the development of the tools needed, the complexity of the transportation networks and the construction of infrastructures, financial and commercial connections, a comprehensive study of the production process propels us in an endless round across the planet.

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

network, he feels or foresees the dissolution of his being. The relation to Internet, through its infinite networks, indefinite and interwoven, sends us back to this kind of intuition.

Returning to a metaphysical reading of the problem. The nature of the relation in itself seems difficult to determine, yet this relation allows location, space and matter. None of these three characteristics has any meaning without the notion of relation: what distinguishes a location from another is that it is here in relation to another that is there. What distinguishes a moment from another is that it happens before or after in relation to another moment. What distinguishes matter is that such thing responds differently in relation to another, and there is no reaction nor action without any relation to another. Relation, taken in its strictest sense, thus becomes the presence of the other, a presence to what we are not. It becomes our possibility to be this or that, now or later, our possibility to act. To the extent that relation is constitutive, since it is a relation which made us be and makes us be, in other words an interaction generated us and now maintains us, what we are not is part of ourselves. It becomes undeniable to consider that relation is constitutive of our being and, in a sense, that it is our being.

Dissolution of the singular

Let us admit that relation is constitutive of our being. What consequences will ensue from the hypothesis asserting the constitutive and intrinsic, if not primordial, nature of relation? One of the most striking is the explosion or dissolution of the unity of being. Indeed, if the unity of any entity is composed of the relations whom it entertains with an infinity of other entities, this unity becomes particularly friable; it ceases to be this pedestal on which we sometimes want to raise knowledge or identity. Out of question to state peremptorily: “a thing is what it is”; from now on, “a thing

is mainly what it is not". Above all, the first person of singular, this 'I' which we use so easily as if it was given to us by divine right, becomes a fragile word pronounced softly and sparingly, somewhat like when holding a fine crystal glass, without holding it too tight, because it could collapse under the pressure of our fingers. In the near background of the 'I', indistinguishable from him, looms a whole universe, a compact mass of presuppositions, a story with endless ramifications, an intertwining so tangled that it is no longer possible to distinguish what is from what is not.

Within this new perspective, the 'I' certainly loses an identity, but does it not win something in the exchange? Instead of its usual status of cause, it is now a result, made strong by its origins, its elaboration, its structuration, and it is no more a mere evidence accountable to no one, a power based on itself, and authorized by itself. It wins in the exchange because magic never fed anyone. It merely maintains illusions for some time. Nevertheless, the weight of a heavy debt certainly darkens the panorama for the one who would want to jump in a serene heaven where everything is given without measure. A legacy that we could have been spared; can we not refuse it? At the cost of a radical and total negation of oneself, since without constitution and history, there is no being. We then become an insignificant step in a long chain of chaotic hedges, and in the long run one might question the point of this endless farandole. Is there a goal? An end? A terminus? A place where we could rest in lush grass and pure gratuitousness. Are we swimming in utmost chaos, a chaotic chaos even if by times it takes on the appearances of a marked pathway? Or again, are we eternally condemned to the status of a vulgar mean, of an unknown finality, a strange pawn in a game that we ignore. Are we manipulated by a hand so invisible that we perpetually move forward without ever emitting the slightest suspicion of rigging?

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

A terrible emancipation, obtained through the murder of the father, the mother and of the entire lineage. These abusive parents who, despite all their good intentions, can only remind us of the chains that bind our soul. We burn with desire, a desire for freedom, a desire for being, a desire to pose oneself as subject, a desire to assert oneself as the

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

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

Singular and Universal

Between the ridiculous temerity of murder and the pitiful surrender of sovereignty, two forms of cowardice and blindness that are yet very excusable, what other path

remains open? Does the singular have the only possible alternative to negate the universal or to disappear into it? Must we absolutely choose between these two ways of being? Others have imagined a rather practical solution that they sometimes call the middle-way. This conception somewhat looks like a kitchen recipe: a little of this and a little of that in well-balanced doses, you let it simmer, adjusting from time to time with a new pinch of this or that, with a lot of patience, and there you go! All is done! An example of this alternative is the one that preserves the singular aspect of existence to private life, and the primacy of the universal to public life. This produces a fully functional citizen, who during weekdays wisely obeys to the rules of the city, while his weekends and evenings are dedicated to whatever activities please him. In such a perspective, schizophrenic, the world is divided into two kinds of relations that alternate and oppose each other. On the one hand, a liberty which embodies the pure indeterminacy of being and subject; on the other hand, obligations which constitutes the determined aspect of being and subject. In this man, the individual is opposed to the city and to the citizen. For him, law is limitative and not constitutive; it is a stopgap, a lesser evil without which the freedom of others would represent an effective permanent threat. There, subjectivity is arbitrary and without any ground. In the same way, law becomes arbitrary and groundless. I am that way because I am that way; the law is as it is, but it is the law. *Dura lex sed lex*. And since we must operate within this absurd world, let's practice the middle-way, the principle of 'a bit of everything', a principle which we turn into the epitome of wisdom: the art of concession. One wonders if such a conception of existence is not the worst of all. It would seem better to act as if the singular and the universal did not exist; to behave in a completely ignorant and intuitive manner. There would be less chance to go wrong, and most of all there would not be any pretention to know what to do. Such a behavior

would not erect itself as a universal maxim, in a sort of eternal return: it would not try to strengthen and to crystallize a state of fact by rationalizing it under a form or another. Absence is a lesser evil compared with a presence the distortion of which makes impossible any thought worthy of that name.

Before going further and drawing the necessary general consequences, let's work on another example of the problem of the singular and the universal. Let's take another scenario than that of man, so as not to psychologize the question too much and to avoid limiting it to the sole domain of anthropology. As always, the value of a problem lies on its universalizing power. Can we transpose it? Can we use it to enlighten other domains of thought? How far can it lead us? Also, let's exaggerate the dilemma by grasping it through a borderline case. Taking the geometric point, let's examine what this situation can bring. A geometrical point is nothing. It has no dimension. In itself, it is absolutely undetermined and ungraspable. In fact, as long as it is not located, as long as it does not determine a location, it does not exist. In other words, the point really comes into existence from the moment where it is located on a line, or rather on two lines; for example, as an intersection between two lines. It is only as a location, by means of this intersection, that it finds an identity. Yet, if while situating it in this location we try to perceive it more precisely, it disappears from our sight. By gradually narrowing our metric, we see it dwindling even faster. We eventually have to admit, in a certain manner, that this particular point is a hole in the line, an interruption, a silence of the line. When it segments the line, it transforms it, cuts it, and alienates it: it introduces a new reality. We cannot think about it as a segment of a line. It is of a different order, even if the point seems to find an identity through its relation with the line, and even if the line seems to find an identity through a relation with the point, since

the line is in a certain way a continuity of points, and specific points determine its trajectory. The point and the line are completely dependent on one another although they completely ignore each other, bundled in two different dimensions. The singular and the universal therefore require each other, even if in a certain way they otherwise completely ignore each other. Geometric reality offers us an obvious perspective on the paradoxical nature of being.

How to think? How to grasp reality? Neither a lone singular, neither a lone universal, neither alternating singular and universal, nor absence of singular and universal. What is left then to cling to? Only one option, although *a priori* it seems rather difficult to think about: the simultaneity of the singular and the universal. Even if they are radically distinct from one another, singular and universal are united in the most intimate way; they are intrinsic to one another and are unconceivable one without the other. Is singular only what is universal? Is universal only what is singular? This directly follows from the principle that we baptized 'double perspective', a principle through which the simultaneity of apparent opposites constitutes the very foundation of reality, or its mirror image. This is what we have already considered while trying to think the timelessness of time and the immateriality of matter. For the foundation of any concept is its negation, in the same way in which there can be no negation with no principle, since without a principle there would be nothing to negate. Opposites are born together, we could say, they constitutively require each other.

Thus, if we now return to our initial fourfold hypothesis: being, matter, life and thought, we do not think about it anymore as the ultimate categorization of all that we can think of, neither as a kind of metamerisation of reality and of knowledge, but as the representation of an unavoidable process, the one which generates and denies, which threatens and perpetuates, an infinite dialectic which folds

and unfolds, explodes and regathers, which sows history and annihilates it, an elusive frame on which all truth tries to weave itself, all existence, any relation, every permanence, symbols and limits of the world and of our thought.

Presence and Absence

Commitment and Independence

Any presence is an absence. This is one of the most commonplace truths in the world, yet it remains one of the most unsettling truths of that world. A mountain is definitely not a valley. Yet, would another world be possible where mountains exist without valleys? Such a recognition, more than others, allows to understand just how double is the nature of knowledge: on the one hand knowledge of the mind, on the other hand knowledge of being. And though they are not necessarily opposed, these two forms of apprehension may find themselves at odd with the perception of reality, to such an extent that one must make an effort to resist the temptation of giving them different names. However, it is necessary. For, accepting a double denomination would smell too much like a capitulation, the impossibility of grasping this couple in its dialectic and tension; such a concession would signify the acceptance of a serious and dangerous rupture. Maybe then necessary ...

Let's start with the following principle, even if it means to come back on it later on in our work. The presence of any entity foreign to a given subject necessarily implies that this entity holds the status of an object. It may be objected that two subjects can face each other, an inter-subjectivity scheme, which is far from false or impossible. We will answer that for each subject, the other subject nevertheless

remains an object; object of his thought, perceptions, action. Even by granting it the status of subject, even by identifying to it, the other subject is a stranger, that is to say someone, something, that comes from the outside. While stating this, we are tempted to yield to the potential objection. But let us pursue our path. There is presence only if there are subject and object, which is to say if the two 'extremities' of a relation are positioned, if there is a possibility of duplication (subject-object) and of separation. Whatever the nature of the relation may be, may it partake of consciousness, of life, or else simply constitutes a physical or chemical interaction, it is necessary in one way or another to distinguish the perspective of one or the other of the 'participants' in the exchange, even if in some specific situations, very slightly differentiated, such an analysis may seem artificial and relatively useless. The world does not articulate itself in the same way when caught in a direction or in another: asymmetry always imposes itself.

So, if there is an object, it means a form or another of presence, and the presence of this object must necessarily be intimately intertwined with the texture of the being of the subject that lives this presence; we can say that this presence represents a commitment in the flesh of the 'being-subject'. Thus, it is only through a partial fusion that presence happens, an unavoidable condition for the object to effectively exist for the subject. Some common outline must be established, much like two objects that lean on each other, which adopt their mutual forms by forming a surface of tension whose outlines will depend on the form and materiality of the objects in confrontation. Lines of force will be established that will be common to both entities. Not only are these objectification (a subject which becomes an object) and partial fusion essential to the very idea of presence, but they constitute presence in an exclusive manner.

Consequently, to be precise, we must state that for us any presence is thus not the presence of another being, but the presence of a way of being ourselves. It is probably that way that the object becomes a subject again, while risking assimilation, being transformed into a mere projection. Here is the limit of inter-subjectivity. For, it is in ourselves that we feel the presence, this could not be anywhere else. It is a hollow version of ourselves, a place where the discovery of the other sinks within forms, since a kind of fold, a force line, is formed by such a meeting. When I touch an object with my finger, what I perceive are the modifications of my finger, it would be illusory to say that I perceive the object itself; it is only a way of speaking. The lover perceives the beloved through the pleasure and the pain imposed by this 'other self'. The object transforms the subject; it is through this deformation of the subject that the object is present to the subject. It should however be noted that, if we talk about form, it is only out of ease and convenience, as one must not grasp this concept on a static and fixed mode only. Two dynamics, two modes of action will interact through the distinction and the encounter of their forms. For example, it will be the interaction of two minds, although the outline is far more difficult to imagine or to visualize, unless it is represented in terms of flux, as hydro or aerodynamic flows for example.

When we say that all presence is an absence, the notion of absence is exempt from any purely negative connotation, since by the same process absence now becomes the affirmation of a presence. It would make no sense to talk about an absence that would not be symptomatic of a presence. Because for somebody to be absent, he must still exist, be manifest somehow, have a kind or another of presence, of interaction. Whether we talk about physical or mental absence, the presence of the absent being is undeniable; negation applies solely to the circumstances of the presence; it generally refers to the fluctuation of the

course of events that alters the presence. Absence is never absolute, but always relative. It signifies a drawback of presence: “He was previously there, now he is absent.” Or, again, it is the non-realization of a possibility: “He could be there but he is absent.” In fact, both propositions state a presence, even if it is no more what it used to be, even if it is not what it could be.

When presence diminishes, the object quality of that entity equally diminishes. Absence represents a degree of independence and of affirmation of the thing itself, just as presence represents a degree of commitment within the relationship. However, if this implies that the thing in itself manifests its pure ‘self’ to the extent it comes to disappear, we are now witnessing a paradox. On the one hand, maybe it becomes a subject again through its absence. On the other hand, if an entity becomes totally absent, it would rest only in itself, and nothing could no longer be said about it. Without presence, at the very best one can give a name, as neutral as possible, a quasi ‘no-name’, even if to name is still an affirmation of a kind of presence and thus the affirmation of presence. The whole difficulty of the exercise lies in the helplessness felt while facing the effort to think the object all the while ignoring its effect on us, even if we know it only through this effect. How is it possible to think of a subject when we only know objects? This is equally valid within our relationship with ourselves.

Deformation and Projection

If one thinks about it, for the subject, the world-totality can ultimately be summed up to a simple deformation, that of his own being, and if this world-totality is conceived as a subject, any single being, for this world, merely represents a deformation of its being-world. In other words, the world, as any other subject – the most consequent or the smallest –, can be considered as a deformation of a deformation. If one accepts that nothing exists outside of a relation, one can

state that the object is exclusively the deformation of the subject, and that in reality the subject is only the deformation of the object. However, from such a conception, how is it possible to draw any realistic perspective? How to escape pure illusion? What are we able to state without flinching, about the world and ourselves, when there only is subject, when everything is subject, when everything goes through the subject, when everything is representation or modification of the subject? Myself, already, as a thinking subject, I can only be a projection on a projection. A frightening prospect. Is there still a safeguard? How could I pretend to express through my discourse anything else than the irrational manifestation of desires and wills rooted in 'my' singularity? No more possible escape, no more way to convene any kind of freedom of reasoning. Are we not venturing here on a slippery and dangerous slope?

Within such a system, one observation remains undeniable. If the world can be reduced to a simple deformation of any singular being, the world identifies with action: the act of deforming, and its confrontation with a resistance without which there would be no possible deformation. It is to the extent where an entity acts that it exists; it then becomes senseless to consider the world in a static and rigid manner. Power, a capacity to act, embodies the first predicate of being. Through the encounter, everything that is must act – or resist - without discontinuity, at every moment, under penalty of not existing anymore. But at the same time, we must admit that the same world is constitutive of the singular being; without the whole how would the part exist? If only logically, since I must admit that, like everything that exists, I am a part of this world, a part of a whole, so to say. Unless one defines the whole as all there is except for myself, a hypothesis with interesting consequences, but which we will leave aside for now, although, in fact, we continuously played with this

tempting prospect. The world is constitutive of the being of the subject, already because each part of every being perseveres through a relation with the world. However, a question, which arises, is to know if in fact the world is the origin of the subject. It is one thing to maintain a being in existence it is another to engender it.

Although the origin of the singular remains a mystery for the moment, we admit that the action, which is the world, a dynamic form, constitutes this singular being. Since the singular being, in its relation with the world, is only a deformation of the world, every singular being is defined by its capacity to deform the world. It is constituted and manifested to the extent where it deforms the world that it lives in and which lives in it. Certainly the singular being must be aware of its relative separation from the world, since without this separation it could not pretend to act in any way, since it would not possess any 'separate' existence, any autonomy and would thus not be a subject. But the danger that looms is to take this relative separation, this 'separation of perspective', for a complete autonomy, where the subject becomes, for its own sake, a kind of evidence in itself, completely self-sufficient, or at least having the illusion of self-sufficiency. Such a subject needs the world, it could not deny it, but it keeps in its mind the idea that the world is at its disposal, as a kind of self-service where the subject chooses whatever it needs, when it needs it. An illusion of pure freedom, as the world crushes this unfortunate subject under the vastness of its heavy mass, wrapping it under some kind of gluey veil.

Any subject, proportionally to the degree of consciousness that its nature allows it to reach, realizes that a threat permanently hangs over its head; within this world on which it depends, and because of this dependence, danger awaits at every moment. He more or less sees in this danger the certain end of its being – limit of form, limit of time, limit of power – and therefore he is anxious. The

problem is that this perspective, which has its interest and reason to be, sometimes takes on a disproportionate priority in relation to any other perspective. A vision which represents a short-circuit of thought, a vague impression which corresponds to a minimal awareness of the identity of the subject. We are driven by anxiety, the perception of a threat, which stems out of a fundamental feeling of separation between the subject and the object, between the singular and the whole.

Community and Possibility

Let's consider for a moment the scission between subject and object, which seems to embody the perfect location, the space of reality, the place where everything happens. Although for some this division is illusory, let's invite them to play the game. Thus, when the subject is considered in relation to itself, if he is not an object but only a subject, it does not know itself; it is, simply. In order to know, distance is necessary, in a way or another. To know oneself, one must take some distance from oneself, separate from oneself. A gap must be operated, a split, a divide, a form or another of modification, in order to allow a return, a kind of fold back. All knowledge implies externality, be it the otherness of a perspective. And the idea of an object corresponds to this notion of exteriority; the object is this entity from which the subject takes distance by trying to establish a link with it. As soon as I want to establish any kind of relation with whatever, including with myself or a part of myself, I necessarily objectify that with which I want to come into relation. I place myself into some exteriority, even an exteriority towards myself if it is I that is in question. At this point, we can say that the archetype of knowledge is relation, with its subject-object polarity, a polarity that gives a sense of direction and meaning to the relation.

A question arises. In itself, does the idea of 'being' really imply a lack of knowledge? To be, is it really some kind of ignorance? Simply saying "I am" or even "a thing is", should then be prohibited; such a statement, in itself, totally excludes the idea of knowing, since in those expressions, there is no link, no relation, therefore neither subject nor object. The only relation there is between two things that are, is a community of being. Does this community represent any kind of reality, or is the verb 'to be' only used as a way of speaking, as a superfluous entity? Does the community of being lay on a relation, as a subject-object community, which is necessarily based on some relation? Earlier we saw that the thing is really itself when it is no longer within an 'expression'. The subject as much as the object are alienated within manifestation: any subject which manifests itself, manifests itself in a particular way; it translates or betrays itself, according to a precise modality, a specification reduced to exist through the kind of relation which conditions and reduces the manifestation. One does not manifest oneself in the absolute, one is manifested 'to'; which implies that the entity to which we manifest ourselves determines the nature of our manifestation. It is a translation in a given language, thus a betrayal, as it is an adaptation. One does not manifest oneself to a blind person by showing oneself, nor to a deaf by making noise.

Thus the community of being would be the community of "things themselves". The only relation that there could be between these things would be the absence of relation. The totality that 'being' brings together would identify itself as a multiplicity that nothing unifies. But then, 'being', is it nothing, or is it something? Can the relation of all things that are unrelated embody reality in any way? Depending on the angle chosen, on the part of the sentence that we choose, it seems that the answer is alternatively yes or no. Being, as odd as it may seem, is nothing else than an attempt to distinguish without actually establishing any distinction.

What fundamentally distinguishes an entity from another? The fact that it is. What does it have in common with any other entity that can be distinguished? The fact that it is. Being is a concept that helps to distinguish, but that does not distinguish by itself. The verb 'to be' would therefore only express a mere possibility? In a certain way, 'to be' would only signify the possibility of being? If we accept this hypothesis, then only to be 'this' or 'that' would really 'to be', truly signify the fact of being. Without the manifestation to some 'other', despite the reductionism that this manifestation involves, nothing would be.

Let's try to draw a parallel with being, through the concept of length. Everything that is characterized by length is measurable, but is not necessarily measured. To state that something has some length amounts to stating that it can be measured but that nothing has been done in that respect so far, or at least that we know nothing about it. Anything that has some length can be measured through this length. It can be compared with other things that have a length, precisely because they have length in common. Thus, length is both the community of two things involved therein, and what helps to distinguish them. To assert length thus also simultaneously asserts the community and the possibility of a difference. The whole problem here, the same that men have faced for centuries, is to know if we accept the idea that length signifies something in itself, or if length exists only as a notion, as an abstract relation that the mind weaves between 'long' things. Does length exist in itself, or are there only specific lengths, quantifiable or quantified? Thus the idealists and materialists have always been opposed, alternately favoring the perspective of things taken in their materiality and the perspective of the subject thinking those things. In other words, it opposes the conception of the thing in itself to the conception of the thing taken exclusively within a relation.

Many will here exclaim: “But what is the point of this remark?” And somehow this question will be welcome, since the philosopher too often indulges in abstruse analyses, with practical implications and consequences rather difficult to perceive, if it serves any purpose at all. Thus, to the extent possible, it is always advisable to ask what a concept or another brings forth, so long as this filter does not become a yoke, since the reductionism of pragmatism constantly hangs over us.

Unity and Multiplicity

What does length give to us? What does the concept of being bring to us? What does the formalization of what we can name transcendent in a general sense bring to us? First of all, this allows us to think about the multiplicity within unity, a unity without which we could not think. If, in order to think humanity, we had to enumerate one by one all the men that are a part of it, we could never speak about humanity or even think it. But what is humanity? Either this concept represents the sum of all men, the living, the dead and even those yet to be born, or the essential and common quality of all men, a quality whose allocation allows one to be human. We notice from those two different ways that the notion of humanity is not a mere totality, since from one side it is an indefinite or infinite number, and from the other side it is a quality, even harder to quantify. It is for this reason that we qualify this kind of entity by the name of transcendence, a term which in its original meaning has the connotation of ‘going beyond’. As for metaphysics, this beyond undoubtedly refers to a beyond the tangible and the quantifiable, those early forms of evidence, of the known, of the certain.

But is it only a thought operator, or is this transcendent also having a reality in itself? If this question makes sense. As a preliminary response, we can say that it would be presumptuous to believe that our mind invents such

fundamental concepts that do not correspond to any preexisting reality. What a claim to believe that we imagine all of this! We can also answer that, criticism for criticism, the notion of a singular man has just as many reasons to be doubted than the notion of a universal man. It is not because our eyes show us some arms, legs and a brain stuck together that we will gain the undisputable right to call this an entity. Unless we give ourselves the permission to propose hypotheses that suggest the unity of multiplicity. If we refuse it, we would have to break everything we somewhat desire to think into a myriad of small 'bits'. Obviously, we see a whole man, while we do not see the whole humanity, nor the quality of being human, but if we would discuss only what we can see or have seen, our conversations would be very limited and knowledge would never move forward. Not to mention that if we did not have a capacity for reflection and interrogation, any sensorial perception would always be trusted and accepted without restraint, nothing would question or challenge sight, audition or touch anymore; we would be prisoners of the immediacy of our senses.

Let's also see what happens in the act of naming. Somehow, naming is like pointing the finger at some things that, for various reasons, we can't always grasp in our hands. By naming we necessarily unify, since we gather a diversity under a unique name, we propose a minimal hypothesis of unity that implies existence, a minimal hypothesis that will sometimes be accompanied by the formulation of a quality, the attribution of a predicate. But when I point my finger toward something, maybe the person I address only notices an erected finger and concludes that I refer to my finger. And when I point toward a tree, do I wish to show the entire tree, a given branch, the whole foliage, a particular leaf, or simply the green color? Sometimes, those who hear the words only hear a name. And if they understand that this word refers

back to something else than itself, they will look in the direction indicated by the finger, more or less far, more or less precisely, or, as in the tests of Rorschach, they will see what they can manage to see, and they will think that the name used refers to what they were able to see, very arbitrarily. Hence so many hiatuses in conversations.

In all of this, what remains indisputable, is that by pointing the finger one states a presence. First, one's own, a presence of one's self to another presence, symbolized through a gesture. But also the presence of an object on which a subject tries to draw attention from another subject. Being is nothing else than this: to state that something is, to assert a being, is to claim a presence. Although this presence, in its unexpected emergence, in its mysterious persistence, is an absence since it is always a matter of ignorance, problem and uncertainty. About it, I can only ask myself, advancing bold hypotheses, imagine and propose words with great respect and a deep sense of the derisory. Within this minimalistic conception, being constitutes a simple break in the continuity of nothingness. Just as nothingness can be defined as a rupture within the continuity of being. Nothingness is an obscurity which we cannot penetrate; the emergence of being is only visible through the crack that this emergence traces upon nothingness, but being itself is not more visible than nothingness, it is made of the same stuff. It is the indivisible discontinuity between being and nothingness that is being itself, and being is kneaded with nothingness.

'Pointing the finger' thus becomes the irreversible act, the significant gesture that constitutes experience, the moment on which thought will embroider itself. Pointing the finger expresses an intention, a curiosity, a will and at the same time it is distinguishing; in this distinction, man rediscovers the experience of being, this being which is distinguished from nothingness only through distinction. By naming, by granting a distinction, the mind generates, it

gives birth. But what does it give birth to? Is delivery sufficient in itself as a criterion of positivity? Is everything that is born actually real, is it universally desirable? Is 'accouchement' its own criterion or should it satisfy some conditions obeying certain laws? But then, where do these laws about genesis of being come from? From outside of being or from within? Is there any forbidding? Is everything namable, or is there some unnamable? And if there is some unnamable, is it so for a distinct subject, in other words for a singular being, or is it unnamable for the totality of being taken as a subject?

Being and nothingness

What are we trying to accomplish with this metaphor where being is symbolized by the act of naming? Above all, we would like to communicate the experience of what we can call the subjectivity of being. Being is not merely a collection of things that are imposed upon us of which we must say that they are. Being is not a unique being, a kind of god, an entity considered as being par excellence, the absolute center of the world. Being is not a specific person, ours or another's, also taken as a center of the world, absolute or relative. Being is also not a hollow verb of which the only function is limited to filling up the neutral space between a subject and a predicate, an auxiliary function which some languages have seen fit to eradicate. Being is first of all the affirmation of an entity, thus a singular perspective, thus a subject, thus a subjectivity, a subjectivity without which nothing can be distinguished from nothingness. For the mind, nothing exists without being named by a subjective act, be it from desire, will or through analysis, since the mind cannot remain neutral in front of any presence. In the same way, nothing can pretend to be without embodying some kind of specific statement, without representing a distortion that could be named, on which one can or must take side. Any specific being, in its specificity, is a distortion of being. And since being itself is

nothingness, the particular being is a distortion of nothingness. It is out of this distortion of nothingness that the mind thinks.

What is nothingness? One after the other, it has been called God, deity, matter, substance, first cause, absolute being, unspeakable, emptiness, power, transcendence, unity, pure act, nothingness, vacuity, and many other qualifiers. All these names can be given to it, even if it is nothingness, and the name of nothingness does not suit it better than any other. Here, we call it nothingness, not out of some pretension to hold the supreme definition, but out of pure subjectivity: it is the way which we have chosen to explore the nature of this inaccessible which embodies in our mind the foundation of everything, a path which in reality becomes the very possibility of our mind. Whether we choose it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, without this path, or another similar one, how could we think? Nevertheless, there is no nothingness in itself, but only 'our nothingness', the 'nothingness for ourselves'. The 'nothingness in itself' is an empty concept, devoid of content, just as there is no 'horizon in itself', but only the horizon of a given place.

Without nothingness we could not think. This statement may surprise. We will be asked: do you mean that without thinking a kind or another of god, we could not think? This is exactly what we want to say, even if the notion of god, rather reductive, is precisely the place where the discussion stumbles. For, our hypothesis is that there could be no thought without a referent which this thought proposes for itself, a referent that will fashion in its own image every statement of being. This referent will be both the very nature of thought and *de facto* its supreme object. For if my vision is based on a horizon, this horizon which borders and limits it becomes the demarcation zone, where out of the invisible arises the possibility of a vision, the invisible draft of vision. Thus, for ones and others, according to

temperaments or reflections, what will be thought of as the limit and the condition of being will be either a durable matter, objective and solid, a voluntary and creator God, or a singular self that sees and thinks. For various reasons, everyone will be relatively drawn towards one or the other of these hypotheses on being. Beyond this matter, this God or this “me”, thought will fail: there will be nothingness, the place where no distinction is possible, this moonless night where nothing can be distinguished anymore. The premises of a thought are the bumper beyond which it can no longer proceed.

Another objection will arise: “but you completely assimilated reality with the mind! You are caught within the most radical subjectivism or idealism. No science is possible within such a system. Everything becomes the fruit of imagination.” But on the contrary, is it not when science becomes aware of the limitation of its own hypotheses that it becomes possible? A science which takes its own premises for absolute ones, which believes itself able to grasp objective and unquestionable data, is no longer a science: it is no longer an object for itself. At best, it is reduced to a technique that applies readymade formulas, a technique that refuses to see or to accept any case that are not provided for by the text book. It allows combinations and extrapolations of these techniques, but by default or by decree it forbids basic assumptions to be criticized. The copy is not to be reviewed. It is based on such prohibitions that a materialist can refuse to consider metaphysics, that a religious person can refuse to consider the world, that an existentialist can refuse to consider science, that the idealist can refuse to examine the efficiency of his own thought, and so on.

Then, where is the good hypothesis, the one that would be familiarly called ‘really real’? Or is this path leading us straight into the most complete skepticism? For, if the world is apprehended as a fiction, nothing goes anymore, nothing

fits, everything is allowed. Thus the mind oscillates between its distrust towards certainties and the fear of nothingness, and to avoid one he jumps in the arms of the other, even if he is to rush in the opposite direction the next minute. The problem is as follows: what to do if there is no irreducible absolute on which the mind could rely without any afterthought? We have to do what we do when we can no longer walk: we swim. And this quip captures pretty well the way in which we consider the possibility of an answer. First because the idea of swimming implies a dynamic, and no longer the static aspect of the one who stands up, sits, or lies down, firmly rooted on solid ground. Stability is not a given anymore, such a feeling would be illusory; it is the object of a struggle of each and every moment. We are floating, which is not always easy. Because by choosing to ignore the waves successively breaking one upon the other, each with its own requirements towards the poor swimmer, no one survives very long.

Installation and imbalance

It would be absurd to pretend to abstract oneself from the implicit subjectivity of one's position as a subject. Similarly, it would be wrong to deprive the world of the subjectivity of its quality as a subject, and it would be wrong to deprive being from its subjectivity when it is nothing else than a presence. Indeed, how could what identifies itself by its very presence to what is subjective ever be anything else than subjective? Only pure absence is objective. Only pure absence is a reality that depends on nothing. However, there is no pure absence, since it prohibits pointing the finger at anything, even if only towards some hollow or shadow, towards a future presence or a disappeared one. There is no pure absence, since it ignores any distortion: absence is a distortion. But the foundation of all thought, is it not what stands by itself, without any relation? Thus, the mere fact of being able to subsist by oneself, without any constraint, without any

relation, such an entity which would define itself as a mere possibility, would suffice to identify the foundation. It is in this way that the foundation is an ungraspable entity, an impossible entity.

Thus, if a god is the foundation, he is necessarily absent; if matter is the foundation, it is necessarily absent; if the self is the foundation, it is necessarily absent. Any foundation is absent. Like the horizon. For if the horizon is the limit, it is absent. The horizon is merely a rupture, where nothing is distinguishable anymore, where space, the nature of which consists in separation, is no longer separated. On the horizon, at the limit of the visible, the plan becomes a line, the volume a point; the visible becomes invisible and the invisible visible. The line and the point are simultaneously visible and invisible. They do not differ in themselves. They only differ in relation to what they are not. The point is not distinguishable from the point, neither the line from the line. The indistinct distinguishes itself because it is distinct from the distinct, not in itself.

Is it an objective or a subjective phenomenon? Let's say that the interest for this kind of metaphors lies in their ability to help us apprehend the following principle: the moment of rupture is what holds the truth of a phenomenon. And rupture is the moment, the locus, where by becoming absent presence manifests its truth. For if the encounter of being is conditioned by the fact of being thinkable, it is by thinking the unthinkable that being is set free and recovers itself. To grasp the reality of my own being, or the reality of the world, requires the slow erosion of the multiple predicates of which they are covered, and the brutal collapse which erases any visibility. What is left then? The irreplaceable experience of a deep sense of freedom, where we realize that everything is a predicate, contingent, if it is not the ungraspable being which we desperately try to figure out. Matter is not material, God is not divine, and the self is not a subject. Words become ridiculous, and this

sentiment of the derisory touches upon the reality of being. We experience the ephemeral aspect of being, and because of this, we simultaneously experience, with fright, the heaviness of the world in the fabric of which we have been cut out.

The relatively pleasant feeling of weightlessness of the swimmer is not separable from the mental and physical energy required to maintain a certain stability, essential to survival. It is in this sense that science, in its general acceptance, becomes a necessity for the one who discovers he no longer has foothold anywhere. How many of us, because once, for a moment, without knowing why, have experienced floating, without controlling the situation, now conclude that we will float for eternity, if only because of the intensity of the fear or the feeling of distress that we felt then. However, science as we describe it here is no longer a technique solely interested in certain types of limited or localized phenomena, a technique that provides the security and comfort of the already known. Science as we understand it is no longer disjointed from being, it is its experimental crucible. It elaborates the individual being by confronting the nature of the world, of a world for which being is the seed and the matter, a world of which it is absurd to speak when overlooking being.

Standing, with both feet camped on the ground, it is easy to forget the effort done by so many muscles in order to enable us to maintain the position. We will become aware of it and will feel compelled to abandon this static posture only when fatigue settles in, or when a longing for comfort motivates us. Then we will sit, walk or lie down. Similarly, we should know that while standing up we were resting on some apparently solid and unmovable ground or structure, which might not in fact have been so solid. It is only when the foundation of our support seems to be undermined or shaken that we become aware of its existence. This is what is scary during an earthquake: what was once

unquestionably stable now becomes fragile and dangerous. What we are trying here to convey is the idea that there are two opposite attitudes in ourselves. The one which take things as they are for granted, as an obvious and reliable reality, a state which naturally comes out of the way things are, or of a firm and antecedent will. And the other one that conceives of any situation through a dynamic process, unstable, where we must be able to react or intervene at any moment. Astonishment is the rule in this second case, and a permanent need for comprehension arises. There is where science can be lived as an experience of being. Are we unconsciously settled in or are we dwelling in this permanent imbalance, characteristic of life and being? For being, thought of in an adequate manner, in its whole extent, is the very negation of sitting still; equilibrium only exists therein, in the artificial guise of the instantaneous, as the arbitrary and fixed moment of a vast movement. Any experience of 'being' which would ignore 'becoming' would in fact be an exclusive experience of non-being, and occurrence of the 'absolute being', an exposure to the void, an episode erected as a protective refuge of life, a shelter against dialectical reversals, a choice obviously legitimate, to the extent that we become aware of the reductive nature of this radical option.

Law and Truth

To state the impermanence of beings does not mean that nothing is. In the same way, to state that nothing is absolutely true does not mean that nothing is true. On the contrary, it is stating the transcendental and universal substantiality of the true by claiming the limitation of any particular formulation. It is remaining open to the irresistible and natural aspiration that provokes the power of truth. One can only temporarily resist this force, for a lifetime, for example, some seconds or some centuries, but not more. And to resist it, much work will be required, for such a challenge is not easy to overcome. Exhaustion will

be its only logical conclusion. It is better advised to follow the stream of the current than to act against it. It goes in the same way for truth. Some do not see why the universal law of gravitation would be less powerful than truth, while this law is a tiny example of the wider law that is truth. For what is truth, if not the law that governs all things? And what does governing mean here? It means that the universe has a direction, with all the reach implied in this word, in its multiple acceptations, both as ordering and as orientation.

Not an orientation guided by some external and magical power, but by its own way of being. Simply because neutrality, the 'straight' – the artificial line reputed as the shortest path - is a pure aberration of thought, a kind of impossibility, an outrageous theoretical scheme. Everything that can be distinguished is subjective, that is to say that it comes from a subject - from a singular entity – as indistinct as this subject might be. Because nothing that is can be devoid of inclination, of direction, of inflection; nothing is neutral within being: it is already in itself curvature or subjectivity. It is form, and it could not be unformed without dissolving into non-being. Just like the line that stripes the white page introduces distinction, determination, orientation, finitude, direction. And this subjectivity enunciates itself as a law, as the law, that is to say as the nature of things.

However, let us make no mistake about the meaning of the word 'law', not more than on that of the word 'direction'. Too often, a strict connotation of imposition, of constraint and of limitation, that is to say of externality and negativity, is conveyed by this term. But the meaning that we want to convey has a constitutive connotation: the law allows the city to be; through limiting and defining, it erects. Admittedly, the singular is not the law, it does not determine it; the law is in a way imposed on the singular. With regard to the law, the singular maintains a certain degree of freedom, sometimes indeed it can somewhat

affects the law, or its application, just as the law affects the singular. In fact, the law is the articulation of the relation, either intrinsic or extrinsic relation, even if this distinction is rather misleading. The relation to what is other is constitutive of the individual himself, it is not a mere accidental situation devoid of consequences. The fact of being the citizen of a state and not a mere individual does not only change the circumstances but the very nature of the human being. In the same way as the kind of law by which he is governed radically changes the identity of the citizen. This same human being is also subjected to various biological laws, social laws and others, laws that precisely grant him his human status since they define him. The question then is to determine up to what point and in what proportion the subject is determined by this or that law. Is it necessary to have four legs and chew on grass to be a cow? Does having four legs and chewing on grass make any being a cow?

The law is never an absolute, its universality knows its limit at its breaking point. Moreover, as an articulation of thought and speech, a law is only a particular descriptive formulation, which cannot claim to be more than what it is. Considered in itself, it cannot claim more than what it is, be it in power or in extension. Thus it is that a direction always remains relative. Thus it is that a meaning has meaning up to its point of meaninglessness.

The same applies to truth. Any particular truth is articulated within a relation, a relationship, in a coherence. What 'sticks' is true, what is consistent, appropriate. Everything has its own truth: the articulation of its foundation, in that it is distinct from another truth, in that it distinguishes this thing from another one, in that it is the specific unity of that thing. But there is another problematic: the one concerning the universality of that truth. What proportion of universal truth contains the specific truth? In other words: up to what point is this truth

true for other things. Up to where what is suitable for a singular being or for a mode of being is suitable for something else? What I claim for myself represents my own truth. The degree of truthfulness of my statement then depends on its degree of universality. For nothing is absolutely true or false. The limits and proportions of this true or false however remain to be known.

Origin and Truth

Here is a problem. Consider two statements: “I love praline ice-cream” and “I must breathe in order to live.” From the point of view of the singular, the two propositions can both be true, however it can be argued that culinary tastes can change within the same individual throughout his existence, whereas breathing will never stop to condition his life. Nonetheless, temporality is not an absolute criterion, although it is highly significant. Indeed, someone may have a birth-mark on his skin, which he will retain till his death, while he will lose reason at some point; this is not enough to make his birth-mark, more than his reason, the main characteristic of his essence. In the same way, most of our peers could act in this or that manner without this particular behavior determining as such the specificity of human nature, without denying the importance that such an observation may hold. Thus one can observe that man has always engaged in warfare without necessarily admitting that this aggressive behavior is a fundamental characteristic of human nature; otherwise we would have to submit ourselves to this implacable law and abandon any desire to modify it. Empirical reality does not necessarily convey the essence of things.

There lies the whole difficulty, because if in order to know truth one merely had to conduct a survey and to gather some statistics, if numbers indicating the frequency of occurrence of events could actually speak, we would not have had to argue in order to determine the veracity of

statements since a long time. One could just count and quantify, something that many of us are in fact satisfied with when it comes to legitimate their assumptions. And the precise reason why quantification contains in itself a good deal of illusion is precisely because it deals with presence, that is to say with immediacy, whereas true presence is absence, and absence can't be quantified, since it is the transcendental unity of things.

This is where we come to our initial problem: the opposition between the knowledge of the mind and the knowledge of being, being and mind taken here as subjects of knowledge, not as objects of it. As we have expressed it, to be is the minimum, the affirmation of an absent presence, but it is also the maximum: the irreducible truth of a thing in itself. It is the perfect intimacy of an entity, invisible and indivisible. But does this intimacy really exist? Is it not by a misuse of language and of concept that we talk about the intimacy of a singular being? The intimacy of the singular being is probably the widest, most vague and undetermined generality that can be. Earlier on we said that the substance of all singular unity was nothingness, since nothing but a fracture could distinguish the being from nothingness. The specificity of being in itself is thus limited to the simple discontinuity of a continuity, spatial, temporal, material or other. And gradually, this discontinuity interacts with itself, self-multiplying, generating a swarming of enfoldments, intermingling ones with the others, a permanent weaving, out of which flows a growing infinity of singularities whose general pattern seems to melt into chaos, scattering, remoteness and confusion.

Thus, while claiming to comprehend the infinity of the thing in itself, it appears that it talks about a step backward, a kind of regression to an earlier era, antecedent to the multiplicity of relations, a reminder of the first bursting forth, where the singular appeared as an embryo out of nowhere, clean and undefined, in the indeterminacy of

unspoiled novelty. But let's point out that within the process of a metaphysical quest, which by definition tries to think about problems in their archetypal nature, the concept of the origin must not be thought of as a 'before and after', but as a presence which remoteness, under the guise of time, seems to obscure; from that moment onwards, as soon as we think that way, the reversal of the temporal process seems thinkable since the mode of action that characterizes the directionality of time can now be inverted. After all, the origin taken in its temporal acceptation represents the indelible mark which forever determines the nature of any specific being. The simple fissure that distinguishes being from nothingness is of this kind, and thus this fissure becomes the very mark of being.

Possibility and Power

A simple fissure distinguishes being from nothingness, thus it becomes the very mark of the being. Over time, like a tree that extends its twigs, its branches and the infinity of its leaves that live and die, the being, any being, unfolds his soul in an immense continuity that searches and desire that which it is not. From a tiny seed, still impermeable to almost everything, yet animated by a kind of thirst for alterity, the singular being will seek for itself through what it ignores, stumble into the unknown and the unexpected, foraging the whole substance of a matter of which he is a part. It will even forget about itself, even if, in truth, this is impossible. How to abandon the fracture that is the mark of our being? But soon, out of the arid and inhospitable hollow in the rock, where the seed found a dwelling place, an immense foliage now expends. How can the abundance and magnificence of one still recall the poverty and sobriety of the other? A simple wind blow could dislodge the unfortunate little seed, thinks the tree, overwhelmed by pity, as it stirs its massive branches. It however forgets that, without water or uprooted, it would die, whereas the little inconspicuous seed, unattached to anything whatsoever,

unaware of any anchor, not yet cluttered with itself or any long story, seems to defy time, to defy nature, as an untouchable sphere which has eternity for itself. Neither thirst nor uprooting scares it: it ignores everything. It has infinite space and its own mobility at its disposal.

It is within this dialectic between the tree and the seed that we wanted to draw the opposition between the knowledge of the mind and the one of being. Some might say with irony: “so trees are thinking but not seeds!” It is always the same problem: we have a glimpse at the difficulty to think in metaphysical terms, the inability to articulate a reflection that directly grasps at archetypes. The impossibility to think intimacy, to think nudity; modesty or forgetfulness. The seed embodies the possible or the power. But to think that power is a potential, a power to do something, does not bother anyone. But to think that mere possibility is in fact a power seems to go against common sense. A newborn, somehow, attracts pity, as compared with an adult: it is weak and defenseless, it lacks something. Yet, does it not have a very particular quality, which we should envy if we do not do it already? To that child, everything remains possible! And every day that life brings forth will gradually strip him of this quality. He will learn a specific language, and the more he grows in age, the more it will become impossible for him to learn different ones. Ditto with his habits. The experiences he will suffer will direct him in a particular way, to the exclusion of any others. Slowly, he will see his range of options shrink dramatically, for a variety of reasons, some having more to do with the singular being which he will have forged for himself, others rather linked with the environment – even if these two concepts can hardly be separated –, a traumatizing experience that could lead him to the tragic if not absurd point of not being able to believe anymore that something remains possible. Will only remain, in his eyes,

immediacy and certainties, the brutal and fallacious evidence of the present, of the presence.

Over the years, every human being will have learned so much, so many things he ignored when he was a newborn who barely knew how to suckle the breast of his mother. Thus, this learning, the whole of all this knowledge of which we are all so proud, does it not have a completely puerile aspect, something even unhealthy? With this knowledge, an impossibly heavy burden has gradually been established, an inertia which turns our mind into one of those huge ocean liners so clumsy that they are no longer able to return to port without being towed by some smaller and more maneuverable pilot boat. The inertia of experience, which moreover makes us believe in ourselves, an existence doubly charged, both by all of these experiences which we did not choose and by the numerous automatic conclusions that we draw from them. And we boast about being wise persons, we say or will declare to our children on a sententious tone: "You will see when you will be older, you will understand that things are not always as we want them to be." We will try to instill in those poor naive and defenseless beings our worship of the arbitrary. We will teach them to revere the state of the world as it is, an untouchable magma, and then we will teach them to surf without any after-thought on this fixed reality. We will teach them how to kowtow, how to swim in mid-waters, and as if we were giving them the most sublime and greatest of all secrets, as if we were passing unto them a kind of Holy-Grail of philosophy, we will offer them in a breath, allegedly modest while heavily charged, the absolute revelation: this strange behavior, this symptom of the devastation of age, this aberration of human existence, this sign of great fatigue, is called wisdom.

Conjecture and Certainty

“Thus, thought constrains and blinds! But if we must not think, why do you give yourself so much trouble as to write, to supposedly foster reflection?” What to answer? Being is a crumb of nothingness striped by a slight fissure. To think, to write, maybe only in order not to forget it; this would already be great. Then also, because to admit this metaphor or another of the same ilk demonstrates an intention to put into perspective these multiple evidences which would otherwise spread in us in a vain and satisfied manner, monopolizing with great complacency most of the oxygen within us, suffocating us, preventing us from breathing. However, let’s precise our use of doubt, since it is by means of this term that many will try to translate the notion of ‘putting into perspective’ which we are introducing here. Some use doubt as others go to church or to theatre, to have good consciousness, religiously or culturally, by sacrificing a little hour here and there to a limited questioning. Others use doubt whenever it suits them, as a comfortable and friendly set up which allows more or less widespread beaches of freedom, precious moments where one is no longer accountable to anyone, not even to oneself. Some even abuse it, by fear of commitment, of responsibility. So called radical doubt falls within this category: unable to maintain itself without stumbling on quantities of physical, moral or other kinds of realities binding it, this doubt accepts arbitrarily determined long moments where it totally suspends its activity and leaves adrift a consciousness blinded by alleged evidences which it does not know how to question. It is the victim of its own arbitrariness.

Compared to these attitudes, compared with doubt, our principle of ‘putting into perspective’ insists on the derisory nature of every thought, of each reality, not to integrally deny them any reality, but so as to measure and to permanently keep in mind the ephemeral and limited nature of their range. Such an attitude, by committing to digging ever deeper into the foundation of metaphysics and its

objects of thought, and by refusing *de facto* to have one's field of vision completely obscured by a first degree perspective, at the same time enables an outlook on the universal or eternal dimension of any singular phenomena. We call archetypes, metaphysical objects or realities, the thoughts that belong to this foundational dimension.

In other words, all formulated thought, considered systematically and *a priori* as a conjecture and never as an absolute certainty, must carry its own question mark within itself, without waiting for the question to spurt out from somewhere else. The proposition both states and questions at the same time. It is essential that any wording tries to keep in mind not only its intrinsic specificity, but the most general form of affirmation that it proposes, that is to say the metaphysical problematic on which it is modeled. In this way, beyond its direct application, it will be possible to question the proposition in the very aspect upon which it is rooted. Thus, if a specific proposition appears to model itself on the singular/universal dichotomy, and then seems to side with the singular, it will be necessary to ask it how to manage the universal.

For example, consider a proposition that would establish that "the only moral necessity of man is his freedom": we would therefrom ask how the principle of the 'city' could ever be supported by such a proposal. Is freedom sufficient to support a political theory? We would thus invite to a reflection on constraints. The answer would automatically lead us towards a form or another of the concept of necessity, this 'other' of freedom, which conditions and constitutes it. If another were to claim 'the State determines itself as an indivisible whole', we would ask him how the citizen determines himself as an autonomous subject. If we take side with the continuous, how to deal with the discrete? How to manage the part of the whole? Because there cannot be a continuous without a discontinuous, nor a whole without its parts. Thereby, by keeping in mind the great

antinomies inherent to thought and expression, a kind of permanent warning about the dangers of believing that any formulation can capture the whole of reality or the ideal perspective of a given problem, is operated. Which, by the way, contrary to the fears that such a theory can generate, prevents us in no way from concluding, but simply maintains the elementary mental hygiene of never believing in a definitive answer.

Truth and Endurance

A serious question can be asked here, which touches very closely upon our concern: the opposition between the knowledge of thought - thought's cognition - and the knowledge of being - being's cognition -. These great antinomies of which we say that they are omnipresent, these fundamental oppositions of which we are constituting a determined collection, destined to border the metaphysical approach, do they have a reality in themselves, or are they mere views of the mind? Do they belong to the mind, are they part of its objects? Are they the very conditions of being? Do they have their own reality in themselves, independently of the mind? And if they do possess a reality in themselves, of what nature is it made? Are these antinomies made of being or of knowledge?

A crucial choice lies before us. Either we state that every thought consists only in thought, or we accept that the mind is also constituted with the help on an external reality. In the first case, with such a doctrine, based on pure subjectivity, it becomes impossible to talk about physical reality. To talk about it would in fact mean, in an exclusive manner, to speculate on the possibility of a physical reality. To admit the postulate of a physical reality, two conditions must be fulfilled: first, to admit that this reality exists; second, to admit that this reality is involved in the constitution of the mind, because without this second condition physical reality would be fully unknown to us. Within the frame of a

doctrine of pure subjectivity, all thought fully and integrally depends on the thinking subject, and it will be stated that all discourse is solely and exclusively based on mental embroidery. Within such a perspective, what would still allow a distinction between reason and imagination? What might still distinguish them one from the other is a criteria which, in a general manner, we could say touches upon a principle of order, order of the world, order of being, order of speech, an order which must somehow precede us, transcend us. For, what characterizes reasoning in relation to any other form of discourse is a connotation of criteria, of rigor, of calculation, of cause and effect, that is to say of logic, the latter being the order to which thought is submitted. But this order, this famous logic, is it a reality in itself or yet again a pure construction of the mind? Does it correspond at least partially to a reality extrinsic to the mind which concocted it or which uses it, or does it totally belong to the realm of the imagination? And if everything is imaginary, through what means and how do human beings minimally manage to understand each other, to argue, or to let themselves be convinced? For this purpose, is it not necessary to agree, by convention, on some statements that will thus be considered true? Thus, unless it is decreed that everything is non-sense and abuse of language – which always remains a choice –, we are henceforth forced to agree on some kind of ‘contractual truth’, on which we could come back at any moment, but which nevertheless, all proportions kept, will be considered true. It will be true not because it corresponds to a readymade truth, but true because it can be relied on to foster an agreement. From this can now be induced the following proposition: the more this agreement will be able to extend in space and time, the more it will withstand the test of alterity, the more it will be true. The criterion of truth will thus be endurance, the fact of persisting in the face of the resistance put forth by alterity, when confronted to its multiplicity, as a ground for confidence. Even hypothetically seen, an absolutely true

proposition will be the one that will have proven its universality and eternity. This criterion will remain, even if all the truths of this class were to form an empty set.

Inner Truth

Let's now look at the mirror image of this subjectivist proposal: after the theory which states that everything is exclusively rooted in the subject, let's see the one consisting in stating that all thought can entirely correspond to an objective reality. If all formulation thought of by some subject can correspond to an external reality, where does error come from? How to explain that through the multiplicity of discourses, so many assertions seem to conflict? If two supposedly true propositions are contradicting each other, two options are open to us: either the two persons who expressed the propositions do not understand each other, thus the contradiction is only an apparent one, or the two expressed propositions do not exactly refer to the same thing. For the two persons to get along, either they will have to accept common formulations, or they will have to agree on talking about the same thing. In these two cases, one must admit that the contradiction is in fact a misunderstanding. In the course of the discussion, a simple agreement will have to be reached concerning the things debated and the terms used to do so, in order for these terms to correspond to a common reality. The speech having the most efficiency will be declared true, the one clearly establishing its object, which is best understood. But such a true thought, pushed to its extreme, is one that deals with an object common to all, bearing on a common experience, and which so clearly expresses its intent that it can meet no contradiction. By acting that way, it proves its universality and eternity. Until it hits upon some exception, and then will have to rise another proposition, somewhat more universal and eternal. We find here again the same criteria as previously, in the case where all thought was pure subjectivity. In both cases will be true what is able

to maintain the greatest coherence for as long as possible; truth is efficiency.

However, let's compare these two positions by considering the third possibility that follows: every thought is a mix of subjectivity and objectivity. A part of what the mind is made of really corresponds to what comes to it from the outside; another comes from what we call interpretation, that is to say a subjective reading of the information relating to external reality. Many will immediately placate on this an opposition between the senses, which bring unquestionable empirical data to the mind, and the mind, which speculates on the basis of such information. But one could also say that the senses receive information from perceptions that are subjective because they are thoughtless; whereas reason is more objective to the extent it challenges itself by testing the various information it receives in the light of coherence. For example: a liquid cooled down to an extremely cold temperature may seem to burn my skin when touched, until I reflect, and upon seeing the ice crystals formed all around, I tell myself that what is frozen cannot produce heat burns, and must rather be very cold. Whatever it is, what would here be the criterion of truth? It seems twofold. On the one hand, information coming from the outside must be as reliable as possible and correspond to their object. On the other hand, the interpretation I give of this received information must be coherent. This second case is what could be called the inner truth, in opposition with the first one that would be an external truth. Indeed, there is an inner truth: whatever the premises out of which operates the individual mind may be, it has to be true in relation to itself. Without this unavoidable condition, its words have no meaning and are mere sound. It is coherence, whatever its form may be, which compels the auditor to respect the words he hears. Even if I am not certain to understand my interlocutor, even if I do not agree with him, it is the inner feeling of veracity towards his discourse which entices me

to listen to him with all due attention. Clarity or transparency as a criterion of truth.

Vision and Consent

Let's continue further on this notion of inner truth. Sometimes, we listen to a beautiful speech, very calculated and detailed, totally coherent, well constructed, and yet, while listening to it, an indissoluble doubt persists in us, which prevents us from adhering to the version we are presented with. In the legal domain, it is called "inner conviction". When nothing allows us to counter the arguments heard and that, however, something inside us drives us to refuse them, or *vice versa*. Here is another case of this experience of inner truth. We hear an incoherent discourse and yet we clearly perceive some tones of truth that compel us to adhere to it. The notion of truth is therefore a very subtle matter, and it is also because we face a certain challenge to nail such an entity on the wall that many thinkers have naturally come to decide that truth does not exist, without noticing the terrible loss which this condemnation represented, since truth is one of the most essential operators for the proper functioning of a mind.

Often it is the impossibility to have a dialectical thought, that is to say the impossibility to think the opposites simultaneously by articulating them according to the possibility of their coexistence, which prevents the ones and the others from adequately thinking such and such concept. The real precisely raises this problem, in an acute manner. Absolute truth, relative truth, singular truth, universal truth. How can such contradictory adjectives ever be simultaneously managed with the term of truth? The dialectical dichotomy that arises here is of the same order than the one opposing being and appearing. Does not appearance constitute being? Since the relation of a singularity with the world constitutes nevertheless the extension of this singular being. Being, conceived outside

of any manifestation, tends to completely dissolve into a kind of non-being where nothing distinguishes a singular being from another one, since by nature any attribute articulate itself as the necessary link between a singularity and another singularity, between the singular and the universal, between the singular and its alterity. What defines the singular, what traces its limits and allows a glimpse of it, is only the relation to another singular, and this is what we mean by the idea of 'appearance': appearance is what we are for another, what connects us to the other. Yet, can we be without being for the other? If only because the other is the world!

Thus, all propositions are true, and all propositions are false. Each one is true because it has its own genesis and its specific circumstances; each one is false for the same reason: because of its own genesis and its own circumstances. If I can see why any proposal is very real and simultaneously see how it is very false, maybe I can then have a glimpse at the true and the false. But then the true and the false are no longer embodied in a judgment of principle which irrevocably sides in a way or another, but attempts to free oneself from a petition of principle which would place us feet and fist bound in a position out of which it would be difficult to escape later on, for various reasons; mainly because of the sluggish installation of a kind of mental numbness, a sort of psychological hardening. Judgment is necessary, as a condition of thought, with all the strength and clarity that behooves its nature of judgment, without however erecting itself in some supreme formulation or taking oneself for an absolute. An iron fist must wave the sword of judgment, without ever stiffening - or wavering - when delivering the blows. And it must always stay aware that it remains dependent on the fragility of its own conviction.

In such a perspective, how to articulate a relation between an external truth said to be objective and a

subjective internal one? First we say that, somehow, such an opposition makes no sense. Especially because there is no objective thought in our mind. The most empirical of data will always take the form of a thought; materiality is never in our mind, it only appears to it in the form of a distant echo. Even our own materiality is somewhat external to us, and we are alien to ourselves. Of the outside, we see only what our eyes can see and what our mind wants and can grasp. The forms of our instruments of perception and of reflection allow us to perceive only what resonates with them. To see and to understand, one must accept to see and to understand; to see and to understand, one must be able to see and to understand. Except that in the human mind, to want to and to be able to are intimately intertwined, a clutching knot which forges a compact relation, the lacings of which are not always noticeable. The only distinction that remains then is no longer one of interiority and exteriority, but of vision and consent.

Reflections

One could say that seeing is already subjective, but that to choose or to decide is even more so. It is not so much in what I see that I trust, but in what I think that I see, what I think of what I see. From this remark I have to conclude that interiority and exteriority are no longer absolute terms but relative ones. To see and to decide are archetypes which are embodied and manifested in different ways, and no longer the sole and only opposition between senses and reason. Sometimes the mind imposes itself, sometimes it is the senses, the feelings or the impressions. No legitimacy imposes itself a priori, it would be a mental illness, a psycho-rigidity. The healthy mind is the one which maintains enough flexibility to let itself be permanently tested by the different aspects of its being and functioning. It is the one who considers the tension of his being not anymore as some pain to be avoided, but as the very proof of his vitality, as the guarantee of his legitimacy.

However, an objection must be made here. How to conceive our mind – which nevertheless stands as a subjective construction – as the guarantee of some objectivity that would protect us from the subjectivity of the sense? Is not immediate sense perception much closer to external reality? To answer, let us think about what distinguishes the sense of touch from the one of vision. Touch is a much more immediate sense than the one of vision, since the latter is transmitted through light rays which sometimes trick us, especially if the distance is great or if there is a lack brightness. But, we will reply that it is precisely this distance and this mediation which give its usefulness to vision: due to the nature of its functioning, more than the sense of touch which requires proximity, it makes it possible to consider the world as a whole and not as fragmented little pieces. I can see a table all at once, but the sense of touch does not allow me to recognize it in one unique operation. However, if I see the hologram of a table, I would not be able to test its hardness, I could believe that it is made out of wood, whereas the sense touch would not betray me. In other words, between different senses, as between the senses and the mind, is effectuated the game of mediation and immediacy, the interaction of the whole and the parts.

If I think that the reality of the whole can be reduced to the sum of the reality of the parts, I am siding for the sense of touch against the one of vision, for the senses against the mind. If the parts are dividing amongst themselves the reality of a whole that is first, I am choosing vision against touch, for the mind against the sense. But these two propositions are both absurd. It remains to be concluded that reality is constituted through a permanent confrontation between unity and multiplicity, between uniting and dividing, union and separation which in turn find their center of gravity in the singular being and in the whole being. The being of the world in its unity and its

multiplicity, and the individual being in its unity and multiplicity. No perspective predominates over another one; every choice *a priori* determined becomes a rigid ideology, a sickness of being and of mind. In the dialogue between essence and existence is established a dialectic which constitutes what we could name reality. There is a true or false only within the acceptance and rejection of this incessant movement that threatens itself by the very fact of its own affirmation. There is therefore no other foundation than this dynamic which lives of what it generates and dies out of what it has generated, which dies from what it generates and lives out of what it has generated.

Therefore, presence and absence no longer oppose each other. The only opposition worthy of that name is the one articulated between the opposition of presence and absence, and the coincidence of presence and absence. Not the opposition between 'yes' and 'no', but the one between the 'yes or no' and 'yes and no'. For it is on this axis that is conditioned the development of reality. Is it spiritual? Is it material? Neither. Strictly speaking, we could say that this third order is that of relation. In any case this order must be other, as this axis, in order to distinguish spirituality and materiality, must be free, cleared from these terms, it must be able to negate them; without this relative independence, it would be reducible to ideality or to materiality, and it would imply to erect one or the other into an absolute deity or an undisputable reality on which it would be necessary to rely. Being knows because it is, the mind knows because it is manifestation. The mind is, is manifested and becomes, matter is, is manifested and becomes. Being and thinking know, by nature, but they are not the knowing. Let's not hypostasize one or the other of these forms. Let's accept them as they come. Let's understand and see that this eternity and this temporality, as any object of knowledge, any knowing subject, are only the somber and irreplaceable reflections of a light weakly springing out of darkness.

The Double Perspective

Tension and Dialectic

Offset and Betrayal

Man has always been haunted by the idea, or the image, of being inhabited. A presence appears to his mind, an inner presence, something that is he without being him. The animal probably knows as well the division of his being. One only has to observe a dog, torn between fear and greed, to be struck by the dualism or multiplicity of the principle that animates living beings. Some will immediately speak out against this mere mention of dualism – a word sometimes taboo in our epoch –, but we will ask them to be patient, to follow us till the end, until they understand our true intention. In order to be fully absorbed by an approach, one should not be carried away by words. Without some minimal transparency, it is not possible to assess with confidence, to judge fairly.

However, the difference between men and beasts is that, amongst the former, this discrepancy can be objectified: it can become food for thought and from then on the individual can act upon himself. It is on this precise point, within human specificity, that the present study takes place. Instead of simply undergoing the lag which belongs to him, man can behold his double or multiple personality, lay it before him, analyze it, and deliberate about the way forward. Even better, man can contribute to his own de-doubling. He can provoke it. ‘What for?’, will we be objected. He would act in that way as if looking into a mirror. For it is from the time where I look into a mirror onwards that I can work on myself, and even modify who I am. But this outlook requires a distance from myself, and from the mirror. It is this distancing in regards to myself,

and the face-to-face that ensues, which allows me to objectify myself, to become an entity external to myself. We even suggest that it is this specific capacity to distance oneself that ensures both the humanity of man and the individual specificity. Without any will to duplicate, there is no human, no individual. As paradoxical as it may seem, the tension which simultaneously generates the duplication and which is generated by it, represents and even constitutes the necessary condition and the sufficient guarantee for man to assume his most profound nature, his most precise identity. Thus, if he is not inhabited, and especially if he is not voluntarily inhabited, the human is not human.

But how do we assimilate the dualism, if not the pluralism, of the human identity to the idea of being inhabited? What does the idea of being inhabited mean? Notice already that we express this vision by using the following expressions: the impression of being inhabited, the idea of being inhabited, the image of being inhabited. As in all subjective or psychological realities, it is a representation that summarizes the reality of the phenomenon observed. This implies that any analysis or speculation will tend to be implicitly or explicitly formulated in the first person singular. When I talk about man, it is necessarily – above all –, about me that I am talking, about a personal engagement. Otherwise, it would make no sense.

But, when the individual says “I”, he places himself within a specific perspective, in a perspective that is necessarily restrictive. And for this reason, as soon as he pronounces the pronoun ‘I’, followed by some verb, he becomes aware of having made a choice, of having created a slash; he realizes or feels automatically that something inside him, some reasoning or unformulated argument, is on the verge of having him regret his choice. Moreover, just when he chooses, a terrible impression overcomes him: the feeling of having abandoned himself; he betrayed himself,

exposed himself. He took a risk that he will necessarily lament. Every thought is a judgment, every thought condemns and excludes. Every affirmation is a negation. Every assertion of the self is a betrayal of this very 'I', a break up with the self. Do not try to find refuge in a 'we' or, even worst, in a 'he', which would serve as a screen to the problem.

Madness, such an idea is. Why should we regret a choice that we have made? On the one hand, there are choices which we never regret, on the other hand, even the choice which we could be led to regret, it is not said that we regret them immediately. But it is precisely there that we expected the discussion. For, is it not this capacity to regret, in the split generated by the choice, and by being aware of that split, that we recognize the human being? An imposed choice, a choice which is a pure continuity of being, a choice which is not a break up in one way or another, is it really a choice? A choice that does not open anything, or rather which does not reveal any break up in the unity of being, cannot be a choice; it would only be a sequence, as a minute following the preceding one. A choice is a door opening on the side, and once this threshold is crossed, we will never be the same again, we will have bifurcated. A choice implies this kind of rupture, of discontinuity, which alone drives a wedge into what would otherwise be the cold and dead marble of a life predefined through some arbitrary and eternal premises. Without a choice, without a point of no return, freedom would mean nothing.

Choice and Freedom

Choice can be provoked by accident: an unexpected or unforeseen event. Or by a simple new awareness, more or less voluntary. Before any reality strikes me, before I realize anything, I did not suspect anything, I did not foresee this upheaval; this specific irruption in my mind was not part of my existential plan. In any case, not from the point of view

of my consciousness. Once the new inner reality introduced, I will no longer be the same, I will not be able to plea unconsciousness anymore. It will be too late.

Is choice necessarily tied to a new awareness? An internal event which I suffer, since it is entirely produced from the outside, independently of my will, will represent something real inside me, even in the absence of consciousness, direct or indirect. Because of ignorance, by lack of will or consciousness, I could negate this event, reduce its importance to nil, deviate its meaning, or quickly forget it. But it is no less present to my being, and the reactions described are mine, intended or not. In this way, nothing happens to me purely unconsciously, and I permanently make choices, whether I like it or not, whether I know it or not. Identically, it is obviously possible to defend the opposite answer. For, we can say that without understanding the issues, or the possible lag of a given situation, choice does not exist. But if, for example, to fall in love is a choice that is usually done without our notice, our capacity to take distance towards this state remains the indispensable element for the possibility of choice. This does not prevent anyone from defending the idea that a consuming passion represents our true freedom. For, a love satisfied with itself lacks of this want without which passion remains a mere infatuation.

This means that the possibility of choice is intimately related to my desire for consciousness, in other words of my desire to hear, to see, to behold beyond evidence, to refuse the immediacy of appearances, to not satisfy myself with customary routine. Many of our choices are made without us, certainly, but if actual choice is opposed both to the determinism of psychological rigidity and to the heteronomy of the wind vane, it is because it is related to a capacity of the being to be permanently challenged. It is for this reason that I have to directly work on my outlook, even before worrying about the object of this outlook. Without

this effort of will, my vision will be forever satisfied with the misery of an indigent outlook, passive and dull.

In this, reading is an interesting exercise, if we know how to practice it, if we succeed in sufficiently dramatizing and playing with the text that we are approaching. The first condition is to accept the principle that reading does not only consist in learning new things, or to entertain oneself, or again to have a good time, but that remains a privileged moment destined to allow the emergence of a provoking and rare new awareness. How often are we not able to really read a text because we are caught in a predefined logic? The sentence which shocks us, the one pregnant with meaning, we declare it impossible with utmost casualness; we can't accept what it says, we decide to change its meaning to make it 'stick', or we skip over it, we ignore it, we reject it. A new idea bothers us, we instinctively spit on it or erase it, we reduce its relevance; and there it goes! Everything is done... Amazing! Gone the pain of choosing... But gone also is freedom. Alas. is it not the same in our relation with the world around us?

Propriety and Impropriety

Our mind, quite clever, is geared since its early days to rearrange everything that it perceives so as to create the most comfortable environment possible. It instinctively recognizes what it does not want to change, what it does not want to come back to; it jealously protects the intellectual and existential anchors that we hold most dear. In general, these anchors are invisible to us; they weave the bones and flesh of our mind. I do not need to think in order to breathe or to shut my eyelids to protect my eyes. In exactly the same way, without any need to calculate the adequate operations, my mental geometry will bend, block or transform what comes to me or what could come to me, in order to protect my preexisting mental fortress. The other tactic to protect our own little personal status quo is to glean

only snippets, to fortify ourselves while sealing the gaps. Just like these birds which capture everything they find on their way in order to make a nest – hence the sometimes unusual appearance of some of them –, the human mind manages the incredible feat of holding together the most heterogeneous and surprising structures with through amalgamation of no less heterogeneous and surprising materials. If these scaffoldings do not collapse, it is only because they have forgotten how to collapse.

What mind does not use patches? It is obvious that, to a large extent, it is this very patchwork that makes up the individual culture. A kind of ragbag, where are jumbled up childhood memories, diverse know-how, various traumatism, precepts gleaned here and there, quantity of more or less predominant information, echoes of pleasures and pains, various logical or syntactic structures, keywords, etc. From all of this, the individual tries to build an identity for himself, in regard to himself, in regard to the society where he evolves. What is this identity? A series of references, which are often self-evident in his eyes, support his mental body, hold its frame. Is it rigid or rickety? Here the work begins. This question by itself introduces the exercise and expression of a true freedom. In the elaboration of this picture is outlined the painful and comical problematic of choice.

Immediately, a first problem arises, of heavy consequences: from which perspective will our individual judge his own construction? On which promontory will he be perched in order to better look at himself? In which mirror will he be able to examine himself? In other words, how will he get out of himself in order to look at himself? The difficulty in the maneuver is similar to the one of a motorist, launched on a highway, which would need to fix his engine without stopping. How to get out of oneself while remaining oneself? Maybe there is no need to go further. Already, by asking this question, by the mere fact of

formulating it, by accepting to let the hypothesis come out of a perspective which is both internal and external, man admits in his heart the opportunity of being inhabited, the possibility of inhabiting himself. His choice boils down to simultaneously or alternatively be a resident or a house, matter or form, the subject or its substrate. But to allow such operations, I must say that there is an 'I' which is not 'me', a fulcrum from which I want to objectify 'myself', become an object which I can weight, measure, analyze, criticize totally freely to the extent that I detach myself from him in order not to be involved anymore, so that the judge in me be free to judge, since he is no longer simultaneously judge and party.

Architecture and Barricade

However, the difficulty does not stop here. It would be less overwhelming if it did not also require that the 'I', which acts like a judge, by having the right to criticize, to question and to decide, also has the total freedom to condemn, that is to say the power to compel and to force. Without the power to impose law, there is no justice that holds. Thus, the consequences of this judgment involve me, I know it, and from the moment I accept to risk myself on its territory, I cannot flee from its ruthless personal justice. Once the protocol is engaged, once the process initiates, I am held, and I have no say over the consequences. If I want to avoid those consequences, I must refuse to step foot on this slippery hill where I lose control. And as the consequences are often unpredictable, I must prohibit in advance, in a general manner, any access of the judge to the territory, which will evidently involve in myself and for myself some other terrible consequences. Beginning with relinquishing the possibility of choice and disclaiming my own freedom. But the lawyer in me is shrewd, and a supporter of the status quo; his defense will try to support my arguments as best as he can, regardless of their consistency and reality: he knows how to practice rhetorical piling up. However, he knows

that such a plea is at best a stopgap. The best solution, to make his arguments fit better, to erase their inconsistency and to forget their insubstantiality, is to not have to express them; if we are looking for security and comfort, it is better not to venture out to the court of the self. But unfortunately, without judgment, nor any risk of condemnation, or condemnation, I am weakened in my being and I know it, even though I would try to not know it.

At this point, he who is allergic to any notion of ethics or universality will jump out of his chair and scream: “I protest. No one has the right to dictate my conduct, especially through a ready-made moral. Throughout the ages, throughout history, we have seen the facticity of moral precepts, we have seen their total relativity. The consequence of moral is to traumatize and chain!” Exactly! The question is here taken within or beyond the establishment of a readymade moral. It is its problematic which interests us here, its elaboration more than its formulation. Its role in the examination and the constitution of a singular being. Even if we will also have to, at one time or another, reflect on the establishment of a conventional moral, if only for practical reasons, since man is not alone on his island but lives in the city.

For now, our judge, our ‘I’ where sits the tribunal, this ‘I’ which lives inside of me and which is me without being me, it is not out of preconceived ideas that he will question me, but from using my own discourse and self. “Who are you?” “What are you doing?” “What do you want?” “What are you waiting for?” These are the questions that he will first ask me, and he will challenge me through the various answers I will provide. Or rather, he will test each of my new answers with the previous ones, the ones that are already formulated. He will judge my internal coherence, the solidity of my basis, the consistency of my existential system. He will judge the clarity of my defense: if my various arguments are transparent, and especially

transparent with each other. Are they imbricated into their innermost articulations? Or do they add to each other like some vulgar barricade piled up with odds and ends? There are certainly some awkward barricades which can withstand heavy battering, there only need to be gathered enough elements, to stack up enough disparate and heavy objects, for the whole contraption to stand together, more or less stable, and resist. It then becomes impossible to judge, because we get lost in an enormous labyrinth, a confused maze, where we do not know what is what any more, nor what underlies what. Some juggling spirits thus manage to lose everyone, including themselves, in the nooks and crannies of their argumentation. They trick us through meandering and quantity. They are clever, very creative ones. Their answers flow like running water: it goes through here, it goes back there. But actually they sail in troubled seas. Do not try to chase them, breath and soul would be lost in a disappointing pursuit. A possible outcome is to go through a tunnel, digging the ground on which lies this barricade. Or, like Icarus, by escaping through the air, with all the dangers of such a vertiginous rise. If we decide to go to the bottom of things, we will have to wear big boots and walk in the mud. We will have to feel the urge of diving deeply, or to build up the courage for it –, and we will need a solid heart. For how many decomposing detritus will we not discover in the foundations of such architecture that resembles scree more than any defined construction.

For the anxious, those who wish to be reassured, it might be added that it is still possible and relatively easy to hush, to a certain degree, the ‘I’ within us. We can always hamper it, inhibit it, enough to no longer recognize it, if that is what we are looking for. We can occult it, to such a degree that we will have difficulty to allow it a clear say. It will stutter and we will laugh at it, despise it. With great endurance, we may succeed in killing it, although this annihilation remains a much more difficult task; often, we will take it for

deceased while it will only be lying in a deep and prolonged coma that might last for a very long time, sometimes a lifetime. However, even if we were to manage to kill it, the body of the victim would not disappear; it would haunt us forever. In the meantime, such an attempted murder required great efforts.

Without going that far, to simply quiet the transcendent 'I' within us, according to the needs, when it becomes inconvenient, who has not become a master in this art? We can even say that without this art, life would be impossible. If we leave the rein on its neck, this evil 'I' will constantly lead us to think the unthinkable, force us to see the invisible. We would be disturbed at every moment. Everyone knows this unpredictable hero, this knight with the sad face that inhabits our privacy. Who can still pretend that we are not inhabited?

Posture and Imposture

There is a very traditional psychological dualism, well identified if not even codified by various practices, starting with art, and especially theater. It is the opposition between duty and passion. Classical. I want something but another side of my psyche is holding me back. The individual feels split, divided, sometimes immersed in a serious antagonism with himself. There is a common way to describe this problem that seems to completely avoid the problem, flattening and depriving it of its true dimension. We often say (or we implicitly think it) that passion is a phenomenon rather driven from the inside, whereas duty is an obligation coming from the outside. Desire would be personal while duty would be social. There is no need to argue here that this principle is not based on anything, because if it were devoid of any grounding this error would not have been perpetuated so systematically and universally. For an error to maintain itself, it must contain a good dose of reality. For a lie to hold on, it must stick to truth as much as possible, or

else, in the other extreme, to be as far from it as possible; this last category of nonsense captivates the mind; its outrageous aspect seems to perform quite well

But if we do not wish to hold on to a superficial categorization of the issues at stake, if we want to attach ourselves primordially to the philosophical interest of this dualism between duty and passion, we will pay attention to the gap, to the void, the offset, rather than to venture out on a rigid analysis, exclusive and Manichean, of what one or the other of these poles can represent. Let's try a dialectical reading that would cover the whole problematic and the genesis of such an opposition, without excluding the irreducibility of this opposition.

I can desire something and want the exact opposite. The connotation of desire is here the immediacy and brute desire, whereas will, or 'want', is rather what is considered and calculated. In a world that would favor the rational above all, the will should prevail in the hierarchy of values. In another world that would favor a kind of candid spontaneity, desire would be the guarantor of truth; its counterpart would thus become a mere intellectual construction, artificial and misleading. Even if, in both cases, this same cultural matrix is totally internalized and constitutes the fiber of individual thought. Certainly, the will is often posterior to desire in the genesis of the individual, but if we were to only accept this temporal criterion to identify the essence of man, eating would appear more natural than thinking, something that would create a singular problem of identity within our species. Moreover, many desires are learned, and are in no way inherent to the individual; there is only to watch the fashion trends to realize this, a phenomenon which forces to see, to our great embarrassment, that desire knows how to arise insidiously in the form of a declared obligation.

In a more general and realistic manner, we can consider that a kind of alternating settles in everyone's behavior, for the good reason that it is equally impossible to live one's simple desires and one's pure will. Yet, a radical opposition is often made between the poles of this psychological couple: according to various trends, depending on the moods of the moment, aficionados will promote behaviors where good and evil are differently embodied. According to taste, proposals and truth systems will be proposed which will take the axis of desire/will in a way or another. Thus, good and evil, positive and negative, will divide the moments of life amongst themselves, more or less violently confronting each other, more or less quickly, with more or less nuances, more or less good conscience, with more or less pronounced tendencies on one side or the other, according to tempers.

However, in this forest of echoes and distortions, what becomes of the 'I'? A kind of magical trick, or camouflage, seems to be constantly operating. The 'I' can be considered as a will that knows weaker moments. Or, on the contrary, the 'I' can be considered as a desire charged with obligations. Go figure! Which is the real hand, the most genuine one, the most 'hand' one: the right or the left? Which one is the original? Which one is the copy? Did you say "symmetry"? Yet it seems that nature has always made choices, whether in genres or in individuals. For example, proteins are oriented in opposite directions in animals and in plants; every man is usually right or left handed. As bizarre as it may sound, symmetry would be meaningless if there was no asymmetry, and *vice versa*. What would be the point in having men and women if there were no men and women separately? Otherwise, why would they not be born together, already married for life and bound by the hand or the belly? Like the two hands which are born together. This would avoid quantities of issues, or maybe create new ones. And symmetry within good and bad is really difficult to

operate, because in reality, in any case, a choice has already been made: good is good and bad is bad. Whether admitted or not. Although commonly, for hands, the strong side is considered the “good” side.

By dint of taking sides, consciously or not, by dint of looking for the ‘right’ side, to defend it, to define it, to postulate it, we end up forgetting the essential: the separation, without which there is no choice, the gap, without which there would be no sides to choose from. If there is freedom, there is necessarily fracture and distance. But the ‘poor’ gap seems to count for nothing. It does not exist. It is but a hole, an opposition, a measly separation. It cannot be seen, thus it counts for nothing! Let us dare, one moment, to look at this little black hole. It is possible that it is a mere lock, the empty aperture where we slip a key, even if this mysterious key does not exist. The gap, the place of all eventualities, place of all perditions and all perfections, of all tensions and harmonies. It is there and only there that operates anything that can be operated. The place of all work, of all transformation. Of what else would anyone want to talk about? This famous unavoidable and ungraspable perspective which we have discussed earlier, the one which forces us to become strangers to ourselves precisely because we are strangers to ourselves, that is exactly where it is. Any other place is mere posture, comedy, while this one is true. The only problem is that without this posture and comedy, this truth disappears. It is through posture and comedy, through imposture, that truth embodies itself and drapes itself with reality.

Actors and Extras

Indeed, we are inhabited, but by a ghost, by an eternal vanishing point, by a crack in the wall, by some entity which is nothing and for this reason touches on the absolute. In front of this, what is duty? What is passion? Board games, hide-and-seek playoffs, blind’s man buff. But it is

not nothing, quite the contrary, it is too much. Faced with this gap, we grab asperities, whatever they are, and because we suffer from vertigo we cling to what we find. The well is bottomless. For our frightened look, what could this bottom be hiding? Our childhood fears resurface, the child for whom the world was a mystery, loaded with surprising and unforeseeable behavior. Because everything was possible, our mind was inventing scary tales. Groundlessness. Delicious and terrible imagination. Gods and demons, sorcerers and princesses sprang out in turn; anything was possible for us, possible for the world. We were bound by a natural and invisible twine to this chaotic turmoil we can sometimes hear roaring from the bowels of the earth.

But with age, this perspective on nothingness gradually closes. The passing of days, the quest for the immediate, certitudes which, like an invisible limestone, gradually settle and crystalize, this know-how which, for the sake of efficiency, requires to attend the most urgent. Soon enough, the well is completely silted up. We can barely notice its rim, from far. We moved away. In a new city, built to be more functional. There we trod, and we are functioning. Many people live in this arena. It comforts us. We must have made the right choices. What better proof can there be? If so many others have found refuge in the same place. Moreover, we keep each other warm; we render each other so many little services. Sometimes promiscuity is a bit heavy, but we get nothing for nothing; this is one of the important precepts we have been taught. All is there. Yet, it is that well we want to talk about. Of this one we want to evoke the memory. This one we want to bring back to life, we want to awake the consciousness of it. It is the zero point, the anchor, the umbilicus, the seat. It is on it, and only on it, that we can lean, even if it remains quite far. Our thoughts must bounce back on it in order to take their true extent. There they will grasp their own futility, they will realize that everything is a game, an immense playground

where we must play being serious. Child, we had very well understood all of this, we understood the playful scope of the thing; we were playing doctors, firefighters, policemen, thieves. But as adults, we forgot ourselves, we forgot our first intention; we now believe in quantities of things, hard as iron. No more comedy, no more tragedy, but a terrible game, since we are caught in it, and because we are caught we commit terrible things; beautiful things as well, but many horrible things, actions that make men crazy and unhappy. Sometimes, as a child, we did not like to lose, but as adult, we forget the game, we only care about winning.

Child, we practically only knew this bottomless bottom. The real was magical. Everything was bizarre. Rare things appeared to be mandatory in themselves. Needs were generally met without having to ask for anything and, in any case, without having to persevere too long. Certainly, such a magical outlook can be problematic; it seems that it prevents us from growing up. But, back then, we trusted ourselves, our ignorance granted us access to providence. No particular effort, only some propitiatory acts, much like we would do on the altar of a good and hidden god. "Please" and "thank you" were enough, from time to time with some insistence, the irritation of waiting, the occasional pain of a refusal. We were taught or imposed rituals; coming late, they gradually became part of the general weirdness. But insidiously, one within the other, the gauntlets of conventions were settling in, slowly forced upon us, without realizing it. Some clashes, certainly, but for most of us the message was accepted: we learned the unavoidable rules of social life.

The child copies. He imitates. He learns a new game: playing the adult. But adult games are plenty. What games does the child learn? What is more distasteful than a child calculating his share of things, preoccupied to know if he gets more or less than his brother or sister, already haunted by domestic pettiness? What terrible game has he been

taught! He is training in banality. Later on, he will be an ace in the kingdom of shadows. He will know how to realize his little prognosis faster than anyone else; impressive! What a painful impression, to see these young children loaded as donkeys with a destructive burden. The little mister, the little mistress. How awful! They learned their duty, or at least one, too fast; the 'early' child soon becomes a little old person. However, in order not to misunderstand our intention, notice that the absence of any role can also become a role. The retarded teenager, which, at sixty, still toys with the convertible car, plays doll, or to Monsieur, Madame or the Doctor, is as much stuck in the game. He is not an actor in his own drama, he is a mere extra; his character is not really determining, it changes nothing to the action or the scenario. He is some kind of furniture or wallpaper, and it is by default that he plays a character. He remained a little magician in a world filled with strange beings and desires.

The Perspective of the Gap

Generally, we expect that an adult engage in new perspectives. He himself becomes a kind of new perspective, his own one. New perspective both for himself and for what he is not. He becomes an axis around which, whether he likes it or not, revolves society. The world in which he lives cannot avoid him. He is present. He is an integral and constitutive part of the city. It is for this reason that he plays a role, unavoidable. It is for this reason that he has numerous spectators, paying attention to every one of his moves, while he remains attentive to each of their glances. He looks at his spectators looking at him. A kind of mutual attraction freezes them in this pose, slightly obsessive. Ultimately, this situation always faces two possibilities: either it is indefinitely prolonged, either it ends in a break up, a split, an injury from which can anew burst out the singular.

The break up can have two origins. Either society does not accept the game anymore, it requires another one; or the individual does not want to play the game he played so far. Both of them also simultaneously happen, but in both cases, if there is any change, it is because of the choice, of this gap that we mentioned already. And as we said, the question is not to know who is right or wrong, but to become aware of the gap, and to place oneself within the perspective of the gap. This does not mean to be aware of the gap while having taken sides; this kind of knowledge would be artificial, devoid of any existential issue, pure sophistry. No, it is about placing oneself in the camp of the gap, as difficult to hold as this position can be. We have no choice, because if we try to ignore this perspective, the only one which, despite of its elusive appearance, is plausible, we place ourselves at once within impossibility, within a cul-de-sac, meaning destruction, banality and death.

How to pretend to stand in the gap? What nonsense! We are forced to take options. The accomplishment of the choice is unavoidable. We are born in the location, the instant and the matter, that is to say in everything that separates and chains and alienates. This is not that. I am not what I am not, for the good reason that I am what I am. We exist from the principle of identity and the principle of exclusion. Without these two principles no identification is possible, no specific existence is possible. In some respect, the world is nothing else than the assembly of these exclusions, a sum of specificities, a continuity of singularities, irreducible to one another. Each of them is a center of the world, since the world can be grasped from any of these perspectives. And it is simultaneously the union and the contradiction of these countless perspectives that constitutes the subjectivity of the world.

Compared to that description, human society is not radically different from the world, of the universe as a whole. The human race is perhaps more mobile, more

contradictory, more changeable, thus more in the gap; a finding due to the special nature of the human being, a nature which, like a magnifying glass, amplifies and exaggerate the form of what there is. In itself, time, space and matter, although they operate on wider scales, have roughly the same operating role as human multiplicity, another form of time, space and materiality. A human group has a certain homogeneity that resembles matter, it resists more or less to what is foreign to it, it is more or less massive, more or less rapid in its changes. It has a specific history. It embodies a particular spatiality. For these various reasons a society will react differently to events, according to the various aspects of the multiplicity which compose it, according to the various degrees of coherence that combine to articulate its own being.

As for singularity itself, to perceive it as a part of a whole, with the specific characteristics this implies, amounts to seeing this singularity in its fabric, in relation to what constitutes it, that is to say in its continuity, which in no way takes away its status as a radically singular entity. The difficulty in this perspective is not to grasp a singularity as singular, or to grasp it as a part of a whole, but to grasp the two characteristics or modalities of being simultaneously, there again with the gap and contradiction that this may involve. A gap that in the end captures the essence of singularity. Thus a human being is neither an isolated individual, nor an interchangeable element of a community, but the opposition, the link or the relation between these two definitions. Thus is defined his humanity, in the richness and the vivacity of this antinomy. In this light, contrary to what the evidence is telling us, the singularity of an entity becomes proportional to its universality.

Want and Can

This difficulty brings us back to our initial problem, the one of the double perspective, which can be formulated thus: that which 'is' should always be considered under a complementary, contradictory and dialectical relation of unicity and multiplicity. Knowing that this relation takes on many forms: the noumenon (the thing in itself) and the phenomenon (the thing in its relations), mind and matter, the continuous and the discrete, etc. In this context, let's consider the question of man, which we just discussed. Is the human being an interchangeable part of a whole, a world segment, a segment of society, just as by cutting a line – in an arbitrary location and of an arbitrary length – one obtains a line segment? Or is the human being radically singular, holder of a total, irreducible and irreplaceable legitimacy? The first version certainly offers a less irreplaceable vision of the particular being. "If it is not you it must be your brother... If it is not I, it must be someone else... Without society, I am nothing..." Is it not the kind of arguments from which the individual can somewhat be detached from the specificity which individualized him? In this type of formulation – whatever the psychological reasons thereof, or the motivation of the discourse –, we are within the continuity of being, being here taken as universality in a wide sense. Everyone is an entity embedded in multitude, a multitude that gives sense and substance to the singular. The opposite version singularizes excessively. "It will be you, and no one else... It is fortunate that I am here... If I do not do it, no one else will..." Here we are on the mode of discontinuity, in the specificity of the singular; being is above all discrete in nature. Everyone is an entity in itself, individual and specific, that only has merit within itself. Therefore, the universe is a simple aggregate, an infinite sum of singularities.

How would that double perspective change what is an individual? In a way, it does not change it at all. He is what

he is. One can look at it in a way or another, with green or red spectacles, this will not change its intrinsic nature, its form or its color. In the same manner of thinking, one can say that philosophy is useless; it only helps to fill up time and split hairs. It is only discourse or thought on entities that did not wait after it in order to be or to exist. In the process, we will add that by nature 'thought' is in itself essentially opposed to 'action', and in this sense it remains relatively unproductive; it becomes 'useful' only when it can be translated in actions, even if at this moment it no more a question of 'thought' but of 'action'. Within this dichotomous vision, I oppose the thing in itself to the vision that one can have of it, and the various visions will vary according to perspectives and outlooks. Nevertheless, vision is here but a pale and approximate subjective representation of a solid and objective reality. It will only change the outlook that we have on life, without changing the latter in a substantial way.

It is perhaps with the notion of freedom that we best identify the catastrophic implications of such an articulation. Suppose that within the same frame I establish that without freedom to act, freedom to think is worthless, something which seems to be a logical continuity to the hypothesis. From this moment onwards, the risk is to condition my thoughts to what I can materially accomplish, physically, and objectively. A kind of harsh realism is settling in; heavy, it will at every moment tell me to not take my dreams for realities. My thoughts will be constantly on alert, anxious about immediate confirmation of a pragmatic or empirical nature. Out of question to think the unthinkable anymore. Out of question to let my fanciful intuitions be the motor of my being. In other words, it is out of question to shake myself up anymore. Before even thinking about anything, I will have to make sure beforehand that the material realization of the idea is possible; I will no longer accept to believe in its simple possibility, I will refuse to

work on the basis of mere hope of accomplishment, since this kind of vision is now considered to be too unsubstantial. But, in reality – and here appears the absurdity of such a perspective – since the world is offered to me only through a representation that I build up, this lack of freedom of thought comes to mean that I will chain myself to the vision that I have developed of the world, without in any way allowing it to jeopardize my “already thought”.

Under the cut of this uncompromising filter, any free idea will forever be forbidden, without any other form of trial. It becomes out of question to throw myself headlong into such and such mental or spiritual adventure. Banished are imagination and invention. Because I will no longer accept to take as a foundational reality the dramatic gap between what I can do and what I want to do, any transcendence will disappear. Any difference between the world and me will be reduced to a psychological difficulty, a heresy that I will have to subdue. For this uncompromising realism, imagination will constitute at best a hobby for free times, some dreamlike activity, to be practiced preferably at nightly hours. It will be suspect, declared harmful and dangerous, since this kind of practice will seem to incite a kind of ignorance or scorn of reality. Sentenced to exile, poor imagination will become dull and gloomy. It won't be very motivating anymore. And by succumbing to its charms, by abandoning myself completely to such an imagination, I will become like these bad students which leave their studies aside and let their mind escape through the open window, gawk at the wall or compose cheap rimes.

Boldness and Complacency

And yet! To catch an intuition as it bounces, as whimsical as it may be at first sight, believing in the impossible, daring, if only for a moment, to take a joke at face value, to build castle in the air, to fight without any hope of winning,

to be motivated by an ideal, placing oneself within the perspective of the unattainable, being animated by a utopia, acting out of principles, as inconvenient for life as it can be, so many formulations of an unreal which is a reality, which nevertheless constitutes reality. And anyway, must a psychological truth immediately conform to what our senses and our reasoning tell us, in order to be considered or even be envisaged as a reality?

To answer yes to this last question would mean the death of the spirit. Already because to accept such a dictatorship of the continuous and the familiar implies a conclusion: we are making a big deal of our little understanding of the world. It is betting too much on the obvious, as if we had access to a kind of objectivity immediately perceptible and expressible – a hypothesis often comforted by the assembled opinions of our peers, by a conformist majority. This ‘sincere’ realism prohibits any singular thought, to the extent the latter would dare to question the general consensus, to the extent it would simply dare to make me doubt of my own personal consensus. The hodgepodge of my present creed, strengthened by the mass of its arguments, according to its moods, would either smile at the impertinence of a free and wild little thought, or it would meanly ban it as soon as it would show the tip of its nose. One does not mess with certainties! No more doubt, no more possibility of a reversal of thought. Who can still claim that within such a ruthless mechanic it remains possible to exercise one’s freedom?

However, in this regard, an objection would be admissible. If a practical man, a “no bullshit, to the facts!” type of man, was to oppose us the following argument: “you gargle yourself with words out spurting from your wild imagination, you are getting drunk out of gratuitous phantasms, you are not even trying anymore to vet any of these shenanigans which pop to your head. Everything you have in mind, you take it for words of the Gospel. You do

not even doubt of yourself anymore, drowning in your own whimsical nature. The world is reduced to yourself and your rantings. You think yourself free. You believe that you are liberated from material contingencies. You are convinced that you have no accountability towards rules of reason, yet you do not see the ridicule of your situation. You are the laughing stock of the smallest piece of dust lying on the floor. You are a fool, and like a fool you will never see the brick wall coming to crush you. You will be dead without knowing why, and maybe you won't even notice that you are dead!"

No doubt, he would be right. For, by tilting into unbridled subjectivity, deprived of tension, we would no longer be in the gap, we would have fallen into the abyss of the 'nothing at all'; we would be comfortably established on the cozy sofa of complacency. We would no longer be in a challenge. We had a good conscience, because we agreed to listen to ourselves, to hear what was coming up inside ourselves, to care about what we had to say about ourselves, about the world. We were accepting to question everything at every moment, but now there are no questions anymore. By tilting into pure subjectivity, we live in the reign of the moment, we are constantly practicing clean slate strategy and, like Attila, after our passage, nothing grows but wild and ephemeral grass. Indeed, we agree to question everything, everything, except the very principle of this constant questioning. To question: we have no other creed: we have abandoned commitment. Within such impermanence, a new intuition pushes away a barely germinated thought. Of permanent instability we made a posture, we turned relentless scrambling into a system. Our thought has become its own parasite. It functions in closed circuit, it runs idle, and rushes at everything on its way, to churn it into mincemeat. But then, every gap is gone, all tension vanished. The gap cannot be a posture; it can only be a gap, a gap that disappears when its opposite disappears.

In itself, to look into the mirror cannot change anything to what we are. In the same way, to see ourselves acting in the world might not change in any way what we do. But for this, it seems that we would have to wish that this vision changed nothing at all. To implement the action deriving from such a resistance would require tremendous effort, an effort that by itself would bring about an important change, if only on the thinking subject. All this to say that in our world nothing is free, nothing is deprived of a price tag, nothing is without consequences, especially the work of consciousness. Any modification, as tenuous as it might be, will receive the salary it earned: the echo sent back from the world, an unexpected echo, an unpredictable echo; even if it was to reverberate only on the limited surface of a very localized little being, it would put in motion the most fundamental principles of reality which constitute the very intimacy of the universe we inhabit. Nothing is hidden. Our precious intimacy, jealously protected, our best kept secrets, our every thought, are no less exhibited in public space than our very body; a symbolical body that, despite our most senseless efforts, we can hardly extract from the space it occupies, a space that everyone of us imposes on the world even if we pretend excuse ourself from it.

Decision and Indecision

Our purpose is not to deny the concept of interiority. To abandon any form of localization would lead to many inconsistencies. We would fall into a pure continuity of being that would deprive this being of any tension. In the gap and in the link between interiority and exteriority, the possibility of the singular is articulated, the possibility of a dynamic constitutive of being and his essential subjectivity is established. Unavoidable and necessary dialectic, between the 'elemental' man and the 'autonomous man', which, for example, allows us to think of the double requirement of the concept of citizenship: freedom and

necessity that simultaneously capture the notion of responsibility.

Accepting to see that neither the world, nor my individual being, can find any reality outside of the gap and of the confrontation which constitutes them, perhaps this is what will allow me to grasp the dualism - and work on it - between my being as a separated singularity and my being as a part of a whole, element of the continuous. Illusion of the self and illusion of the world will indefinitely oppose each other, even for the one that pretends at any cost to arbitrate and take sides in this eternal dilemma. An easy pretext for the one who, in order to exist, insists on promoting of a religious war where he will be able to, so he believes, realize himself. Yet, the way is simple: it is given, no one ignores it. Accepting the rattle between a thought that flies away and a world that pulls down with all its weight. In this locus of tension, fundamental elements of the problematic that generates the very being of being are doubtlessly to be found. To choose without the possibility of return would amount to fleeing; to choose without considering the derisory aspect of any perspective would imply the radical refusal of a real freedom.

The work is strenuous. To take a problematic in the fracture it offers, and substantialize it, to admit its constitutive power, without petrifying it, without hypostasizing it. Not to conceive of it as a lack, not to consider it as a potential answer to come, not to take it as a simple expectation where nothing happens yet. For such a reductive vision would transform the very idea of an answer into a dead thing. If an answer was considered to be the end, the result, the full realization of the reflection, it is both the question and the answer that would be reduced to the status of non-entity. A problematic is not an absence of decision, it is a non-decision, which is rather different. In the same way, non-action is not inaction but the moment of preparation of the action, or the generation of the action,

that is to say a moment of action: its gestation. One could also say that the action is a moment of non-action: it is one of its innumerable possibilities, since action is a specific and temporary position selected within the requirements of materiality and contingency.

Let us take an example. For a judge, non-action is the learning of the law and of the great principles of justice; the action representing the particular judgment remains a simple particular manifestation of this learning process, a learning that defines him as a judge. Would he be a judge if he would not have this training? Would he be a judge if he were to pronounce no judgment? He cannot do without one aspect or the other. It goes the same way for the engineer, the citizen, the family mother, for any particular identity or any function of the human being which implies both being and acting, to know and to apply, there again with the link, the opposition and the gap implied in such a relation.

Necessarily, action is always linked with a form or another of non-action, even if we frequently prefer to ignore this dimension. Two paths favor this oversight. If we are a proponent of determinism, action becomes the automatic result of a certain amount of integrated parameters, thus no need to reflect. If we are a follower of free will, it becomes the product of choices made freely or even completely arbitrary, thus no need to reflect. Yet, non-action is both the subtract and the seat of action: it is simultaneously the matter out of which action will be formed, and the place from which it will emerge. Maybe is it its Achilles' heel. Its double nature, of paradoxical shape, resists the game of evidences. Logic is queen, it prevents from thinking.

It would thus be incorrect to consider a non-action as an absence of action. In the same way, it would be incorrect and inadequate to present a problematic as an absence of answer. Two specific reasons come to support such an assertion. The first is that the very form of the problematic,

its formulation, is already a kind of answer; a hypothesis, despite its precariousness, already represents a certain affirmation, by the mere fact of pointing fingers. The second one lies in the fact that, by nature, any problematic tends to maintain the scope of reality, its complexity, and does not look, for the sake of ease and comfort, to reduce reality to some kind of evidence which would satisfy our petty reason, an evidence which we name answer, an answer which makes us so happy! For this reason, a problematic can provide a more adequate answer than an 'answer' type of response that would still claim to be more qualified as an answer. The question is not to know if what is said is simpler, more immediately graspable and classifiable, more in line with our little logic of non-contradiction, but rather to know if what is said is more consistent with the fundamental nature of things, even if an entrenched and disturbing question mark would be permanently attached to the tail of the beast.

Take an example: freedom. In itself, as a pure concept, freedom immediately clashes with necessity. It can also only be defined with respect with the latter, since it thinks of and manifests itself necessarily through the absence or the release from constraint, thus by the negation of it. On the practical level, freedom cannot be considered without taking care of the necessity that conditions it. Freedom necessarily involves a relation to alterity, even to alienation, since it presupposes a choice, that of becoming other. It necessarily exists in a dialectical relation to necessity, since it must simultaneously negate the latter, reckon with it and count on it. Thus, there is no freedom in itself; freedom, that remains first of all a concept, can be thought of in an explanatory form only through the problematic of freedom/necessity. At best, freedom in itself is no longer a thought, or not yet one. Either it is a concept, empty of empirical content, or it remains a fleeting feeling that can hardly be articulated or be understood, who will at the

utmost express itself by joy or by pain. Even then, this feeling will be linked with a necessity from which we feel or foresee liberation, a liberation that, according to circumstances, we will experience through well-being or through pain.

Being and Other

In the same way, life cannot be thought of without death, passion without reason, man without animal, flesh without spirit, animal without vegetal, vegetal without mineral, reason without imagination, etc. These different modes of being, seemingly opposed, require each other and cannot be considered one without the other. They mutually constitute each other, although when captured in the moment of a particular conjuncture, they seem to and can well be opposed. For reasons of circumstances, we are obliged to choose between them, and the choice of one excludes the choice of the other. Thus, life is not death, as death is not life. Yet, biological science shows us how the mortality of individuals accompanied by the principle of filiation was the very condition of the evolution of species, and thus the development of life. There would also not be individual minds if intelligence were not bound to some physical location, forming a double nature – spiritual and biological - that we call a thinking being. Nor would there be living beings if mineral matter would not offer the conditions required by the laws of life. It is by considering the general mechanism behind such findings that the double perspective finds its foundation. The double perspective therefore consists in maintaining a simultaneous vision of opposition and of the non-opposition of concepts or of antinomic entities. The basic problematic is thus no longer the one that opposes and excludes, nor the one that does not oppose nor excludes, but rather the one that simultaneously thinks the exclusion and non-exclusion, an exclusion and non-exclusion which exclude each other because they are

opposites, but which do not exclude each other because they need one another.

Thus it is that what first appears to us as an opposition, a separation, as a gap, is neither a lack of anything, nor, even worst, a nothing at all, a non-existence. It is first of all a link – of a very particular nature let’s admit it –, a relation, a bond, as substantial and fundamental as the one which links the cause and the effect, and close to it enough, although it is more reflexive and broader. The double perspective is thus not the last resort of a schizophrenic or immature identity; it is not a sickness waiting to be cured. It is not some incoherence awaiting a solution. It is the very nature of nature: the naturing nature. In the alternation of its bipolarity, nothing is in itself, nothing is in the other. Everything is both in its cause and in itself, in its neighbor and in itself, in its principles and in itself, in its contradictions and in itself, in its effects and in itself. There is nothing that is not simultaneously in alterity and in identity. Only what is totally other is exclusively in itself. Only what is totally other is exclusively in itself. But, 'what is not' and 'what is other' are nothing for me, if not an unavoidable reality that I cannot grasp nor even consider. Such beings are exclusively present by their absence. They merge into being just as the colors and shapes merge into the vanishing point of the board. And for that, I cannot really distinguish one from the other. “What is not” and “what is other” are absolutely identical. What is radically foreign to me can only be pure nothingness.

I distinguish these two terms by the distinction of their mode of apprehension, but I have no valuable reason to believe that they are distinct, since in fact I do not know them. In reality, I am unable to tell if they are distinct or identical, if I know them or not. It is only a way of speaking to say that they are identical or that I ignore them. I only realize that so far they are deprived of any gap. Because the gap is the alternation and confrontation game between this

distinction and the distinction, between the thing in itself and the thing in the other, between the effect in its cause and the thing in its exteriorization, the interweaving of a non-being expressed by its radical absence and of a being taking refuge in pure presence.

As we have already said it, one must not either hypostasize the gap, nor turn the problematic into a new entity, in order to erect the gap or the problematic as a Commander's statue, nor to make a kind of self-serving supreme truth out of them, nor to consider them as something in themselves. Or, otherwise, to allow it only for a brief moment, the time to listen, to feel, to analyze. For to extend the experience even just a little bit would make the exercise perilous; it is too easy to dwell and overflow. It is always the same temptation: to settle, to become rigid, to crystallize, even in indeterminacy. Behaving like this, by fixing in a categorical manner, would already be a choice, and consequently it would nip in the bud a problematic that needs to remain a dynamic. In fact, there would be no gap anymore. At least not a living gap. It would be dead. We would find ourselves with the ghost of a gap, with an embalmed gap. The rule of the game, a prerequisite for serious work, is to let the problematic permanently work on ourselves, without being chained to it, without killing it, without becoming its prisoner, so many warnings or prohibitions which are equivalent in our eyes. At all times, we must still be able to make a choice, remaining free to choose; to establish what we can call a non-choice, of which the possibility must permanently be preserved. Not because we do not chose, this would be a choice, but because the choice always remains free, even while choosing. The choice is not an obligation; it is a choice. Not to choose is not an obligation, it is a choice. Not to choose between choosing and not choosing is an obligation. To choose between choosing and not to choose is a necessity. In reality, all this is a game.

Taking the Risk

So what is the danger of choice? Once a path has been decided, once the goal chosen, man instrumentalizes himself. He becomes the mean of his goal, exclusively. The primordial question that should be asked in front of any given bias is the following one: are we still able to take some distance from our goal, or do we become completely engulfed by its finality? Does the goal we impose on ourselves take a rigid and impossible posture? Thus, even a notion as the quest for meaning, which wants to be wide, noble and deep, can be completely treacherous. Let's take the greedy, whose existence is dedicated to filling his casket with silver and gold, a strong symbol if any. He certainly granted a meaning to his life, a one-way meaning that moreover is a true highway, even if it will never take him very far. Carried away by his own momentum, he becomes unable to question himself. To become able to question oneself, or to be able to do it again, he must take some distance from his becoming, by going back to his other self, the one of another era, the one that stands as a pure question, the one that remains astonished and accepts what he sees because he is not fully burdened with desires yet, because he is not totally determined by his options on the world. But the stubborn scrooge begrudges shifting his self, because this other self, all he knows of it, is that he wonders and questions. It does not know anything else. For this reason, it would be better if it were dead, that evil questioner, this dubious doubter. One thing is certain: it is useless. It is an old fool, or a naive child; it depends on the choice. No way here, of any return to some original state.

Ultimately, through it all, we are faced with an embarrassing dilemma. Who is the self? Either it is this shapeless thing out of which we have emerged, that doubts, questions and wonders, and this for one reason: we are here in the indistinct, in the "not yet" and in the "always" that nothing disturbs. Nothing really bothers such an entity, this

self is as malleable as play-dough, and waterproof like the skin that covers the bones. Or, on the contrary, the self is that collection of moments we call temporality, this sequence of past contingencies that we call being, which knows and wants, which locates and arches itself. It is henceforth in distinction, in finitude, in partiality, in the aggregate, in the contradiction. Its motto: everything in its place, maintain oneself, the important is to want and to resist, although its poor carcass cannot help wearing away in tatters. Who is the real self? Is it the child for whom everything is a discovery, or the adult that sees nothing new under the sun? Is it the ignorant or the knowledgeable one? Is it the one who learns or the one that recognizes?

According to temperaments, according to the streams of thought or the currents of life, individuals arbitrarily prefer to blow in one of the two directions rather than in another one. Faced with this psychological, epistemological and ontological opposition, what do we decide? Do we accept to live in the tension that animates this couple? Or do we choose one of these poles, of which we will make our failure? In the first case we opt for the gap which comes to constitute the unstable seat from which our being gushes out, in the second case the gap becomes the refuge where we wander endlessly, in the third case the gap is a lack that remains to be overcome.

By choosing the gap, by working its matter, a feeling overwhelms us: thought goes in circles. The ground crumbles, it flakes; an unstable substrate that constantly reveals itself, a kaleidoscope of infinite and mobile reflections. We cannot measure anything; devoid of benchmarks, we do not move forward. Such a path leads nowhere. Yet, are we certain not to accomplish anything? Against all appearances, the mind turning around, is it not the one daring to be? It comes back on itself, again and again. Beware of the thought that rushes ahead! The one that believes that it moves forwards, straight ahead, that

does not accept to rethink itself. It sails on certainties. Yet, endlessly going in circles can also become a kind of complacency, a way to avoid taking any kind of risk. The mind that looks for itself strikes here and there, a hit on the right, a hit on the left, it goes and comes back, endlessly, likes the surf on the large boulders bordering the shore. Then, suddenly, it leaps ahead, for a long time, as if it was never to return. Maybe it will never come back; it left for other shores. The double snare is here. Always on the go, would make the mind a furtive and powerless breeze; tied up to the locus, would turn it into a brooding mood, equally powerless.

Being wrong or being right. In the view in which we have embarked, such an articulation slowly drifts away, to the point where all the beacons seem insignificant, they are so far apart. The true and the false seem to move away from one another, like stage curtains at the beginning of a play, to make way for the shifting show of light and shadows, a constant ballet of puppets and marionettes which sing, talk, and dance while we never know where are the words coming from, nor what their movement means. It is not really that nothing makes sense anymore, that all criteria disappeared as an old and gray snow that would have taken too much time to melt, but a multitude of voices are coming out, infinitely intertwined. There are muddy roads where the exhausted traveler easily gets bogged down; there are dry roads, lined with pleasant shrubs, where one can walk carefree and cheerful; there are winding roads, all made of laces, which one can only follow, but will never see the end coming; there are labyrinths with countless outlets, requiring decisions at every moment; there are wide roads through deserts, sowing terror in the heart of the walker. How to overlook one aspect or another of reality, as if only existed the place where we were, where we are going or from we we are coming from! As if there was some kind of a royal avenue, straight and reassuring. Our eyes are slowly

opening. Discouraged, we would like not to choose anymore. But whether we like it or not, we have been chosen, the game has already started, we join it underway; we can only, once more, cast the dices.

Pain of Finitude

Time has come to finally ask an important question. What about the desire that we have mentioned at the beginning of this work, this desire that drives us and makes us seek? Is it always true? Can it be false? Is there a simple question that makes the nature of desire evident? Can it always be offered in the guise of a problematic? Indeed, what is more paradoxical than desire? This thing that extinguishes itself as soon as it reaches its goal. A strange phenomenon when you think about it. Desire can only die, a characteristic that may seem to us very banal, if we did not add that desire itself will always lead to its own peril. Nevertheless, mortals are mortals, but all their efforts are stretched one way or another towards immortality, whether they know it or not. When man wants to die, or least take the risk of it, with the exception of some situations that distorts the situation, the reason is that this death will contribute in some fashion to his own immortality. Be it through art, nation, children, God, or another cause sacred to his eyes, his individual existence somewhat finds its eternity in the goal he has set for himself. Even animals know a certain form of self-sacrifice: defense of the territory, of the leader, of the offspring, of the couple, etc.

Thus, without always admitting it, desire considers itself transcended by its own object, for it is on this condition that it accepts to rush to its own demise. However, the main difference between desire and an individual is that desire assuredly disappears once fulfilled – to the extent it can be fulfilled –, whereas the individual only takes a risk, regarding his own demise, by attempting to satisfy his needs. In other words, the difference between a being and a

desire is that if the being does not necessarily disappear while fulfilling his desire, it is because his being does not rest entirely upon the satisfaction of this specific desire. Although in some species, such as insects, the satisfaction of the desire to copulate may lead to the loss of life. This is also seen amongst humans, which sometimes know perilous desires. But in general, the subject can offset himself in regards to his desire, he can modulate. It is only when his desire and his being absolutely coincide that the individual can no longer offset himself in regard to his own lust. The question remains to know if such a perspective is possible for the human being. For, even with the desire to live, man can offset himself in this regard, as we have explained. It suffices to mention suicide, martyr or heroic acts, to prove that staying alive does not constitute the primary and absolute preoccupation of all human beings. It remains to be inquired if it is possible to conceive of a desire, an impulse, a will towards which man cannot offset himself. A desire where the gap would make no sense, a situation where the gap would not play any function. Even the desire to stay alive does not bear such categorical feature.

Imagine a being dominated by a given faith, wishing above all to forget about himself as a distinct singularity in order to abandon himself to a nature or some kind of being which he conceives as an absolute transcending his own existence. Does he not look for a kind of eternity at the expense of his own singular being? Let's see what this eternity means. For a moment, let's take this entity out of the reduced notion to which one frequently constrains it: the one of an unlimited temporality, an eternity conceived as an immensely wide temporality. For, is an unlimited temporality still part of temporality? Is the infinite number still a number? Yes, and no, one could answer without committing oneself very much. Does something which defines itself by its finitude and its quantifiable form, the number, remain itself when quantity becomes

undetermined? Would it not be the best definition of a negation of this same entity? For quantity is what knows the more and the less, whereas the infinite, as infinite, ignores this relation: in every infinite the part is equal to the totality, it cannot increase or decrease. The infinite is thus that which lacks nothing, which fully assumes its own nature, since it ignores the more or less. Thus, one who surrenders to infinity, seeks in fact the absolute realization of what he is, he seeks for the disappearance of the lack, the absence of alterity, meaning being or peace, the totality itself or immovability. And basically, through various disguises and mutations, it is probably this reconciliation, this fusion, this regression, this sublimation, which all humans constantly pursue, more or less explicitly.

Here arises, even when one tries to avoid it, the paradox of human nature. For, it is precisely because he can consider this infinite, this perfection, this accomplishment, because he can desire it, that man necessarily lives in moral pain, generated by an unavoidable awareness of the double perspective. How does it operate? There are two ways by which man can alleviate the suffering of the lack: by trying to fulfill what is lacking, or by negating the lack. But the double perspective does not mean to make a choice where the two parts of the alternative radically exclude one another. However, this is what is happening between fulfilling and denying the lack. If I refuse to see the lack, I will not fulfill it. If I fulfill the lack, I cannot ignore it. How to simultaneously practice both perspectives? How to simultaneously see and not see the lack? Hence the problem arises: should the desire be satisfied or ignored?

Will and Acceptation

A solution to our problem of lack would be to not look at it as a lack. Or, rather, to not see the lack as a lack and to simultaneously see the lack as a lack. In both cases, I admit the lack, I am aware of it, I do not try to forget it. But

whereas by seeing it as a lack I try to fulfill it, when I do not see it as a lack I take it for what it is: not a lack but a state of mind, a way of describing things. A first perspective: I am mortal, this makes me desperate, thus I will seek immortality. Second perspective: I am mortal, this is my nature, the self with which I must live, the time span of a life is, in a certain way, my own eternity. Identically, "I am hungry, I must eat" is opposed to "I am hungry, I see it." However, to see does not automatically imply a will not to fulfill; this means only that an awareness is happening which, at this precise moment, express a certain detachment: not feeling forced to fulfill, to consider abstinence, and always maintain the possibility of choice. By trying to fulfill this lack, the singular being places himself in the perspective of becoming: existence; by simply accepting it as an integral part of his nature, he places himself within the perspective of his own eternity: his essence. An organic vision opposed to a metaphysical one, multiplicity opposed to unity.

However, it is because man can consider a unique perspective, the one of his own undividable and complete unity, and because he can simultaneously desire and not desire what he is lacking, that he will live in the gap. Because, henceforth, he is both subject, that is to say a 'desiring being', and object, a 'simple image' or a 'particular case' of desire. It is not the same thing to be hungry and to understand that food is missing, but the idea is to be able to live the two modalities simultaneously. One can also say that the phenomenon must be lived while its cause is being understood, but these two states can easily be opposed, because of the difference of their mindset. Whoever seeks to satisfy his desire at all cost does not waste time speculating about the nature of this lack. Such a proposition could only irritate him.

If the subject were only staying with the mere consciousness of his desire, the gap would not exist. If he

was restraining himself to accept what he was, not as a lack, but exclusively as "what he is", the gap would not exist. Would this last posture be a true solution? The temptation is great, and quite actual. It seems to overcome the compulsive and frantic race forcing us to fulfill any desire that touches us. It would suffice that man accepts what he is, his nature, without asking question, in the present moment, and not live torn apart anymore, to not live in the tragedy. Being without desire, without will, without wishes: what a wonderful prospect! This state could be, in such a context, considered as the very definition of the state of grace, a kind of nirvana in a secular or religious sense. However, this scheme is artificial, fabricated, dependent, in that it can hardly be envisaged without a perspective or another of the infinite – a state or an entity evidently imbued with incontestable hegemony –, be it the cosmos, God, nature, society or some kind of transcendence, in which we would abandon ourselves. Else, where would be the meaning of such an acceptance, what would be its object? But, any perspective on the infinite also implies to be able to consider the lack as a lack to be fulfilled. Otherwise, without this perspective of total completeness, the lack would not be a lack. The lack is infinite in that it transcends the finiteness of the subject, in that it considers the gap of what is external to itself, and places itself within the perspective of this immensity. In a way, the universe – almost – entirely lacks to the singular subject that is a – almost – nothing, downtrodden when facing the perfection of the absolute. This sums up the experience of the finitude of being, our deep feeling of solitude, our anxiety about nothingness, our anxiety about the absolute.

Let's take this argument from another perspective. What are the presuppositions of a doctrine that would recommend us acceptance as a palliative to human or universal tragedy? Tragedy essentially lies on the lack, that is to say the non-fulfilled lack, accompanied with frustration and pain. Any

acceptance injunction, refusing the tragic, implies the fact of stating that this lack is a lack only because we grant it such a status. For example, the lack of an alcoholic is a lack only because the latter accepts his status as an addict requiring his dose. From the point of view of will, to take a distance from this identity considered factitious, the latter must consider his state of dependency as a choice, not as a necessity anymore. To bring about this shift of perspective, he must identify the place from which such an outlook is possible, something that leads him to rethink his own identity, which now transcends his nature as an addict, his dependency. He will therefore ‘accidentally’ be dependent, and be ‘essentially able to choose’, even if he continues to drink. If he wishes to defend his status as a free and voluntary man, the inveterate drinker will tell anyone who wants to hear it that he can stop to drink whenever he wants to, a common occurrence. Here, will is conceived as a state of nature qualitatively superior, which transcends and arbitrates that which is subordinate to it. Thus, the argument used against the perspective of our alcoholic will be that his alcoholic condition restrains the power of his will; by quitting drinking, he will truly exercise his will and will develop it further.

Does the prospect of acceptation change anything to the problem’s analysis? Acceptation is the annihilation of will, its very opposite. Is it not, for this reason, another kind of will? Let’s take our alcoholic again. If he must accept his condition, under the pretext that he must stop to want anything, the argument turns against his alcoholic state that makes him desire alcohol permanently. Said otherwise, the same preeminence of acceptation that can initially legitimate his alcoholic status, in a second moment asks him to not desire alcohol anymore, something that necessarily implies to not be alcoholic any longer. Within such a logic, a goal is to be reached, which nonetheless calls upon will, a kind of ‘in hollow’ or negative will. For there is a state,

better than the actual one, which one must reach. But instead of acquiring this status, one must get rid of that which encumbers it, let go of what makes it heavier. One must find oneself, thus restoring the true seat of his being, relieved from the slag of desire. Basically, it seems that it amounts to about the same.

Relative and absolute

If we accept the principle of the return to the original, harmony is not achieved, it is recovered. And to recover it, one must simultaneously consider this harmony and the infinite gap that separates it from us. No question here to fall in the trap, banal and common, consisting in legitimizing easiness under the pretext of adhering to a lazy doctrine of acceptance. If we must learn to accept, or unlearn in order to accept, it is really because what we have to learn remains some ideal to be ‘conquered’.

Without the double perspective, no substantial unity of being can be constituted. Unity becomes meaningful not within the ignorance of the lack, it would be factitious and impossible, nor in the satisfaction of each lack, but in the union of the lack as a lack and of the lack as nature, a combination of subjective and objective.

The double perspective entertains two opposite visions of the lack. From the point of view of the absolute, the lack is a lack, a defect, an imperfection. From the relative point of view, the lack is nothing else than the nature of things, their identity, their specificity. We need this duality to maintain the substantial unity of being. For being could not be pure, it is made out of an intrinsic alterity. Only non-being is absolutely itself. Being is a residue: either as reminiscence, trace or footprint, or as remains of the original. But this residue may be conceived as a deprivation in regard to this original, or as the concrete and total presence of this original, its sine qua non condition. The ‘residue’ is both a ‘gift’ and a ‘lack’, depending on whether one pays attention

to the origin or the result. Everything that is, every subject or object, is a residue, particularly on the material level. What is a cup if not the residue of a fabrication process? What is a plant if not the residue of life? What is a word, if not the residue of an etymological process? What is a particular thought, if not a residue of the mind?

In order to love what we are, not to desire what we are not and not to suffer from this desire anymore, the perspective of some seeming absolute is unavoidable. It is from the point of view of the chosen absolute, and only within that perspective, that the relative can be appreciated for what it is, and not anymore as mere pain. Because in this way, in a reductive but significant and total manner, the relative becomes the incarnation, the projection, and the localization of the absolute. May it be deliberate and conscious, or not. We could almost say that the absolute is the relative of the relative. As much as we might say that the absolute is the relative of the relative. An absolute which can be thought of as beauty, nature, the State, humanity, truth, nothingness, family or even another singular being; any concept or representation erected in some primary ideal, in primordial reference, which will necessarily incarnate itself and exist in particular moments, in particular beings.

Regarding an individual, everything that he says or does at any time captures the totality of his being. A frightening idea, if we forget the dimension of generosity such a perspective contains. The particular is the absolute considered in 'self', and not anymore as a presence or an absence. The absolute in itself is an absence. Every particular entity is an absolute in terms of presence. It is for this reason that its presence does not interest us at all: we do not notice it. Every singularity captures the totality of the universe, in its own way, under its specific mode. But at this very moment, the universe is nothing anymore. Only remains the thing, it is no longer a mean or a mode: it is

itself. Absolute presence, it is no longer a presence: it is. A concrete reality, which refers back the absolute to its own fragility, an ephemeral shadow, unspeakable and absent, an ectoplasm we could easily do away with. The particular is the incarnation of the absolute. Once laid down, the absolute could very well disappear. The absolute now has a concrete form. It is inscribed in space and time. It has a weight. What to do now with this formless and useless thing? We have the cup: who cares about the mold and the original material? We can then laugh at this absolute, draped in its insignificance.

Some may be shocked by our trivialization of the term 'absolute', for example when it refers to a physical person. But let's not forget that the notion of absolute, at least in the sense in which we use it, is never else than a representation, and not only a conceptual representation, formal and distant, but a psychological encounter. In other words, this is the absolute as it is lived, the central point around which gravitates a particular existence, the relative truth that gives meaning and sense to the biological, social, and intellectual life of every human being. No matter if this truth is individual or collective. Once this is clarified, it remains to be known to what extent this representation plays its role satisfactorily, how efficient it remains, and how well is articulated the relation between the subject and the representation of his absolute, which is an altogether different question. No doubt that each absolute can manifest its limit and its lacks within this confrontation; it is up to the thinking subject to then draw up the necessary consequences, or to ignore them.

The absolute and the general serve as foundations for the relative and particular, embodying them or thinking them. From this point of view, to know who depends on whom, to determine who comes first, the singular or the universal, remains a big question, if not the great question, which is likely to remain unanswered, and should remain this way.

Some will decide, out of habit or by anxiety, without noticing that the answer is already part and parcel of the structure of relation that they conceive a priori between the two terms. In other words, the discourse refers to itself, which should not surprise us. Despite its immense contradictions, the mind always tries to maximize its own coherence. Nevertheless, it is true – here as in front of many antinomies – that the circumstances will lead us in a legitimate manner to choose our camp, thus reducing the problematic to a characterized opposition, where we entrench ourselves in some univocal position, something which should not prevent us in anyway from becoming aware of the reductive effect of these circumstances, in spite of the weight of their reality, and of the particular responsibilities it imposes. In this last commentary, to remain coherent with ourselves, we must also admit that the problematic in itself, in all its generality and ‘objectivity’, is neither more nor less true than the particular situation which forces us to have recourse to judgment and to decide in a subjective manner.

Therefore, in the perspective of the specific outlook that we just described, the lack can be considered as no longer only and simply a lack, but also as a gift, as a living nature, substantial and constitutive of things, as the specificity that gives rise to the singular. The particular is an absolute that misses something. The particular is an absolute that possesses something extra. A particular triangle is a baroque triangle: it is an absolute, accompanied by some frills. But these frills may be considered as treason to the principle of least action, to the principle of economy, a cowardly abandonment of the essential. Thus it is for our personality, which both humanizes and dehumanizes us. Or for our vulnerability, which fascinates us today, that supposedly demonstrates our humanity. Is it a strength or a weakness?

However, make no mistake! It is not because the entity expresses itself in itself that the need will disappear.

Autonomy does not follow immediately from mere affirmation of existence and self-satisfaction. Debts do not disappear so easily. This declaration of independence would hold some impossible requirements, if only for biological, material and temporal reasons, since need constitutes the very essence of the singular. The change that is happening concerns the relationship to this need. One of the main upheavals affects necessity: it is no longer this state which one wishes to flee by all means, numerous loopholes that use multiple diversions and various psychological tricks, whose role and simple function is to facilitate forgetfulness, inducing the fading of the real. Even if these diversions are common, if not downright trivial, they are nevertheless the expression of blindness and the manifestation of a pathology, of which the specific formulation will capture the general mechanism of dysfunction of the particular psyche. In other words, freedom ceases to represent the all-mighty and mysterious force that protects us from the brutality of the world, to become the very engine of necessity, a kind of supra-necessity or hyper-necessity. Freedom established as a gap, and not as a condition of being. This is how the lack becomes a gift of providence.

Finite and Infinite Desire

Let us see for a moment how this absolute and the relation it implies to the relative is projected on the problem of desire. Every desire, while trying to be fulfilled, runs to its own perdition. In reality, for obvious reasons, man can fully and radically identify himself to a desire only if this desire has an infinite nature, meaning that it cannot be wholly fulfilled. If desire is apprehended in its finitude and the subject completely identifies with it, this subject will rush towards his own destruction, just like those salmons that, extenuated after a very long journey, come to die out of exhaustion at the very place where they reproduce. By fulfilling his desire, the subject dies as a singularity, unless he fulfills his desire while knowing that it is only a desire full of facticity,

the spontaneous and arbitrary localization of a wider desire. It is by considering the gap between the localized desire and the wider one that man will develop the exercise of his freedom; indeed, he will become accessible to distancing, able to make a non-choice, he will decide if yes or no the localized desire must be fulfilled. At the same time, he will become aware of the infinite desire that inhabits him. He will become able to consider such a desire, in a more or less conscious manner. For example, this is what a child cannot do, while the absence of distancing towards his own desire is, in the adult, the expression of a pathology, since in theory the latter is supposed to be more conscious.

Before this new awareness, the desire being merely the manifestation of a lack, the perception of a pain waiting for a palliative, every infinite desire represented an impossible state to live in, too painful to undergo, and by a retroactive process it became impossible to envisage. In the interest of self-protection, consciousness then rebelled, tensed itself with all its strength to confine such a necessity to the dark realm of the subconscious, with the disastrous consequences of such a repression. The relentless quest for temporary and limited satisfactions, provider of poultices, ointments and elixirs of all kinds, therefore constituted the bumpy vector of a life where ‘muddling through’ navigation was perceived as the ultimate science. However, do not forget that, in spite of a critical view of the short term, each of these pitiful intellectual and emotional upheavals, each of these many spiritual hiccups, indicate as they can the generous call of the vast, lively, deep and terrifying force which inhabits and sustain even the most miserable of beings. Obviously, one must realize it and think about it, else within this bag-race of desire, the soul may decay, or should we say ‘loose its soul’...

Hunger as hunger constitutes my make up as a biological being. But to eat in a certain manner at a certain time is a deliberate choice of which I could consider the negation.

Unless I am obsessed with certain rigid rituals, obsessed with some particular diet, etc. To love, in general, is a feeling that I could not avoid, because it is linked to my human nature; but to love a person, an object or a specific activity, or even to love in a particular manner, is yet another. Wanting to accomplish a task in general is one thing, in the order of necessity, wanting to accomplish a specific project uses another register. The double perspective of desire is therefore based on the possibility of considering the desire in its metaphysical or timeless form, or in its physical and temporal form, more determined. Some will distinguish the potential form of the first case, from the actualized form of the second, but it is not certain that this distinction fits: without being totally false, it seems to contain a presupposition giving precedence to the finite, more concrete in relation to the infinite, whereas we are trying to establish their non-hierarchy.

Thus, the non-choice allowed by this double perspective will guarantee the legitimacy of my choice. The satisfaction of the lack is no longer seen as a pure necessity. My free will or motivation will no longer be the slave of needs over which I have no control. It will rediscover its freedom by discovering the alternative. For the will might really express itself to the extent it will become possible to deliberate, to refuse, to abstain from choosing, to the extent where it will become possible to simultaneously consider a choice and a non-choice. Any choice of which we cannot consider the opposite is not a choice, but a compulsion, and thus an absolute, even if not admitted. Whoever strives above all to survive considers his life as an absolute; whoever risks his life or gives it away for a cause, an ideal, or a being, considers whatever motivates his act as an absolute which allow him to relativize his own existence.

An objection can be raised here. The one for whom the absolute is the only reality, does he not miss distancing? Is he not even more dangerous than the one who takes himself

for the absolute, since the latter perceives at least a minimum the limited nature of his adoration? Fundamentally, there is no substantial difference between the two characters. The excess of subjectivity in which they have both fallen makes any minute distinction ridiculous. For, let's not forget that the absolute in question here - in spite of its pretensions - is not the absolute in itself - which is a real challenge for the intellect -, but the absolute of someone. That is to say a subjective absolute, a relative one, even if for the one who adheres to it, this absolute still remains the absolute absolute, which somehow no one has the right to deny him. An act of faith is an act of faith, no less legitimate, not more either, than another act of faith opposed to it. Reason is here out of order. And it is not clear why the expression of any skepticism - just as subjective - would grant any particular prerogative regarding the truth of the matter. And if there is danger, it depends more on the capacity of distancing oneself when facing one's own choice, than on the arbitrariness of that choice, which is unavoidable.

However, there is still a distinction between these two types of excesses, to be identified, if only for clinical reasons. For, caused by the articulation of our double perspective, there are two possible spills. The temporal overflow, the relative one, the one of multiplicity, rather linked with the emotional or corporal, and the metaphysical spill, the absolute one, of unity, rather linked with the intellect. In both these cases, the gap has disappeared, and tension as well; rigidity and complacency rule, even within radicalism. Does the intellect, however, not remain the engine of this distancing? Is desire not lacking in essence this power of distantiation, a characteristic that would identify it by nature as a negative factor, inferior or secondary, within our scheme of double perspective? Is desire condemned to be an accessory status of the intellect?

Such a conclusion, although tempting, seems unacceptable, because it is devoid of dialectical power. After all, the intellect is as much a tool for desire than desire is a tool for the intellect. Already, there can be no intellect without desire, the latter cannot be its own 'engine'. Is 'sitting' knowledge, satisfied with himself, not the one who no longer desires to know? The most marvelous of absolutes then becomes a couch on which to install oneself and rest; it becomes an object, useful but dead and dangerous. For, in the end, is not the absolute an infinite movement, of which all particular apprehension is in fact treacherously limited. In other words, desire without an object, the love of the infinite, are they not more real, in a certain way, than the truest of all the propositions formulated by the intellect? Then, that the intellect fixes itself on an object, or that desire fixes itself on an object, what is the difference? Simple detail, that manifests itself in the relative insistence granted to the particular shape of the dialectical deficit, to the aspect that will be valued, but in reality there is no substantial difference. In both cases, the "therapy" consists in reestablishing the constitutive fluidity of being, by calling out and working on the dimension that we pretend to erase, by calling back to life what we negate or had forgotten.

Playing and Winning

The lag that we have been describing can be approached in the mode of the tragic, or of necessity, but it can also be discussed in the mode of the game. Let us try, for a moment, to think of the game as a model for existence. We generally say that children are playing, and that big people are serious. Not playing anymore, is to subject oneself to a specific conduct of which we can no longer deviate; it is opting for ethic, for obligation, for the irreversible choice: the one implying commitment and responsibility. The severity of actions distinguishes the serious occupation from the lightness characterizing the practice of the playful child.

It must be noted that a game becomes serious from the moment one forces himself to a particular kind of behavior, by routine, ritual or another reason. The game distinguishes itself by its gratuitousness: it has no other goals than itself, which explains its lightness. When, for example, the card game becomes the locus of a financial involvement, we say that the game becomes serious; a heavy load is set, the game becomes a mere pretext, it is not a game anymore, it is a mean to something else. We also say that the game becomes serious when the outcome is tightly contested, and participants are forced to weigh attentively each of their movements, since at this precise moment a particularly crucial dimension is given to the action. In a general manner, players are not bound to any responsibility extrinsic than playing in itself, the joy is its only purpose and reward; the game is not encumbered by any mortgage of heavy consequences, and this state of fact allows it to maintain a high degree of freedom, its very playfulness.

We cannot however pretend that the game knows absolutely no necessity. It ignores necessity only relatively; it cannot be totally free from it. If there were no rules, no obligations, there would be no game, the activity in question would amount to some foolish play, mere fuss. For example, football is not just about kicking a ball, and playing checkers is not only about moving pawns. The game can be a game only by expressing a certain freedom, but in relation to a strictly defined necessity. But, among the requirements, besides the rules which allow and constitute the game, there is an unavoidable condition to the game: the desire to win, or at least the desire to play as best as one can, a desire which has for manifestation and practical consequence to lead towards winning, if only to win against oneself by outdoing oneself. This rule is not written, it is not stipulated, it is not part of the formulations that condition such and such game, yet it is necessary. This desire, which is actually a simple desire to be, a desire to increase the

power of being, is absolutely necessary. In comparison, the various other circumstances or possible motivations of the player will denature the exercise. Suppose the obligation, and the game will become a mere series of soulless movements, a behavior totally opposed to the thrill, to the excitement which characterizes this activity, instigating the creative act; unless the obligation is totally internalized and no longer formal, which brings us back to the previous situation; the game is adulterated. Suppose again that, bored or disinterested, the player plays randomly, to kill time for example, his practice becomes just 'anything', a sub-game; this makes the exercise uninteresting for his partners, since it is said then that he does not play the game, and one can wonder what he is doing there at all.

There can be no game without some tension, without a real challenge, that is to say without a desire to play as well as possible and without something which could prevent the fulfillment of this desire. In this, it looks like life. It is a reduced model of it. Without desire and without resistance, life is not life anymore, the game has no stakes. It is the relative impossibility or the difficulty to realize one's desires which generates tension and some dynamic. If we were to win every time, it would not be a game. If we were to lose every time, it would also not be one. The game is first of all a confrontation, primarily towards oneself. By its challenge, it is constitutive of being. But if, in the course of the game, no one has the idea to abandon the rules of the game, to make it easier, it does not proceed this way for existence. For the good reason that, in everyday life, the playful and constitutive dimension procured by tension is forgotten, for the pure sake of winning, in view of the price granted to the winner. So much so that, for many, one plays only if a guarantee is offered by contract, signed and countersigned; a mortal condition for the game. Obviously, we are not always able to play, and the tragedy is awaiting to take place. But there is no greater tragedy than the slow

death that insidiously wins over the soul of the one in whom the spring is rusted or broken. The one who no longer knows how to play, the one who is so old that we might sometimes wonder – by admiration or concern – how he can still be breathing.

The Stakes

If the desire is mainly to win, two limitations arise: the rules that do not allow me to do whatever I want, and the capacities of my adversary, this other entity also restricting the scope of my shots. This holds true even if I am my own adversary. Even if I only pretend to play as well as I can, and not just to win, the adversary remains the one limiting the possibilities of action of my game.

However, what distinguishes the two perspectives, the desire to win and the desire to play well, is my relation to the other: in the first case, I wish that he does not play as well as me, in the second case I prefer that he plays the best he can, to the extent that, in truth, my true adversary is always myself. The other then transforms himself into a partner, which must challenge me to the best of his abilities. He is no longer an adversary, he becomes my trainer, even if does not pretend or wish anything of the sort. In the same process of psychological reversal, the rules are no longer ‘spoilsports’ but necessities, even friends, which allow me to challenge myself. From this point of view, law becomes constitutive, and no longer limitative; it does not prevent me from being, but it allows me to be. Then, everything conspires, so that I can be, so that I can exist to the best of my abilities. What frustrates me makes me exist.

In every game truly lies a challenge. Every game is serious. It is for this reason that men are so easily taken by the game. They invest a part of themselves in it, if not their whole being. They forget, however, that it is only a game. For this reason, we will often see the stake – if only the stake of psychological involvement – becoming very

important, so important in fact that the game disappears. And be it for fortune, honor, glory, or a simple satisfaction of the ego, the game disappears behind the stake. It becomes a pale staging, a pretext more or less avowed. The rules and the adversary become enemies to be won over by all means. From then on, cheating is part of the game. Nothing goes anymore, all is good; the soul plunges in a frenzied utilitarianism. I become an enemy to myself; my self is transformed in a mere tool destined to satisfy the whims of my desires or of my will. I am angry with myself and get enraged if my capacities and my actions are not living up to my ambitions. This is what we call a bad loser, which is also a bad winner, since he does not know how to either win or lose. He does not even know what is to win; even when he wins, he loses in fact. We also call him a bad player, since he does not know how to play. He ignores what it means to play.

The desire for fame, the love of money, pride, tiredness, conceit and vanity have for primary consequences of blinding us, making us believe the moon is made of green cheese. Our fists clenched on our meager tokens, with sunken eyes, we look at the spinning wheel with utmost anxiety. Fixed on our stools, we are dying on the spot, on the very place where we are nailed.

What is the link with the double perspective? If we must still explain it, let's say that it is a game, the first of all games, and at the same time the only stake of its own game. The only game devoid of any other stake than itself. For this reason, it is the only worthwhile game. For everything is a game, there is nothing else but games; the only difference between beings is the nature of their game, the quality of their fingering, the power of their movements. To play well, one must learn the rules, know the world; to play well, one must know men; to play well, one must know oneself, be an object to oneself, be distant from oneself, and yet be oneself totally and integrally. It is at this moment that the game

becomes serious, since the issue becomes major, and yet it is at this moment that nothing is to be taken literally. In this gap between me and myself, I have hardly any accountability, I have nothing to prove, I look and observe, and in the same way I still have everything to do and to prove, because at this distance, in this fault line, fits the whole of reality, as long as I have access to it. There, everything is waiting and presence, everything is absence and presence. One no longer calculates, for everything is played and replayed at every turn. One cannot loose, for there is nothing to lose. All is there, on the carpet. An esthetic moment where every moment, mere instant, captures reality.

Inside and outside

How can we not see that we are all actors, tragedians or comedians! To play well, I must penetrate into every pore of my role, and simultaneously I must not forget that it is only a role. At every moment I must be a spectator of my own spectacle and remain conscious that I am too good a public: I get caught by the pathos of the script. I believe so much in myself that I turn bad. I close my eyes to speak, I do not know how to look anymore. I must take some distance and not keep my face glued to the front of the scene. Sometimes I move back too much and, from the back of the room, I do not see anything anymore, I become alien to my own role. I find myself being outside without knowing why. Or again, carried away by my own momentum, I cross the curtains and get out of the scene, I get lost in the corridors of the theatre. I do not know what I'm doing.

To play well, I need the gift of ubiquity. I must simultaneously personify the model and the mirror; be inside and outside, in front and behind. And in this shuttle, lose for a moment of consciousness about what is, not being preoccupied anymore about who is what. Where is the

original? Where is the copy? Is the spectator a role that the actor plays when he is sitting in the room? Is the actor a role played by the spectator when he stands up and walk on stage? Not to distinguish, not to choose; only being able to duplicate oneself and to reassemble at any time, simultaneously. Yet, if I am a spectator, the actor that plays his part is a stranger for me; without this indispensable condition I could neither observe, nor admire or even hate him. First of all, because I would draw no pleasure from it, I would see no interest in it, and then how can we see ourselves? My sight cannot directly become its own object. The image of the mirror is alien to me, because it is inverted, because it is external to me; it is distant, and only an image. But it is only thanks to these differences that I can contemplate it; without any difference, I could never look at myself, there would be identity, any consciousness would vanish.

At the same time, going to the theatre without abandoning oneself to the vision of the character that embodies the actor, is not going to the theatre. If, for a moment, the spectator does not fully adopt this perspective from which he can look at the room, look at himself, without any resistance or reservation, he does not go to theatre, he goes in a theatre, which is very different. Staying outside is not the lot of the viewer, it is the lot of the consumer. To act like this is to take oneself for God. It is like taking refuge in an 'in itself' not accessible to anything, which refuses to be challenged by some foreigner; being a concrete wall which could not be alienated for any reason. To listen to the other without becoming, for a moment, his lawyer, without becoming his mouthpiece, or even without falling in love with him, is not to listen, it is merely like listening to the rustling of one's own eardrums. Indeed, I heard something, I can even repeat one by one each of the words said, but it is only noise; a recorder would have done just the same, even better. Becoming other in order to better

tear oneself away from oneself. Becoming other in order to better become oneself. What else is there to do?

On stage, the actor wears a mask, it is for this reason that he sees me, it is for this reason that he can see the mask that is mine; he knows how to change mask, it is for this reason that he recognizes all my masks, the ones I successively wear, throughout life, and it is for this reason that, through the mask, he can see the mask which disguises and expresses itself through the mask. Without this actor, without his mask, without his sight, my disguise would stick to my skin for eternity. Through it, all is granted to me, provided that I do not let myself be swallowed by the armchair where I am sitting. On condition of permanently navigating from one side of the scene to the other, this fracture where resides the soul of the theatre, the gap from which being bursts out.

However, as a spectator, I am not on the scene, the spectator is not an actor; it would be too easy. Between him and me stands a terrible barrier, a thick red line is drawn. The pit of tragedy separates us, an infinite distance that allows me to laugh or to cry. To be simultaneously actor and spectator, in an undifferentiated manner, amounts to breaking away with oneself. Here, one must take the opposite stance towards oneself: to laugh in front of one's own sadness, to cry in front of one's gaiety. Without this breakup of the image, which transposes my wounded outlook to another universe, I cannot see anything, I stay myself, I am just a poor anxious animal trying to breath, the time of a brief sigh of respite. If the mirror is not foreign to me, if it does not disorient me, if the camera limits itself to filming my office, my living room, my kitchen, my bathroom, I will be with myself, amongst my own kin, but I will not see anything. How can I capture the slightest walls around me, those that are there every day? No drama, no tragedy, the days go by and are the same; everything is just habits and familiarity. If the outlook does not detach itself

from what it looks at, it does not look at anything. As long as Odysseus will not have gone through what he has to, he will not be allowed to go back home.

The curtain rises, figures appear. The spectator waits anxiously. The actors have the jitters. One winces, the other stammers. Who are they? Costumes, music, speeches, attitudes, decor. What is happening? Anxiety overcomes the one that just came in. He indeed is an alien. Very well, he will breathe with a brand new gaze; it's been a long time since it happened to him. He will not yield his place for anything in the world. Then slowly, as events unfold, he digs his hole, he understands, he judges and settles; he decides, he is now home. Time passes, the curtain falls, our man applauds to say thank you, as he is polite; everything is over. As light comes back, he stands up. Will he leave has he came. What does he know? This is the real question. To ask it or not to ask it makes all the difference. This is how existence is formulated. Without actors, without spectators, no double perspective and no humanity.

Duplicity of Truth

Singularity and Universality

But, in this jumble of words, where is truth? Cherished truth, feared truth, admired truth, hated truth, so often invoked and so often sold off. Does it exist or is it a mere breath, which dies a way just when it touches our face? It is because it ceases on my skin that I feel the wind, because it ceases on my face that it is, for me. How to pretend knowing the living nature of a being of which the mortality, for my being, is spelled with the very letters of the name that I give him? How to grasp or even touch a life that dies by merely touching the imprint of my thoughts.

Truth does not exist, says common opinion without hesitation, the opinion of today, proud of its shortcomings. Similarly, however, such and such declaration will be judged true or false, without always realizing the implications that such a position, contradictory, introduces. For, beyond the Épinal prints on the matter, the various traumatismes provoked by dogmas, and the numerous prejudices they engender, what remains of truth? What is it? The character of what is true, says the dictionary. Before any other mind operator, the notion of truth refers to a principle of adequacy. For example, a writing adequately describing physical reality is considered to be true. Or, again, words in line with their context, a sentence fitting the remaining of a discourse, a person coherent in his words and actions. However, this adequacy can be perceived as universal or singular. Singular: an idea would be true for me if it seems to adhere to the rest of my thought, since it is anyway always question of the mind here, even when we talk about physical reality. If only because physical reality will always be interpreted and translated, or could be negated, rightly or wrongly. But, according to this same process, how could an idea be universally true? When it is conforming with the thought of all? So to say, when everyone accepts it? Is such universality possible?

By asking these various questions, we realize that an important notion was surreptitiously introduced: that of recognition. Because, on the path we have taken, an idea would be true from the moment that it has been recognized as such, either by an individual, which would make it into a singular truth, or by all, making it a universal truth. However, thus defined by this 'all', for an idea, universality would become a status relatively impossible to acquire. There will always be some maniac – crazy, poet or wise man – to refuse the idea that the earth is round or that cows ruminate. We will then have to fall back on a simple majority. But if such a proportion were sufficient to

recognize the universality of an idea, any debate would henceforth be reduced to a statistical order of argumentation, censuses, surveys, and others to support the universal validity of this or that opinion. Democracy would ultimately become the ultimate guarantor of truth. This is a strange hypothesis, but one that is not uninteresting to think about. Especially since it is quite common today, for example in the 'law of the market', which carries a large number of established 'truths'.

If recognition does not offer any solid guarantee, what remains available as a possible way to universality? In fact, we play on two different meanings to determine universality. First, what is 'universally' recognized, that is to say by a vast majority, which we could call a universality of form, and on the other hand, the fact that it can be applied to all, which we can call a universality of content. In the second case, it would be enough for only one individual to recognize it as universal to make it so, for a proposition to be universal. Universality would no longer rest on recognition, as a mere unit offers a much too limited quantity; only the content of the idea could be defined as universal. Universality would thus be a universality of recognition, or a universality of content. The two principles would stay completely independent one from the other, as the main conclusion of the present analysis.

If one person states that all intelligent men have a mole on the face, we have there a singular thought of universal content. If all men, or almost, recognize that the earth is round, we have here a universal thought singular in content. Of course, if one says: 'half of the people on earth, or one person out of a hundred, believe that...', we will have a problem to define the universality or singularity of the recognition. Qualifying this proposition as a particular one, between the universal and the singular, will save us. In the same way, if one says that "the world changes", or that "every man born on a certain date, at a certain location,

from a father X and a mother Y, are called Victor”, we will also have a problem to determine the universality of the content. The first proposition is a disguised universal, since “the world changes” amounts to say “everything changes”. In regard to Victor, it is a singular content disguised as a universal one, since it concerns only one person in the end. All this to say that universality does not radically oppose singularity, but opposes it relatively or proportionally, be it formally or materially; that is to say that the action of judgment remains unavoidable, which implies making choices, with the part of subjectivity and arbitrary involved therein. But it is always possible to carry out an act of force, sign of recklessness that characterizes our mind. Moreover, many ideas universally admitted today first emerged as coups on the universality of the time. There is only to contemplate the concept of ‘universe’, a simple word of seven letters supposed to capture the totality of the material world with all that it involves, to realize the hubris of our species.

Content and Cognition

Let us now examine the consequences of this analysis on the notion of truth. Either truth rests on recognition, or it rests on content, two criteria which function independently one from the other. In the first case, the universality of a truth will be validated by the number of people that recognize it, whereas, in the second case, the universality of a truth will be validated by the value of the content in itself. Thus the truth of recognition, or of acceptance, will be entirely based on propagation, or on the use of an idea, which means that for such a truth an idea is never true in itself. While the truth of content does not worry about numbers, since it claims intrinsic truth, even if all would ignore the idea in question, even if it would never have been formulated. Here again we find our double perspective, in the fracture between a phenomenal truth or temporal one, a noumenal truth or metaphysical one.

As we have mentioned already, the principle of a truth of recognition, subjected to the vagaries of time, to the ideology of the ambient structure, might shock those who are inclined towards eternal considerations. They will struggle to conceive the concept of ‘conventional truth’: the one that is true because it operates within a given frame. In the same way, the principle of an *a priori* truth, written in golden letters in some starry heaven, will annoy those for whom there can only be thoughts within a concrete and tangible human mind. For, if the hypothesis of a truth subjected to the test of democracy can be scary, in the same way the one of a truth standing alone against all, guaranteed by a mysterious mandate, also contains its lot of danger and excesses. As a guarantor of truth, the prophet is no less dangerous than democracy. But, depending on their intellectual tendencies, some will fear the abuses of the group more than the ones of a singularity, or even of a small elite. What remains to be known now is if we have here, within this antinomy, a radical opposition, or if, like the universality/singularity couple, it is rather a relative or dialectical opposition.

If there was no recognition, how could an idea be true? If only for one single person. More specifically, if recognition was not necessary, and especially if an idea could be true for me, without the slightest glimpse at its weight in truth, or even without knowing this idea at all, what would happen? Already, this would not prevent someone to know this idea, and to think that it is true for me, whether he knows me or not. Is the truth thus discussed universal or singular? It will be singular in recognition when a lone individual will formulate it, even if this individual recognizes the ‘true’ for another, or for any other. In this last sense, it is universal in content, it pretends to be universal, even if this is not necessarily recognized by all.

Let’s tackle the problem more concretely in the following manner: how can I accept the doctor’s verdict in my

regards, without recognizing the value of his ideas, since I ignore it, being a non-specialist? His knowledge seems universal without having necessarily obtained my consent, by the tacit agreement of the institution that granted him some credit. What is the nature of our relation? Does it involve, in any way, to grant some infallibility to the specialist? We are forced here to explicitly involve a concept that so far had remained implicit: confidence, with all the weight and the load of acceptance that is implied within the concept. Because this confidence is an act of faith: I put my trust in that physician, in his judgment, in his various propositions, even in what concerns my life, since a mistake from his side might lead to the worst consequences. Notice that, in a certain way, the same holds true for a taxi driver or an airplane pilot –which I do not know nor even see most of the time – to whom I entrust my life. Similarly, to recognize a proposition as true, does it not involve trusting the individual that formulated it, be it himself or another? The notions of proof will be objected here, of rationality, even of intuition, but can we really ascertain in the smallest details every proposition that we recognize as true? There is only to observe the discomfort that settles in while we are being questioned, to notice how we bring forward propositions to which we adhere without being able to account for it. That is what is called belief or faith: truth without proof.

What does this change for our couple ‘truth of recognition’ and ‘truth in itself’? Should we not distinguish two kinds of act of faith: the universal and the singular? I trust a doctor for two reasons, in varying proportions: on one side, he is recognized by society through the institutions that regulate his activity, on the other side, because as an individual he seems to master his craft and to be in good faith. The airplane pilot which I never met deserves my trust solely because of social recognition, and I grant him this trust, unless I notice something that seems incongruous.

Similarly, when I follow classes in school, I trust the teacher for the same reasons, unless some words or acts sow doubts in my mind.

Two dangers are looming here. The naivety of the one who lets himself be conditioned by society by accepting social recognition as an ultimate criterion. The skepticism of the one who accepts nothing without requiring a certain amount of evidences able to satisfy his own mind; there lies the limit of the critical mind. On one side, the abuse of the argument of authority by a group or an institution. On the other, the abuse of confidence in itself, doubled with distrust for others. The problem also arises in the course of any reading. Will I trust an author and risk to lose my critical awareness? Or will I remain distant and not even risk entering into a foreign thought. Truth takes on the double mask of what imposes itself as obvious, and what imposes itself through proofs; through what is intuitively accepted, what is accepted through reasoning, through experimentation or social recognition.

Truth and Assent

Generally, we send back-to-back two conceptions of truth. On one side, truth as something that allows a proposition to be formulated in a perspective of obligation applicable to everyone, whether one adheres to it or not. For example, one wishes that everyone gets out of error, by defending a principle going against common prejudice, considered backward, immoral or unfair. It's the general case of a religious truth, of a political or philosophical truth. Those who adhere to it consider that those who do not are making a mistake. This does not necessarily mean that they will force their ideological opponents to comply and change their mind, even if this has been seen already and is commonly practiced in the course of individual discussions. But, in any case, those who adhere to such a truth think that the others would be better to change their mind, even if they

are very tolerant and accept the possibility of an opposite view. We can even see some that push this tolerance to such an extent that it becomes a kind of abnegation that encourages opposite views, for quantities of various reasons: out of pure masochism, out of a certain taste for martyrdom, to prove that they alone possess truth, out of a spirit of contradiction, or by a mere tendency for sophistry. This is to say that the adhesion to a universal truth does not always take on the form of an ideological bludgeoning, even if we tend to minimize the value of the 'opponents', to ignore them or to despise them. Let us not underestimate the complexity, if not the potential of duplicity of the human mind. The notion of truth that we qualify as scientific does not represent anything else than a specific case of the kind we have just described as act of faith. Although very often the statements that are presented in this guise require to be taken at face value, we are starting with the point of view that there is no formula or formulation that does not presuppose some subjective premise referring back to an ideological form of thought. It goes in the same way for those who extol science as for those who extol moral.

On the other hand, there are those who pretend that a truth can only be individual, they are proponents of a more or less radical relativism. The first contradiction of the supporters of such a system is that they often do not tolerate that one claims the universality of some truth. While, in a certain way, believing in the relativity of ideas does not have to prevent anyone from adhering to the universality of truth, since any idea is true to the extent it satisfies the one who utters it. If I am opposed to a universal formulation, I henceforth believe in the truth of principles in themselves, I do not evaluate them in relation to the one who expresses them. If I state as a universal truth that there is no universal truth, I am contradicting myself. Since a negation is also an affirmation, a prohibition is also an injunction, an order. If I am to admit that some universal truth might subsist for

someone, I must only admit that he recognizes it as such. On a strictly philosophical level, to be a real relativist, I must be able to accept an absolutist conception, as paradoxical as it may seem.

From this we can see that it is primarily consent that we are seeking through truth. The absolutist requires the consent of both the relativists and of the proponents of another relative truth; he wishes to see them renounce their own principles. The relativists claim the support of all for the relativity of ideas, whereas they concede to them that they can individually believe in whatever they please. The main difference between the two positions is that relativists accept the gap between formulation and assent, but not the absolutists. But, are not these two conceptions composing again the two faces of the double perspective? The one who refuses the gap, is the political, which wants to force a decision, the other is the philosopher who wishes that we became aware of the lag between a thought and the assent that is granted to it. The philosopher installs a distance between his judgment and the object of his thought, he duplicates himself, whereas the political seems to us to be a whole; in this case, he seems to be molded in his own mind.

The use we are making here of the 'political' and of the 'philosopher' is of course of archetypal nature; we do not talk about specific practices, which would tend to suspect the political of rigidity and the philosopher of sophistry. In the same way we could approach this opposition by talking about the polarity between 'judgment' and 'problematic'. Because judgment and problematic are not reducible one to the other, even if they are often associated. To problematize is to simultaneously take a perspective and its opposite, so as to test a concept, to work on a hypothesis, to build and elaborate it. To judge means to decide, to choose, to take side.

To think this opposition, let's reflect on the concept of law. To be established, a city needs laws, and these laws, as much as possible, should not be subjected to interpretation. They must involve each individual, in a relatively precise and unquestionable manner, even if the human mind is built in such a way that it will always contest. The political thus needs a clear and precise involvement of the citizen, without which the city would be uninhabitable. There can be no ambiguity regarding the law, or at least such ambiguity should be fought against. And since no one is supposed to ignore the law, it is assumed at the outset that everyone recognizes the same 'truth'. Even if within a certain legal conception, one would object that the law is grounded in nothing, that it is only a protocol between many parties, a kind of voluntary agreement. But for those, there is no truth of content; there are only principles that operate within the limitation of whatever is asked from them and within general agreement. However, they need a somewhat indisputable reading of the agreement. Therefore, they cannot really escape the truth of content.

However, there is some truth in the assertions of these opponents of truth. The distance they require regarding the value of any formulation seems entirely appropriate. It is with them in mind that one can say that any proposal has its share of truth. For, in fact, what are they criticizing? Or, rather, what do they fear? What is scary in truth is that a singular could be the bearer and guarantor of the universal, in an exclusive manner. This excessive singularization scares us because it represents a heavy responsibility for oneself, it scares us because it is a threat for others. The risk of overflow of such a vision would be the formulation of an official and indisputable truth, by a person or by a group of people, a truth, which from then on would impose itself as a kind of absolute and eternal diktat, with all the arbitrariness, and the absurdity it implies. But, for this, we must emphasize it, the truth in question would have to be

potentially formulated. Now, to assume the possibility of a truth in itself does not mean at all that such a truth can be formulated. That some pretend to be able to formulate or to hold such a truth is an altogether different problem. It is true that, often, those who talk about truth believe they ‘possess’ it, but it is also true that those who pretend that truth does not exist also believe that they hold it, which is even more absurd since it is said not to exist.

Whatever is the form of expression, under the sparsest words are still nested some avatars of the notion of truth. By proclaiming that truth is nothing and that only consensus exists, I put my trust in myself first of all, because I identify and articulate what guarantees truth. It is only later on that I refer to the *vox populi*, which will establish what is appropriate and what is not through majority.

Idea and Thought

However, a kind of suspicion continuously weight on the notion of truth. A peculiar prejudice for an era that pretends to be a symbol of tolerance. The word scares, its evocation startled, as if this term was raising from its tomb some horrible ghost from the past. Because the term is easy to use, everyone has the impression to know it, to know what it refers to. Why then such an embarrassment? Let’s defend, for a moment, the truth of content. As strange as it may seem, truth as a transcendental reality better ensures the valorization of individual thought, because it does not crush it. Just as it helps to defend singular thought against a dictatorship: the one of the majority. For what status would have the mere individual thought, if it signified nothing before recognition by the majority? Conventional truth is more threatening. What represents an idea, if before being recognized as valuable by the majority, it did not acquire any universal status?

Yet, an idea is not made more adequate, nor truer, by the fact it is recognized. At best, by this recognition, it will

increase its efficiency, and even then, it is not automatic. But what motivates a creative individual to worry about converting his peers to a new idea, if the latter was nothing before being approved by the community? One could answer that he wants this approval for his idea to reach the desired status, but then the only ground for his will would be the desire that what belongs to him, for sole criteria, becomes existent. There would not be much detachment in such an attitude; an egotistical self would be at the heart of this enterprise. Need would be to convince others, everything would henceforth be a question of rhetoric and communication. Our identity would permanently be challenged by collective assent. And we would cherish any thought simply because it would be ours. The argument of possession: what a wonderful apology of mercantile society!

On the other side, if a truth comes to me as a truth, I can understand it with all the necessary distance, with all the respect due to what does not belong us, with the precautions taken towards what is only lent to us. Furthermore, I am aware of the fact that the truth that I am discovering, I express it rather badly; the words that I use clumsily reflect the difficulty encountered to adequately translate something of which I only have a faint idea. This feeling of difficulty, or even of helplessness, makes me extremely sober towards the speech of my neighbor. On the one hand, I understand the difficulties; on the other, I try to grasp each of these difficulties for what they are, for what they offer. The spirit blows as it wants, when it wants, where it wants. Every word pronounced in front of me is a challenge that I must solve from the inside, without judging it too fast, without being carried away by the easy trick of immediately reducing it to the meaning that it would have if it were uttered by me. Truth thus becomes a perpetual requirement: to dig a rich mine of which I can hardly know the bottom. A

mine that does not belong to me, which actually belongs to no one, of which I would ever barely scratch the surface.

How to get out of an opposition between the psychorrigidity of an established truth, already made, and the soft magma which certifies that truth is a hollow concept used by everyone to gain legitimacy. Is the only choice found between the arbitrariness of the predefined orthodoxy and the arbitrariness of the opinion? For a moment, let's suggest the principle not that every thought is true, but that every idea is true. What could we deduce from it? We are here opposing an idea to a thought, in the sense that an idea would be of an intuitive order linked to a simple concept whereas a thought is the articulation of this idea within a broader intellectual scheme. The difficulty would not be to determine the truth or fallacy of an idea, but to know how to deal with this idea and to give it its rightful place. The idea, like the concept, would be neither true nor false, but its articulation within a thought could be judged as true or false. An idea would only be a tool, more or less well used. It is the judgment that would be subjected to being true or false – the use of the idea, its incorporation – it alone can make mistakes.

Thus we find the problem of the double perspective again, within the necessity of a coexistence of antinomian principles. On the one hand, an absence of true and false, on the other hand, the assertion of the true and false. Because a problem arises: where does the idea stop and where does thought begin? What is the extension of the idea, what does a judgment on the idea suggest? Does a frank discontinuity exist? Judgment will permanently bumps onto this stumbling block since, in truth, in daily operations, there is no idea without thought, nor thought without ideas: it would be rather impossible. To what extent the totality of a thought is only one idea, including in its surprising articulations?

Since we doubt – or we should doubt – of our capacity to immediately determine the intrinsic value of what is expressed, both by ourselves and by someone else, there is a commendable practice. Just as in social relations: to trust *a priori* till proven otherwise. To take any idea at front value, to receive without any second thought a proposed perspective, to accept it immediately, to see how it can ‘stick’, and to make it ‘stick’ as long as possible, until dissonance or impossibility become obvious. To leave a hypothesis do its job inside of us, to dig it from within, just as it works on us from the inside, to be mutually challenged without abandoning confrontation too quickly. Two interlocutors must rub against one another to the maximum in order to get the maximum out of the discussion.

Moreover, is there another way to read than to absolutely trust the author we read? To take his thought as an idea and to look at how it works. To read, it is first of all to abandon oneself to a foreign mind, not to tense up within an approach that is foreign and strange to us, it is wanting to alienate oneself through a mysterious or unsettling vision. At the risk of being lost, because we must desire to lose ourselves. Thus, the other becomes the mere mean of my own ‘mise en abyme’, he forces me to become transparent, to have my soul pierced through by a weird discourse, or even by an unknown idiom. Only to the extent I would let my spiritual and carnal intimacy be invaded, would I benefit from the discourse of a book, from the breath of an author, from the existence of a human being. What is the difficulty? Not to get hung up on words, on discourse, on concepts, on all these articulations, disturbing and pummeling us. To take them for what they are, for what they say, not more, not less, and not to expect from them what they do not say, or to have them say what they do not say. To let the spirit that stands above or below the words come to us. And for this, to suspend one’s judgment, as the tradition invites us to do.

The idea of surrendering to a reading, to give up – at least momentarily – to a foreign vision, considered to be alienating, is naturally repugnant to many of us. The mere fact of listening to the discourse of the other till the end is often very painful to our mind; we want to interrupt it, and not just because it is long. Because we are generally animated by strong beliefs, necessary for the affirmation of our being. But a fear agitates the convinced being that we are all, to a degree more or less deep, more or less conscious. Does the foreign perspective not threaten our integrity? Would it not annihilate our little personal struggle? Would it not jeopardize our existence, undermining what this existence knows to be the most fundamental? And would not the ability to change perspective be in fact a defect? Would it not induce weakness in the soul, a moral indifference and a fading of the being?

It is true that conventionally, to one taking a clear-cut position is opposed a kind of no man's land of judgment called indifference. And it is out of the question to negate indifference and its dangers. Even if too often, an indifferent attitude is an appearance that serves to hide the choices we do not admit, shameful choices perhaps, choices of which the 'happy' owner is not necessarily aware. No one is radically indifferent. Neutrality does not exist, neither in the human mind nor in life or matter. At best, indifference is an acquired quality, personally or culturally, but it always remains relative: indifference towards such and such things is created, justified or explained in reality by the attachment to another. Indifference as a supreme virtue that denies any desire or passion uses as leverage the attachment to a kind of quality or way of being which by itself transcends all other form of desire.

Pain and Consolation

The impression of suffering related to the evocation of an elusive truth can be painful. However, instead of regretting this eternal and unavoidable dependence of our existence to some unattainable satisfaction, a situation considered as a handicap or a ball and chain, why not see it as a simple and essential opportunity to exercise being. The word exercise is used here in the noble sense of the exercise of a profession or an art. Any art or any profession has its limitations, without which there would no longer be any art or profession. The painter can think about his colors, his canvas and his brushes as limitations for his practice. The architect can sometime conceive rigidity and the weight of his materials as factors preventing him from realizing his wishes. But in the same way, without these limits and this materiality, they both would neither be a painter nor an architect: they could not perform their art. This quality would be an embryonic nature buried deep down in their soul, a human quality to which, thanks to its own qualities, materiality will have contributed to the manifestation and the development. Limitation is a condition of art, a condition of the exercise.

It goes in the same way for our existence, which knows its own multiple heaviness and rigidity, its limitations and shortcomings, which we still have to realize and work on. A materiality of being, with its own resistance, which is not only the mechanical one, with its own logic or expression, which is not only that of space, with its own temporality, which is not only that of chemical or biochemical transformations. This specific materiality is the one that braids the skein of every being. A question arises: how can we love those ontological limitations, which, like the limitations of our flesh, make us suffer, when they do not kill us? How easy it is to lament on finitude, how natural! How easy it is to hate finitude, how legitimate! Is it not the lot of consciousness, the one of the human being who constantly confronts the brutality of the finite, of

imperfection and of lack? What to answer? But, on the other hand, if the mind conceives the finite, is it not because it can also conceive the infinite? If the human knows art, as we said, it is because he knows finiteness. Art makes him cry and suffer by throwing it back to the face of his own finiteness, but make no mistake: to be visible and graspable, this finiteness must necessarily be represented on the virgin canvas of the infinite. The determination of the location must be inscribed within the vastness of space. And this infinite that he perceives more or less well through matter, through the material thickness, through the spiritual thickness, will accompany his existence as a small red lantern shining, according to its limited means, on his dreary existence.

Is the issue here one of consolation? Is it about reward? About compensation? About diversion? You suffer indeed, comrade, but in life you earn a little extra that will help you somewhat forget, a subtle alcohol that will brighten your dull existence, a distraction that will make you forget your setbacks, or even a powerful narcotic that will alleviate your pain. What unbearable consequences bears such a perspective! But can we love the other with such an outlook on things? Can we still even love ourselves? Can we still love at all, burdened by the weight of the chains, fastened at the rear of the dungeon? Will the tiny ray of light filtering miraculously through the skylight be enough to convince us to forgive the world for our arbitrary and cruel detention? Unless we still believe that the one who brings us this fragile glow has nothing to do with the sadistic jailers who conceived this horrible dungeon. Thanks to one, while I devote the other to eternal damnation. Only one idea still obsesses me, to flee this unhealthy place forever, to exclusively feed myself on the joyful clarity, to live in it and only there, and at the very least, if I can imagine such a

hypothesis, find and embrace the mysterious light-giver forever.

A big mistake, at least if it is maintained over time. The position that might be appropriate and useful, or even just, within the limits of a determined and precise extension, becomes an unforgivable and dangerous flaw if it is extended indefinitely or is extrapolated with excess. For the light ray illuminates only when it is in contact with what is not so. How could it illuminate itself? What would there be to see that is not already seen? What would be the gift without a receiver? Where would fulfillment be without the principle of delay which values action? Without shrinking and without loss, nothing is anything; the world is nothing but a spiral of dust, constituted of loss and impurity. Story is weaved on the elusive frame of eternity, this virginal originality that accepts time be snatched from it. A dark mist, which generously provides to the translucent and diaphanous ether the meaning, and existence of which it would be absolutely deprived. Because light is not light, since light does not exist. Only exist the temporary and nuanced withdrawal of an opacity, an opacity that here and there abandons and renounces itself, which humbly forgets to assert, if not to impose, the ostentatious shadow of its own presence.

The night is the very locus of fertilization. Everything comes out of it. Everything that is, ephemeral, sees the day at some point, and loses it at another. Nothing belongs to the day, everything comes to it, and all comes out of the night. For the night is the mother of all distinction. The night bears the possible and the undetermined, it carries the light. Thus goes it for truth, it also loses its substance and vitality when an unfortunate and miserable speech dresses it with the garbs of contempt. What is truth, if not a fold back of the world onto itself? If not an attempt of being to regain a hold of itself, a de-doubling of matter, a budding of life from which this life is seen and embraced? A truth is not a

truth without being articulated in filth and mud. A truth is never spread out impudently; it is never engraved in golden letters on the azure sky. Although it knows itself in the fold and the contradiction of its pure light. But in the end, the opposite is also true.

Ephemeral and Permanent

Thus, truth cannot be said, it can only be touched upon. To the great sadness of all the gross minds, accustomed to the hammer and anvil of ratiocination or obviousness. Struck by its aerial fluidity, irritated by its elusive nature, they frequently prefer to hang from trees like monkeys, or to walk on their heads and hands, and conclude that truth does not exist. Conceit does not frighten them. They classify without any qualms, they shamelessly decree, and they think themselves happy to have had it in their own way. "Let's be pragmatic, they sometimes say, why bother with such hollow and impractical notions? We have so little time to live, let us handle it properly and enjoy it. What need do we have for some weirdo to come out one day like a puppet, screaming that finally he has found 'it'? Let us be responsible, thought is a collective act, without consensus it is nothing." For them, what is not said is not said, what is not thought is not thought, and what is not there is not there. The night is made to sleep and dream, the day to stay awake and calculate. Without a minimum of organization, we don't know anymore where we stand.

For the reader, these words might appear to hold as sole virtue that of being metaphorical. But does the little difference of perspective implied here not imply profound changes in human acts? For example, what is money? Is it the possession of a given power to acquire whatever we need for our daily consumption? From this point of view, the more we spend, the more it goes, the less it remains, the less we have of it. Or is it the possibility to generate the wealth that one has not? In which case, the more it escapes,

the more we will get back, that is to say, paradoxically, the less we have, the more we have.

Is it not on this possible status, and its opposition to the immediate, that is articulated every in-depth economic discussion? Is wealth what we actually possess or what we can possibly have? To answer that it is both does not solve the problem; the essential difficulty remains: to determine the nature of the relation in those two terms, and understand the dynamic that links them.

Because any dynamic revolves around an anchor, a kind of lever presupposed stable, on which change and transformations will find support. For, there is no movement without some constancy, as tenuous or impalpable as it may be. There is no transformation without some kind of sustainability. Without a form or another of invariance, there would be no transformation, but a multitude of entities radically distinct, the ones appearing and the other disappearing. When I notice someone and state that he has changed, it is because I recognize in him some characteristics that are maintained, otherwise I would not recognize him at all and in fact I could not even say that he has changed.

And what if to accept the notion of truth was simply involving the act of recognition of a continuity, a permanence, a unity, as imperceptible and microscopic as the entity or the quality in question might be, to the point where the notions of entity or of quality might even themselves almost represent a usurpation of the term. Now, not only do we accept this hypothesis, but we will stick to it, only by default, because any other hypothesis would be unthinkable: it would prevent one from thinking. If to think involves apprehending the validity of the term, the link woven by an object, thinking implies to grasp the universality of a concept, it is still necessary for this concept to be universal. But what makes a concept universal?

Unlike the singular that we might meet only once, the universal is found on multiple occasions: every time that a singular contains characteristics he shares with other singulars. Thus, the characteristic of the universal is its repetitiveness or community: “Men eat apples.” What pertains only to the ‘event’ is of the singular order: “This man eats an apple.” However, strictly speaking, as all singulars, this singular is a fake singular, since it is expressed through concepts, through universals: man, eat and apple. A true singular would be: “X, Y, Z.” But this is unthinkable: we do not see why one should distinguish X from Y from Z. It is not that “X, Y, Z” are necessarily false, but we cannot know it.

Language Games

Let us explain ourselves. Suppose I meet an explorer returning from an exotic country. He tells me that over there “the sagne graupes the mariots”. The sagne is a strange animal of which he saw only one specimen. The verb to graupe designates the astonishing act of making an object roll jerkily with one’s tail. The mariots are strange fruits looking like nothing we know, something between a banana and a grapefruit. The sentence would not make any sense if I did not recognize any other use of these words, if I could not universalize them, if I do not create a continuity between this sentence and others. Because the meaning is first of all a relation, a link, a direction. However, if I only ignore what is a sagne, I will know that it graupes mariots. If I only ignore what is a mariot, I will know that it is what a sagne graupes. If I ignore what to graupe signifies, I will know that it is a relation existing between the sagne and the mariots. However, various mistakes are possible. It is possible that other animals graupe the mariots, in which case I will confuse the sagne with the skewbald mole. It is possible that the sagne graupes other fruits, in which case I will confuse the mariots with the banana-apple. It is

possible that the sagne also marbes the mariots, in which case I will confuse marbing with grauping.

When the explorer tells me his story, in its anecdotic aspect it remains of the narrative order. I accept what he tells me, I can't verify it. I try to understand his words, especially if he speaks about things I completely ignore; I try to recognize what he says, I accept to be disoriented in order to find myself in his unknown territory. From this, I slowly develop a mental map, using what I already know. Two kinds of reading are here possible. Either the narrative attitude: I let myself be lulled by the exotic and the fantasy, I listen to the words, listening to what they say like events that fascinate me by their strangeness. Or the scientific attitude: I analyze and test everything that he tells me regarding the internal logic of the story and what I already know. Either I am a confidant or a naive listener, either I am a critical or skeptical one. Either I am carried by novelty as it emerges, or I am attached to the anchoring of the 'already there'.

Let's see now how this affects the problem of truth. Each thing – or phenomenon – is absolutely singular. Each thing – or phenomenon – is articulated in relation to what it is not. These two proposals will always be true, simultaneously and absolutely. Even the shadow or the knowledge of a thing are not that thing. Even the most original of existences is somewhat the projection of something else. Nothing is that is not simultaneously in singularity and continuity. It is true to say that Paul is a man, but it is also false to say that Paul is 'a man'. For, Paul is "that man here", and to describe him as a man is both a terribly flattening and reductive statement. Who manages to take himself as a generality? Is your house really a house? Is there not in singularity a specific truth going beyond any generality?

The poet makes us grasp the specificity of his perceptions of things, of feelings and of beings. The painter shares his vision. The musician does not even have an object to share.

Is there hence no more possibility of truth in art? No more challenging? Yet, when some artwork touches me, there is some recognition: it awakens in me something that was already there. And the artwork will touch me to the extent it will awaken this something already present. Could I not then state that the artwork is true to the extent it recalls something in me, to the extent it calls upon coherence? I will thus state that the wider and deeper this thing will be, the more this work will be true, because it is how this work will manifest its universality. In its capacity to upset me, to reach the most fundamental unity of my being, the unity of all being, the speech or gesture, whatever its form or nature, will have manifested its degree of truth. It will be its probation.

But what upsets one might not upset another, the critic might rightfully object. Where is the universality of the act then? Well, is it not rigorously the same for the truth of speech and of syntactic propositions? There also individual coherence is called upon, which might resound through one and not through the other. Else there would not be such a diversity of thoughts. There also one can ask where is the universality to be found. Let's attempt an answer to this objection. On the one hand, universality, conventional, would be found in the fact that a community of spirits tacitly agrees on the same formulation. But, to this, one can object that an entire group can certainly be mistaken; this has commonly been seen before. Such a realization partakes of utmost banality, to say the opposite would be surprising. On the other hand, universality is based on the simple fact for the individual mind to think the universal. Obviously, it is not less fallible than the group. It is even more, in a certain way, because no one puts it to the proof; it is even less, in another way, because it is autonomous and does not feel obliged to compromise with anyone else. Thus, it is neither the group, nor the individual that guarantees universality. What is it then?

Put to the Test

After our good habit of practicing the double perspective, let's ask ourselves out of mere reflex if it is not in this in-between, between the singular and the collective, where universality is to be found. Something in the gap between the same and the other. Because it is true that, *a priori*, an idea mainly comes out of an individual mind. Although we cannot deny that there exists a phenomenon resembling collective mind, which we encounter within an epoch, an ambient culture or a trend. The proximity and intimacy of beings manage to generate relatively common processes of thought – a kind of thought of the many – or a structural condition of thought, but despite this simultaneousness, it is clear that it is the individual that formulates an idea in the end. There is always something that will differentiate a singular thought from another. We can add that this singularity is also the singularity of the moment. Including in the same individual, the same idea will hardly ever come back in identical manner. Unless it rigidifies itself in forms articulated through a mechanized or repetitive thought, what we call, amongst other things, obsession or senility.

The more specific role of the community in the mind seems to be both a foundational role and a critical one. Alterity permanently puts to the proof the individual. It questions him, challenges, contradicts and obliges him to think and rethink. At the same time, it provides him with readymade elements of thought. The individual does not have to reinvent a language and a culture. He benefits from the work already done. Then, it is him that plays a critical role: he has to question alterity in order to test the coherence of the “ready-made” society pretends to provide him with. All of this would be a great banality to formulate if it was not that our consciousness often forgets the consequences of such a perspective: the delocalization of the act of thinking.

Take a sculptor. Certainly, he has in mind the idea of the artwork he would like to produce. Or maybe he does not have it before he touches the clay. But whatever the case, does the contact between his hands and the matter he wishes to work upon not participate to the process of the mind? Is this possibility of contact to which simultaneously participate the hands and the nature of the clay not constitutive of the thought of the sculptor? We could consider this problem in a totally reductionist manner, either by saying that his hands will do whatever they can with the clay in relation with the initial idea, or by saying that the clay will allow whatever it can or want to of the expected result, or again by saying that the final result will only be a pale approximation of the intention of the artist. In other words, the sculptor thinks with his hands and with the clay, through his hands and through the clay. It is in fact what makes him a genuine sculptor, a sculptor in act, in relation to a mere potential sculptor. A sculptor that ignores the clay is not a sculptor; in the strict sense of the term he is nothing. And to know clay, in spite of the 'pure spirits', signifies that the clay participates to the thought of a sculptor. Knowledge is not a mere bag where we store things. It rather looks like a body, which, by absorbing and feeding upon foreign elements, makes them participate in its being. These elements thus come to modify this being; they alter to various degrees its very nature. Thus we are what we eat, just as we are what we know, as we are the place where we live.

Such a vision of things could bother those considering the inner sanctum of their being as a mysterious place, sacred and unreachable, an all-mighty seat of the singular which no external reality will ever modify. Without fully admitting it, many are thinking in this way. Therefrom comes resistance to thinking altogether. One thinks in his corner, calculates, plots, takes from the world what suits him and rejects what annoys or displeases him. Without seeing that the seat of

our being is also found at the periphery. The skin is not a simple protection against aggressions from the whole universe, it is the living link, the umbilical cord that connects us to the matrix where we evolve in the course of our entire existence. The senses are not passive receptors of the external world providing information subsequently treated by a cortex considered as a central and all-powerful unit. Just as the skin, the senses constitute our thought. They are its seat, to the same degree as the brain. In fact, is the brain not, on the embryological level, a complex fold of the skin?

The skin is thus the interior of the being, since it is its seat, same as the various other sense organs. The foundations of the house are not external to its entity as a house, to the extent all construction rests on what is ultimately a limit. And this limit, the interface between the earth and the architecture, is not external to the house, it is its very cornerstone. Are not the walls themselves the locus of the house per excellence? Yet, we do not live in the walls or the roof. Let's take another example, a more dynamic one: that of a leaf of a tree. Where is the reality of the leaf if not on its surface? Its surface, by its capacity to capture light rays, is the very essence of the leaf. This is where the leaf's reality is accomplished, where the neuralgic center of the leaf, in a certain way, is to be found. And, to stay within the vegetative analogy, take a seed which, unlike the leaf, seeks to minimize its relationship with the outside world: it is round, the geometric shape covering the smallest area, because this is how it can protect itself from the environment, until the appropriate time. It will deploy only when the conditions of heat and humidity are adequate for the survival of the future plant. It will then open up to the world, which will constitute its being, or will at least partake of it.

Cohabitation and Infighting

Within this double form of the leaf and the grain, we discover the double perspective of our being, that of our mind. Some individuals are rather like leaves; light, they fly with the wind, they absorb whatever touches them, the outside largely determines them. Others are more like seeds; heavy, they are closed on themselves, they only utilize what already exists within their own being, they work in isolation. These two images are only archetypes, for no one can live only as a leaf or a seed. The leaf possesses its inner functioning, while the seed cannot radically ignore the world. In reality, every being functions through this double seat, this double perspective, of interiority and exteriority. Every being operates around – or in the middle – of a bipolar axis, of which each limit is itself a center. Ungraspable limits, vanishing points, which infinitely fade out but yet constitute the only anchors. And it is between these two infinities, in this gap that is the living matter of things, where is located the seat of each being. It is this gap that holds the only legitimacy to declare the pronoun “I”. It is from this gap that I can simultaneously consider the affirmation and negation of my being, it is only from this gap that a true freedom can be exercised. For, neither the seed nor the leaf in itself is free. The first one is asphyxiated by excess of itself, the other by excess of the world.

Now, what about universality and truth? Their nature can only be double, internal and external, relative to oneself and relative to the world, subjective and objective, intrinsic or extrinsic. This impossible cohabitation must be taken care of, despite the real difficulties it entails. We should not reject truth on the ground of subjectivity, nor wield truth based on objectivity. In the first case we find the artist, archetype of intimacy of beliefs and feelings, one which creates his own world, whereas in the second case we find the scientist, archetype of effective practice, of knowledge of the world. Old dualism dividing every singular being. And, on the battlefield of this fracture, everyone is ready to

take side and to slay the enemy, attempting to suppress by the same blow the vital alterity within him.

The scientist is testing the coherence of the world, as much as he can formulate it to himself. Even if by professional deformation, he often forgets the second part of this sentence. As long as it works, it must be true. It is so easy to believe that the act of pedaling is enough to move the bicycle forward, instead of attesting the complex principles of physics of which we sometimes do not even suspect the existence, or that we forget. These principles interest us only in their manifestation, a manifestation of which we totally ignore the status of manifestation. We take them for self-evident certitudes. The mechanic who knows how to fix the car probably ignores most of the physical principles that would account for the operations he is dealing with. As for the physicist who is able to explain them to us today, if he survives long enough, the poor will certainly witness a substantial calling into question of the methods he uses.

Thus the principle of experimental science is fundamentally based on the fact that a principle is true if it is still operating, within the limits of a well-defined frame. From this point of view, science is verified by its efficiency, what we might call its technical aspect. The scientist confining himself to this efficiency could thus be considered as a technician. However, if he chooses to universalize his problematic by putting the local principal to the test of more general principles, he acquires his status as a scientist. Why should one distinguish these two practices, to the extent of assigning them different names? Is it a mere issue of knowledge quantity, of years of study? Or is there not any shift that deserves a particular attention?

Indeed, a given scientist could be acquainted many research areas, while conceiving them in a restricted and non-integrated manner. Is it the quantity that will change the situation? Or is it not rather the fact of rubbing these

domains one against the other? Take the case of ethics, which is one of the most striking case of how science can be confronted with itself, or not at all, through the subject responsible for this very science: the human being. Beyond the purely human aspect of the question, there must be other important epistemological implications. To take into account the subject cannot be boiled down to the mere fact of adding a supplement of soul to a science whose domain of reflection would be restricted to purely material and quantitative questions. Some hand-to-hand confrontation must be set up and performed.

Truth and Circumstances

Thinking about the subject is a reversal, in the sense that the process of knowledge moves upstream with respect to itself. It no longer takes itself for granted but conceives of itself as a postulated starting hypothesis, a hypothesis without which nothing could be thought of anymore. If the subject is a hypothesis, if he is no longer thought of as an evidence of which there is no need to talk about, its basic ideas, the premises through which it operates, are even more of a hypothetical order. Thus, the thinking subject lays down in front of him, at every moment, the foundations of his own thought, ready to review them, to rethink them, to reformulate them. He stands ever ready to think the unthinkable, out necessity, out of playfulness, for basic mental hygiene, for the sake of exercising a real freedom of choice and of reflection.

Truth, in his eyes, is no longer just a certain number of axioms limited in scope that he has to apply well, from which one must constantly tinker. It now embodies a requirement. That of an integrity which has nothing to lose but itself; that which is ready to risk itself in order to better assume itself. To risk oneself, that is to say to accept to strip away our image in order to better examine it, to test its legitimacy. Because often, the unspoken aspect of a

thought, by dint of not being shaken or oxygenated anymore, hardens like old filth, and becomes a straightjacket for the mind.

Strangely, if truth is no longer a series of formulations but a requirement, we observe some switch: it no longer wears the exclusive appearance of objectivity, but also the one of subjectivity. Does it then lose its universality? Such a conclusion would have strange consequences. The discourse that I could hold on such and such a subject could have access to the status of universality, but not the perspective from which I stand to formulate it; the origin out of which these thoughts came about would have no possible way to pretend to this so-called universality. Is there not within this singular human creativity some qualities superior to the created object? Thus a sculpture would have a status superior to the sculptor who made it? Indeed, as we expressed already, there is no real sculptor without a sculpture, it would be an aberration of thought. But there is here a precision to be made. It is not because there is no sculpture, but most of all because the man who never sculpted did not incorporate in himself the nature of the clay and the capacity of his hands to act upon this clay. In other words, he is not a sculptor for the good reason that he never sculpted and has thus not been tested, not because he did not prove his state in the eyes of others by means of his sculptures.

“You are quibbling! If the sculptor has been tested through clay, there must necessarily exist some sculptures to attest it... Where is the difference? You are making this process very complicated for no reason.” Indeed, the maneuver is a little more complicated, or rather refined, but it is for the sake of truth: that of not reducing the principles to the evidence of their effectiveness. This is the danger of a pragmatism reducing thought to the immediate of its efficiency. In these cases, we do not see what would be the use of culture, if not to provide a light varnish well suited

for mundane gatherings. The danger to grant primacy to the result, to the detriment of the generative process, to the detriment of the possibility, to the detriment of the unexpected and of novelty. The world thus becomes an imposing totality, horizon of all ambitions, of all obsessions, where the singular vanishes.

“What is a sculptor without sculpture?”, will be rightly objected. Narcissism of a subject satisfied with himself, conceited individuals fed to satiation by the vanity of their own intentions. It is so easy to present oneself as a sacred entity, queen, king or half-god, as if the mere fact of existing, of thinking or babbling, gave us the right to all kinds of illusions, excesses and pretenses. The child believes the world belongs to him, he is entitled to it; it is arduous to loose the habit of such a feeling of security. So many pitfalls lurk around the poor truth!

Undoubtedly, what is true at one point will not necessarily be so at another time. Not only for external reasons, but because of the nature of the subject. The same words can be uttered by the same individual on different occasions and, without any change concerning the object of discourse, they could be true in one case and false in another. For example, I am asked if Paul is at home while he is there. I answer no, because I believe that he is absent. Then, learning about his presence, for various reasons, I still answer negatively. Paul has always been there, I always negated his presence, but for two different reasons: the first time out of ignorance, the second out of desire to save the face, to lie or something else. Is the epistemological status of my mistake identical in both cases? Does the distinction between error and lying change anything to the content of the statement? In a way, it does: the genesis, the matrix, the foundation, makes a difference.

If I subscribe to a notion of reality that is purely objective, both cases amount to the same. My speech does not

correspond to external reality, and that is sufficient to disqualify it. However, how do I know that Paul is not at home? Either because I saw him elsewhere, or because I was told, or because 'knowing' that he must have been somewhere else I concluded that he could not have been home. The first case is an empirical verification, where I must trust my senses. The second is an argument of authority, where I must trust the judgment of a third person. The third is a speculation based on an analysis of coherence, where I must trust my own judgment, premise and conclusion. It is clear that these different cases do not amount to the same. The information in itself does not change anything, but it is not the same for my own thought.

Truth and Responsibility

Let's try to address the problem of truth from another angle: that of responsibility. This is to address truth not as a formulation, but as a tension. Let's start with the following principle: "I am responsible of the entire universe in the same way and in the same proportion that I am responsible for myself." In order to better understand, one could also propose: "I am responsible for myself in the same way and in the same proportion that I am responsible for the entire universe." That is to say that the extension of this responsibility is in principle infinite, although at the same time it is, in fact, restricted and arbitrarily finite. To be responsible is to answer for one's actions, to answer for one's speech, for one's thoughts, in the sense that coherence answers, since it must echo itself. This responsibility is infinite because the entire universe is offered to oneself, just as I am offered to myself. I cannot do with the universe what I want more than I can do with myself whatever I want. I can conclude from this that neither one nor the other are either reserved to me or completely abandoned to me. They are merely offered to me, as they are offered to every one of us. They are offered to me, just as a book would be. I cannot do whatever I want with it, since it is already

written; the sections constituting it are not blank pages. It is simply up to me to read it, to outline the passages around which my reading is articulated, since by definition a reading is never neutral. Neutrality is absent. Thus, before being read, the book is there, closed on itself: it is an indivisible whole, an inscrutable and secret magma. Is it really a book? It could be a gratuitous hypothesis on my part. Optical illusion, an original packaging. It might be a pretty candy box, or a piece of these cardboard shelving used to fill and decorate bookshelves.

A book is not a book till it is being read. Give it to your dog, you will see if this book is really a book. Indeed, this object has its own specificity: it has some weight, a chemical composition, a precise number of pages; specific physical processes constitute it, but it is a book only if it is read. "However, it is already a book because it can be read", will we be answered. Obviously. But does its status of potential book make it a book. The idea of a book I have in mind is also a possible book, but so far it is not a book. A book is a book in this mysterious and banal intersection between an author's intent put on paper and the look of a reader who accepts it as such. Otherwise, it is something else: an intention of a book maybe, not realized yet, or some object undergoing the vagaries of commerce.

Thus the poor reader is suddenly charged with a heavy responsibility: he is the one who at the same time makes both the book and the writer be or not be, since without a book the writer is also not a writer. And the painter, or the musician, is he really a painter or a musician without the acquiescence of his neighbors? Thus, is the world the world without the look of the one who takes it as the world, without the words of the one who declares it to be the world? One will answer here that the world did not wait for me to be here, to be what it is. But it is not certain that its nature would then been that of a 'world', or at least, even by accepting the word 'world', the meaning attributed to that

term would widely vary. Is the world the dark chaos out of which bursts an infinite multiplicity, or is it the harmonious setting of laws which configures being, or else this non-place where swarms an infinity of entities devoid of any relations amongst themselves? These few positions, amongst many others, remain defensible, and they will all have been defended. However, in one case or another, is it still the same world, can we use the same word?

Each glance makes the world exist. A tragic and heavy task befalls us, which should oppress us, since every answer we grant to that formless being calling us, from near and far, let emerge the immensity of a dazzling moment, or the banality of a silent eternity. Then, to the answer of words, thoughts and acts, other words respond, other thoughts and other acts. Responsibility. An engaging coherency, which makes us answer ourselves, and by answering ourselves guarantees some thickness to a world which, without this coherence, would have the delicacy of a brief and tenuous breath.

Where is the truth or the lie to be found here? In the fact of having answered. But to what have I answered? On one hand by answering the call of the world. On the other hand, in the fact of answering to myself. Two moments of an instant which is the same, two moments that are distinguished in spite of their essential coincidence. A moment to listen to the being that resonates there, outside, a moment to listen the being which resonates there, inside, as far as it can be distinguished. Moreover, by dint of answering, because of this back and forth, the calls become virtually indistinguishable from each other. My 'me' is dissolved in this echo chamber, of which the flux gradually amplifies, and scares me to the extent I become aware of it. A temptation arises: to resist. Fright. For it is only in the resistance, in the clenching, in the fact of not answering anymore, in the attempt to render opaque this unlivable transparency, that I would find myself existing as a separate subject. A desperate attempt to gain dignity, or an illusion

of dignity. This opacity that makes me visible to myself, opacity that makes me be, opacity that simultaneously makes me shortsighted, if not blind. A necessary opacity, which nevertheless can only feed on transparency. In other words, through the answer, by assuming my very nature as an answer, I become responsible. I come to be without cheating, without abusing my right to speak, a speech so efficient in erasing any reality that comes to me. Illusion of a speech that first of all serves to hide oneself, to escape, to reach an advance state of intoxication.

There are two ways to say the truth. By speaking or by remaining silent. By answering or by not answering. They both bear witness to truth. But ‘to say’ takes on a new meaning here. In one case, within a classical acceptance, it is about stating something. In the other case, it is about provoking a vacuum: to leave an empty seat, so the stranger invites himself, risk himself, and settle down therein.

“But if I do not answer, if I do not say anything, it is no more about truth, since I no longer exist!” By nature, an answer is deprived of any autonomy, alienated from any own being: It is dependent, conditioned, and always reactive. What about not answering? As a decal paper I am loyal and I properly fulfill my function only to the extent where I retain no parcel of light! Does this transparency not signify the pure and simple annihilation of being? One can claim here that there will be responsibility and truth only if I do not think, talk or do anything. To alienate oneself from being, this is to be.

We fear that when we cease to desire, we disappear, we cease to be. It is in fact the opposite. To desire to be is to cease to be. Yet in fact, all of this is reversible. One wonders what is the use of such statements. We have two opposite ways to consider the fact of being, in the radical sense of the term. The fact of completely disappearing, to become one with the universe. The fact of positioning

oneself and to hold on, by presenting oneself as a determined singularity. To be responsible, is then to be totally passive, to accept, or it is to be voluntaristic, to resist. When we ask the participants to follow the rules of the game, they have two ways to exist, two ways to be responsible. By obeying to the rules strictly, scrupulously responding to the instructions. Or by refusing to follow what is imposed, and scrupulously follow their own agenda. Jesus, even more than “Son of God”, called himself ‘Son of Man’, to show his absence of singularity, and his absolute singularity. Others are all the sons of someone particular.

Truths

What is truth, if not to overcome splits, to resolve tensions, to seek consolation. Be it through philosophy, art, religion or science, we are trying to compensate, to reduce or to treat, even to forget, what we perceive as the fracture of being. We are desperately searching for conformity or loyalty to our ideas, our judgments. Likeness or reconciliation with an object, thought of, perceived or imagined, the quest for a reality which permanently escapes while we would like it to settle down, to stand still: we so much wanted to be reassured. In pursuit of unity, while an eternal and multiform fracture, omnipresent and tempting, imposed to our sight, makes us anxious.

While we sometimes try without much hope, sometimes with a certain lack of enthusiasm, to bridge the gap or the abyss between truth and falsehood, while we reason and think, a kind of guilt is at work within us. Would it not rather be about hearing another sound, another call, of which the echo is much more distant? Would it not be a kind of reminiscence of a long forgotten past? Would it not rather matter to remember? To awaken something that has been long dormant? For much longer than we can even recall. Like a dream we try to recollect, to have it emerge out of the mist of slumber and forgetfulness. There is the

challenge: a truth that does not so much fight against the false than against the nothingness which absorbs it and makes it disappear. A truth that forever, always, could never emerge, could not and should not emerge.

Truth as a correspondence is a shadow, a trace, a footprint, a mere silhouette. It is only ever a provisional truth, that is to say an abandonment of the absolute, a concession to the reduction of the moment, so as to reassure our anxious and frightened mind. Certainly, it is a commitment, but also a temporary compromise that we prefer to the promise of totality, more uncertain. More radical, truth as origin comes under being. Even seeking it, is already an experience of being. This truth establishes itself as a foundation, as an unveiling, and not as adequacy, as conformity. There is no question here anymore to submit it to the criteria of reason, to put it to the test, since reason itself is suspended to this truth, this indefinable substratum of being. Indeed, they are right those who are looking for truth in the reduction: in its manifestations, in its presence, in its 'already there', in its 'already appeared', in its banality. If not that they have, little by little, or always, forgotten the ignominious truth: the truth of truth. In front of it, we find ourselves like the Baron of Munchausen: here we are, obliged to lift ourselves by pulling our own hair.

Opacity and Transparency

“How difficult it is to be heard...” So we abandon, we despair, everything freezes, nothing emerges anymore. However, not to do anything and not to think, there is opacity at its best! The world is not a static and inert mass; maybe is it so in a certain way, but it is first of all a dynamic, an acting force, without which it could not even take care of itself, without which it would depend on mysterious and foreign forces. Let's not forget our initial postulate: the world on which we work is the all-encompassing in regard to which nothing can be considered

as external. Unless we ignore it, since what we do not know at all, or anymore, becomes or remains alien to us. Thus, as a singularity, I exist to the extent the world is in me, to the extent the world goes through me, as long as I let it be. The world is born in me at every moment, since at every moment the world can be made visible or made to disappear in the opacity of the non-being and the invisible of nothingness.

Certainly there exists limited responsibility, as there exists a limited truth, provisory, although in these two notions the plural would be a much more appropriate mode. But as soon as I move away from unity, as difficult, not to say impossible, as it is to formulate, I fall in the domain of the infinite multiplicity, indefinite. Within this indescribable heap, any option on a particular number will be purely arbitrary. What will be much less, and for this reason will constitute the real testing, will be the handling of this arbitrary, or rather the capacity of this arbitrary to handle the world. Before choosing, we tell ourselves that the choice is limited, that there is a loss of possibility. But once the choice is accomplished, it is no longer a choice: it is reality, nothing more, nothing less. But this choice, in its subsequent articulation, in its consequences, will it remain transparent to itself? Will it still accept its arbitrary dimension? Will it still see the implications of its own being in everything it is not? More than the issue of right and wrong, these are the only questions worth asking.

When I pronounce myself on this or that problem, I express a truth, since I feel responsible for the vision expressed. Not that I necessarily feel a moral and reflected obligation, although this can obviously be the case, but already because something inside forces me to express a specific vision in order to be in harmony with myself; I desire to be heard on this question, just as I try to eat when my body is hungry. However, reason can analyze the nature of these needs, and see to what extent they could be modified.

Some may be surprised here by the shameless mixture of an ethical notion such as the one of responsibility, a rational concept such as truth, and a physiological need such as food. To clarify this point, let's simply precise that for us, truth or responsibility are not choices, but realities of a certain order imposing themselves on us, even if we can refuse to see or hear them. We are free to answer them as we understand and please, just as in the case of hunger, for even if it is manifested in every being as a necessity, each one will respond to it in his own way, even by flatly refusing to eat, even though he will suffer the various and painful consequences of this choice.

Maybe I accept to see the nearest more than the distant, or else, only the closer and not the distant, but it is not because this distant did not call. Since, to accept to be the echo of the distant, one must especially want to make this echo. Without a deep desire to become transparent, opacity sets in, with the illusion of independence it provides, with a deceiving and universal feeling: the impression of existing in oneself, of oneself and by oneself. Just as one feels better in his somber cottage, even if it becomes boring there. We are opaque, this obscurity is a given of being. It is up to this opacity to transform itself into light bearer, to the extent it can support transparency. For, it is thus, through this transparency, by becoming coherent with itself, that it becomes luminous. Then, miraculously, everything becomes closer to it and nothing is foreign to it anymore.

There is nothing of which I am not responsible, nothing of which I cannot be the echo. This is a basic premise, a metaphysical premise, that is to say that on the primary level there is nothing that cannot in essence find its echo in everything, especially in the human mind. It is precisely the nature of the mind that is like this, because of its extreme plasticity, because of its sublime sensitivity to resonance. A mind capable to infinitely amplify the presence of being, the presence of every being. Nevertheless, even if we imagine

and conceive eternity, coincidence and infinite, we live in temporality and exclusion, in the limit and the finite. From this fracture emerge the possibility and the necessity of a double perspective. For this reason, we catch on the fly moments and locations to which we hold on, and from these asperities of being we apprehend and define the limits of our own responsibility. We admit the particular position that makes us be, we use it to constitute our singular existence, without ever losing sight of the ephemeral and moving quality of this position.

Thus, we are citizen, employee, father, child, student, boss, employee, king or peasant, it matters not. Only the coherence of the moment, substance and location imposed on us will determine – in its capacity to play the intermediary in the totality that we inhabit and which inhabits us – the validity of our personal reality; it is the one that will test and forge our individual truth. In a very banal way, which will however surprise some, the truth becomes a moral, an aesthetic, without losing its audacity and its implacable identity. Truth also becomes a power, the power to trace into the mass, to touch the essential and to generate that which could have drowned in the bottomless abyss of the undifferentiated, that which could have been forgotten. Thus do we find the print, the echo, of a truth of the truth.

Tracing the Meaning

To better illustrate this theme, let's introduce here the question of meaning. To give meaning is to appeal to the echo and to open up to the reverberations that illuminate being. To give meaning is to justify, that is to say to give coherence, or to expose it. Since this consistency, did we fabricate it? Or did we discover it? Neither one, nor the other, or both; it's a choice. To give meaning is to 'underline in the text', to cite the metaphor used above. But, to underline, one must simultaneously accept what is presented to him and want to take responsibility for it,

despite his own subjectivity, or thanks to his subjectivity. Everything is for me, to the extent I realize that I do not belong to myself, to the extent I accept to risk my own being. Some will see there an abandonment of radical subjectivity, others, on the contrary, will see a disproportionate justification of the subject. Paradoxes are always powerful revealers, of sense and absurdity.

In other words, the meaning is necessarily mine. It is far too arbitrary to be otherwise. But to really be 'mine', it should really be a 'meaning'. And ironically, by truly becoming 'meaning', it is necessarily less and less mine. Or else, by becoming less and less 'mine', it becomes more and more 'meaning'. The more the meaning is meaningful, the more the self is dissolved, the more the subject is projected on the totality in a real and grounded manner. Transparency settles down, the world is looking at itself, is objectified and modeled through me. Henceforth I gain the right to listen to myself, I can legitimately want and desire; my personal judgment, listening to itself, is refined and asserts itself truly. A real power takes place in being, an indomitable power radically devoid of a subject, which however will alone legitimate my right to utter the word 'I'.

To give meaning is to draw a map, like the geographer. But for a same location, there are maps of all kinds: roadmaps, hydrological maps, cadastral maps, topological maps, demographical maps. It is up to everyone to choose the kind of maps they wish to develop and represent, and it is up to everyone to permanently test his own map against the ones of others, or against the one he could have been established. Never will we ever know other responsibilities, or accomplish other task than drawing a map. The battle, of ideas or of anything else, is then nothing else than a mere card game.

By returning to the field to look at the site to rethink about the problem, it is not to an objective reality that we will be

confronted, but to another map, of another size, of another relief – some will name it real – which he will have to transpose to the best of our abilities. To reproduce it on paper, easiness obliges, we will necessarily cheat, since we will reduce the metric. Through this brutal contraction, how many curves, how many inflexions, how many fractured segments, will be brought back to simple lines, straight and flat, devoid of their substance and of their life. In any case, even if the geographer should draw the card in real size, would he report the slightest crevice of the terrain? Would his rough edged pencil render the minuscule pores that make up all these tiny convolutions, the soil material or its form? Each of these details would in itself be a kind of regulatory ideal, a reduced and reducing absolute.

Thereafter, whatever the deficiency of these risky drawings maybe, is it not upon them that the ones who will work this earth will base themselves? And the place will continue to constitute itself through these maps loosely symbolizing them. Is there treason on the part of the geographer? If there is one, it is already found in the fact of considering as a whole the place to be represented. Since in truth, does the hill here have any kind of relation with the valley over there? Does this clod of earth under my feet have anything to do with the tree on the other side? And this very clod of earth, is it not by some kind of language abuse that it is called that way, since it crumbles so easily? Does the decomposed leaf that is a part of it have particularly more intimacy with this clod than with the tree from which it came?

If he is somewhat honest, the geographer has a specific advantage: humility. Alas! As with every advantage, it is a vector of illusion. The poor man sincerely thinks he wants to model himself on an objective truth, without having his own subjectivity interfere, or by keeping it out as much as he can. But this sincerity is playing tricks on him. He ends up believing that the drawing he puts on paper is reality. It

is real for sure, but not with the intention and the connotation he attributes to this reality. What kind of irresponsible game does he then play? Sobriety is a phantasm, an excess, which no spirit, no powerful narcotic could ever equal. The worst is precisely that he is sincere: no one would doubt his faith. The good man! He believes himself responsible. How contagious this faith of the simpleminded...

The ability to convey meaning is a real power, dangerous and hazardous. Even worse, to handle the concept of truth is an exercise for apprentice sorcerer. No wonder that many voices are raised to ask for this damned truth to be banned. At a time risk is hardly in fashion, when before any other concern we care about issues of guarantee and security, truth becomes a perilous and menacing creature. No doubt we should believe that some dangers await us, invisible but surmised, making us cautious. Unless we just feel vulnerable, intellectually deprived of any protection. Or else, when nothing connects singularities amongst themselves, the other becomes a complete stranger, a bizarre and worrisome entity, from which I would certainly not want to depend. To accept the hypothesis of truth, is to accept to give to my neighbor the power to criticize me, to question me, to judge me, even to condemn me.

Accident and Tolerance

For these reasons, and maybe for others that are necessarily linked, an acute concern for minimalism creeps in the minds. "It is only you... it is only me... it is only an opinion... it is only an idea... it is only my feeling..." A more radical humility than the one of the geographer, an open door to all excess. It is no more an excess of objectivity like in the latter, but the uncontrolled excess of the subject, cautious about himself, conscious of the judgment of others on himself, cautious about his own judgment of himself, ruthless. By minimizing the validity of

the singular, its legitimacy, the subject erects an inner fence to prevent prying eyes from getting inside his house and judge him. In this way the individual is hiding behind an inalienable right: the intangible private property of his own soul. It is not much, so he claims, but it is his, it belongs to him. I am not much, but I am myself, and I belong to myself. A conviction which generally implies that this precious little parcel of who knows what, the soul, is what it is, and that it has no reason to change. It has in fact become immutable, untouchable; without seeming so, it is now sacralized.

We are not trying here to jeopardize the feeling of being eternal and immortal that every being experiences about himself, because as strange as it may seem, it is this intuition, instinct or conviction of the infinite, which moves the human or the animal to try persevering in his own being. Without this inscription within our organism, nothing would incite us towards anything. Specific existence itself would be endangered, which on many levels – logical, biological, existential, moral, etc. – would be somewhat absurd. Nevertheless, consider here the fluid and dialectic nature of this specificity. Like a river that, over time, receives various tributaries, many rains, streams which dug its bed and cover it, we have made ourselves out of that which we are not. Let's therefore state that that which composes and limits us is somehow alien to us, and is not so. What are we, if not what we are not! Nevertheless, be it a definite benefit or a catastrophe, like the river, man can get out of his bed, lift himself up, deviate, look at himself and think about it. On one hand, his nature as a man is to constantly escape the bed he dug for himself – often unwittingly –, on the other hand, he would be wrong to avoid such an entertainment. For, if our individuality is in fact reducible to a product of circumstances, we have access to a freedom: to apprehend ourselves as a substantial unity. This constitutes the other form of our singularity, a transcendental function,

autonomous and deliberate, thus reconciling ourselves with our goodwill, granting it a genuine legitimacy. Around this double perspective is articulated the fracture and the tinkering of our being.

How can the truth, this vector of unity and substance, become an efficient operator of thought, while individuality is based on the arbitrariness of the accident, in other words on the scattering of reality? For there is no reason for our presence to settle down here or there, or now instead of earlier or later. Except that the 'here' and the 'now' are thus for this or that reason, and not for another, a reason which can account for the reason of this entity – or the whole universe – which captures and intertwines them. But, it is on this 'thus' that we might maybe work. For example, the musical note, even if it is specific, changes its nature according to the location where it finds itself in the piece: it is within this inscription that it is substantivized. The same note could be gay or sad, depending on its location. Or even change name. "Pure convention, some will answer, one needs only to change culture and perception will be different." They feel comfortable and powerful in the realm of pure relativism; they don't have to account for anything anymore. Indeed, but the mode of integration of this note in a given culture corresponds to a certain logic, which makes that different people of this given 'culture' will attribute to the 'note' a given emotional value. For the sake of coherence, the difference of scales and their embedding should be considered, in order to adequately universalize the singular and to efficiently account for reason. Moreover, in itself, without its inscription in a scale, a given note does not exist.

It is out of question for us to use the context to eliminate the concept or the weight of truth. Being anchored in the singular must not serve as an alibi to erase the universal, nor can the universal be used to abandon the irreducible and absolute value of the singular. Truth loves the singular, as

much as the universal: it operates between in the in-between, it needs the tension. It could not do away with reduction or contraction, nor could it ignore the unconditioned or the unlimited. There is a banal pitfall in this case, consisting in stating 'everything is relative'. By forgetting that nothing is relative, since things are relative to something, to something specific, and not relative to nothing. To the question 'why', the child answers 'because'. The adult, conscious of the problem, does not answer simply "because", unless he wants to assert his indisputable authority: he answers "because of this" or "because of that". But in all good faith, he allows himself to answer "it depends", or "it depends on the situation", "it depends on the person", or again "it depends on the moment", without noticing that when he says this he says strictly nothing: he avoids the issue. Nothing is relative in itself, but relative to something, which has to be specified in order for such a statement to make sense, for it to have content. Without it, the statement self-annihilates, it dilutes itself in a kind of indetermination, of indifferenciation.

We need to take into consideration the reality of the context, but for this we must take care of the context itself, and not confine it to the simple status of a possibility, of a promise. But also, we must not overlook the possibility of the absence of context. Let us call this the neutrality of the object, the essence of the object or the phenomenological reduction, or let's not call it anything at all, we could not ignore this 'thing in itself', as unspeakable, unsurpassable or irreducible this intrinsic reality might be. A musical note is neither sad nor gay, it is not even a note, it becomes a mere sound, almost a non-sound. What is a 'c' note, taken outside a given octave? Even worst, what about the concept of 'note'? The note is not a note; it is everything but a note. The note is a mere possibility waiting to exist, waiting for a context. Yet it is not purely nothing, it is a specific potential of being, which is already being. Conversely, we encounter

as well the problem of those who want the absolute, now, freely, in an immediately transmissible form. How to escape the specific form and its generosity? How to grasp the ‘note’, without the donation, the risk taking, the reduction and the arbitrary of a note?

Let’s push the subjective question further. How is it possible that different ears find a musical piece pleasant or unpleasant? Should we stop here and admit that this cannot be explained in any way – tastes and colors cannot be discussed – or else can we identify some criteria establishing that one is wrong and not the other, that one is more deeply than the other rooted in a truth-value? As always in philosophical practice, we must start upstream. Since the feeling of pleasure or its nature come from the satisfaction of a desire or another, let’s ask each listener what he expected of the musical piece in question and of the music in general. In other words, let’s identify the individual coherence from which come out pleasure and displeasure. However, the problem is only moved a little higher, or lower, according to the taste. For, can we judge of what everyone expects of music, by determining that an expectation is more valid or legitimate than another? To spend time, to cheer up, to look for thrills, to encounter the tragic or of the absurd... The issue of graduating these expectations would amount to ask if there exists or if could be enunciated a hierarchy of desires.

To stay within our usual practice of the dual perspective, let’s ask ourselves if between “all tastes are equal” and “here is the official hierarchy of desires and pleasure” could be formulated a problematic supporting this double formulation without falling in one or the other of these two dead ends. For, if various places and eras have embarked in the establishment of rigid canons in respect to art – and in fact with morality and knowledge – ours would rather give in to the extreme opposite, risking a strong backlash. We already find this reaction in a kind of esthetic minimalism

or pluralism that is usual today in ‘right-minded’ circles, dangerous to transgress. “It is out of question to be moralizing, everyone will interpret the artwork as he wishes”; this is the almost mandatory sentence serving as explanatory note for all artistic accomplishment desiring to gain respectability.

A parallel can be drawn with the moral minimalism that was named ‘tolerance’. As if the verb ‘to tolerate’ was not the expression of the most total disengagement towards the other. To tolerate is to accept “putting up with”, a sign of abnegation, one might add. This ultimate protection against exclusion and intolerance also represents the last step before exclusion and intolerance. Everything depends on where we come from and in which way we take it. This purely defensive attitude towards the paranoiac alienation of our era is an ethical defense line that can only be overwhelmed by the course of events. To ask a person to accept another without finding in him any common link with oneself, without participating with him to a kind of collective project, seeing in him nothing more than a kind of competitor for the sharing of a shrinking ‘peau de chagrin’, is a form of wishful thinking that will last only the time it takes to pronounce it. Tolerance is a negation, and as every negation it is hardly nourishing. The day I will tolerate my neighbor, he will certainly not be my friend anymore, and the day he will be my friend, it would be absurd to say that I tolerate him. And besides, I expect of his friendship to be able to confront me, rather than to tolerate my every whim.

Expectation and Gratuitousness

Thus, esthetic tolerance asks us to accept all forms of arts, every artwork. It asks us to always stay ‘open’. In a certain way, it is probably not wrong to do so, but this vision remains terribly incomplete, terribly reductionist. That I am asked to let my neighbor speak freely and to listen to him is one thing. To ask me to appreciate the beauty of his

discourse is an altogether different operation. There seem to be two moments in this case. For one part, one needs to accept disorientation in guise of any basic recognition of the other; on the other hand, one must determine if the journey was worth the effort. These two moments seem essential to any communication, in any relationship between two people. Without accepting to travel, we always remain in known territory and thought is unlikely to change. Without questioning the value of the journey, we risk wasting a lot of time and energy in numerous and insignificant travels. When it is not the risk to lose one's head or one's bearings.

On the value of travelling, let us go back to our previous question. What did we hope to accomplish on this trip? To relax, to see something new, or to be disconcerted? From the contemplation of a painting, what could we expect? The pleasure brought about by the mere vision of forms and colors? The intellectual stimulation due to the comprehension of the concept represented? The induction of an agreeable feeling due to the recognition of the object depicted? Is there a truth in what is generated by esthetic feeling? How does it conjugate with the meaning? By bringing art down to a question of meaning, we would for sure hold on to a path able to bring this problem back to the one of truth. But is there something else: what to do with pleasure – with all the charge and implications of its supported subjectivity – that has little if any relation with truth? Does the latter not rarely engender pleasure? Or does pleasure entertain a circuitous way to truth?

On the other hand, if the aesthetic feeling is limited to mere pleasure, how to distinguish the art object from any object in general? It will be enough for it to provide me some pleasure in order for me to call it art as such. This perspective leaves an open door to the worst abuses; within such a formless broth the arbitrary only asks to grow and to reproduce. Should we then define? Establish criteria? Unfortunately, the definition of an art object is not an object

of art, precisely because this definition does not necessarily induce the required pleasure by this very specific category of entity. Thus a musicologist is not a musician; he could even represent the total opposite. The art critic or the philosophy professor are other examples of this paradox: to not live through what they profess.

The artistic experience would then amount to an impossible confrontation between the intellectual analysis, the satisfaction of the immediate pleasure, and emotional upheaval. The sublime would be one of these rare moments that grant the three. Pleasure and pain of the senses, pleasure and pain of the intellect, pain and pleasure linked to our desire to grow in being. The 'mise en abyme' inextricably linked to the feeling of tragic would also agree with the perception of the infinite which inhabits us. We would thus be – for a brief moment – imbued with a double vision, we would consider the vanishing point that puts everything into perspective. Daily events would be tainted by a new and overwhelming brightness.

However, a certain opposition remains difficult to overcome. We could state that reality chains us, among other reasons because of the principle of reality that accompanies it, and on the contrary the beautiful would operate within pure gratuitousness. Feelings do not calculate, so they say, whereas reason analyzes and speculate in the greatest coldness. How is it possible that what touches upon emotions can be so difficult to control? If one proves to me that an opinion is false, I can accept it, but is it enough for one to rationally prove me that my feeling is wrong in order for me to change it? It is not impossible; for example, the feeling felt in front of the copy and the original of a painting is not the same. However, one would need to know where the information is coming from, or else learn in one way or another how to distinguish the true from the false. Moreover, our feelings are altered and transformed over time, usually imperceptibly, without us

mastering the process. Would it not be possible to intervene deliberately? We sometimes do, we take some decisions, following such and such deceptions, following such and such discoveries. We decide to love or to no longer love this or that thing. With all the difficulties of application accompanying such an engagement. This leads us to find out that pleasure is engaged in the flesh, more than knowledge. There is need in him, sometimes very urgent, to the point where it cannot even reflect or be questioned anymore. I can freely speculate, but I cannot love freely. It is through an abuse of language that we sometimes say “I think I love” or “I believed that I loved”. Even if this misnomer is entirely appropriate. In order to imagine that I love, it must remain a pure intellectual construction; if I imagine that I love, I do not love, whereas when I imagine that I speculate, I really speculate. The facticity and the substance of the intellect are found in its capacity to distance itself. The facticity and the substance of the feeling are found in its immediacy.

Reality and Appearance

The is another mode of opposition between truth and beauty: the beautiful would be found within the appearance and the externality, it would distort the reality of things. Beauty of the devil, artificial beauty, deceptive beauty. The beautiful would be a simple packaging, a coating destined to make the pill palatable. The esthete would be like a sophist, the beautiful would serve to convince by playing on the pleasure of the senses and even of the intellect. What is striking in this perspective is that the beautiful is assimilated to an immediate pleasure. That is to say that it does not question itself, it does not doubt about itself, it abides in the eternity of the moment and cannot escape from it. For immediacy is here opposed to temporality and mediation. For 'pleasure' to operate in time, either it must be obtained after some time through an activity that in itself is not pleasant, or, by taking the same idea differently, it must be

obtained because it is hope, because it is immersed in a process that will generate pleasure. In both cases, time is an expectation, taken as the pain of the lack or as the pleasure of the promise. And it is there that doubt has a function to play: when the promise has not yet been achieved or when it is disappointing.

If pleasure is prisoner of a kind of in-itself, if it ignores temporality, if it cannot be made dialectical, in other words if it cannot enter into a process of self-criticism, it has no future. And therefore it does not know the idea of meaning. Even if, in a certain way, this immediacy also undeniably possesses its own meaning. Have we ever noticed that touch, an archetype of the immediate, is a sense that has no art, or so little? Even though the hands play such a crucial role in most arts, by touching the keyboard, the brush or the clay, touch does not have any art of which it is the main evaluator. Touch is clearly not an aesthetic seat. Two reasons seem to account for this phenomenon. First, touch is an active sense, much more than the other senses: it transforms or can transform what it perceives more radically than sight or hearing, even if the outlook also transforms things, in its own way. Could its lack of passivity prevent it from being a good esthetic sensor? And then, touch does not know neither space nor time; it has access only to the here and now of matter. A here and now which represent matter at its best. Touch does not know order, as hearing or sight, which are manifested through the order of space and time. For these reasons, we can conclude that touch cannot be a vehicle of meaning, since meaning is conveyed through order. Meaning is a language that is transmitted through another language. This is why we say that there is a meaning when there is a language transposition. Thus, when a story echoes an ethical principle, we say that there is a meaning. Because there is a correspondence between two levels of expression: two orders are answering each other. But touch refers back to

nothing: it is the act itself, terribly singular, irreducible, non-transferrable. It does not seek to understand or to grasp the order, it is in immediate confrontation and contact, it functions in itself out of any global perspective. It does not contain its own mediation. Like the will, which in itself gives itself totally, it ignores any dialectic.

There is no order in the singular. When I touch something, I cannot state “this does not make any sense.” Unless I take into account elements of perception or knowledge external to this touch. I touch what I touch, I am passively experiencing the feeling. The outlook can be critical since sight can recognize incoherency, as hearing can know dissonance, since both perceive a whole, but not touch, which knows only the immediate of the singular. To touch is to realize the experience par excellence of singularity; totally immediate, it ignores the order of the world, it ignores alterity.

The notion of truth implies a twofold correspondence. A noise is neither true nor false, a color is neither true nor false, a being is neither true nor false, a form is neither true nor false. Unless you take these entities in their relation to some primal phenomenon. By integrating itself in a whole, by comparing this integration to a wider or more secure integration, one determines the truth or the falseness of a proposition. To touch an object is nothing true or false. To feel resistance in something is in itself nothing true or false. The true or the false come about when I compare this sensation to another sensation or to an already present idea. Besides, touch is much more determined physiologically than hearing or sight, in this way it appears much less subjective, because it relies less on senses, that is to say to the choice of a referent. The materiality of the body is its referent. Touch knows what comes in contact with it, it is of the order of the obvious, it is this evidence for the mind that represents the archetypal function of touch. We do not say “we touch things differently”, as we say “we see or hear

them differently”: the first is not flexible, unlike the latter. Nevertheless, emotions “touch” us as well, psychically. How, thus, could an emotion be considered as ‘real’? Only by the depth of its emergence, or by the extension of its scope, as far as this can be evaluated.

Immediate and Mediation

Taste and smell also belong to the order of the immediate. The magnitude of the sensation and the capacity of distinction are however more developed than with touch. One can smell numerous smells or taste numerous flavors simultaneously, even if only within a limited space and time. This is possible because the liquid with which taste is dealing with, or the gas dealt with by smell, are more fluid than the solid processed by touch, rather heavy and fixed. But they will never know the extent and the refinement of sensation, the capacities of distinction and of simultaneity, of hearing and sight. This materiality, more material for these three senses which come in contact with their object, is opposed to the more formal materiality of the two others which perceive through a mediation, the one of acoustic or electromagnetic waves, of a more metaphysical nature, could we say.

In other words, sensory perception must be extracted from its purely receptive and descriptive function, mechanical, chemical or physical, because the sensory apparatus taking this function in charge through its diversity, visibly contains the architecture of our thought. At its limit, it refers back to being itself. One can find in this sensorial axiology the quadruple root matter-life-thought-being. Do mystics not have visions of the absolute? For, if to touch invites us to perceive the here and now, sight seems to give us access to the entire universe or to transcendence, for example when we contemplate the starry sky on a clear summer night, an intuition of the infinite, of totality, of the unconditioned.

From there, one can also question the orientation of the relation between perception and the intellect: which function uses the other? Who is the mediator of what? Man is always ready to extol his thinking appendage as if he thought it was an end in itself. But could this glorious proto-material pseudopod not also be considered as the mere extension of a physiological entity? From this point of view, despite its specificity, the mind would carry the imprint characteristic of the organism which generated it; it would be morphologically and functionally determined by the preexisting structures of this organism, in this case the sense organs. And beyond the fact of deciding one way or the other, with an ontological or epistemological primacy, this reflection will lead us to try finding out if there is any actual community between the mind and the body, even if this will shock the proponents of a radical psychologism, or various kinds of existentialism, for whom the mind is the expression of a pure freedom which is not accountable to the physiological matrix in any way.

A parallel approach to this relation can be outlined here in terms of the purely intellectual functions, that is to say between the intuitive and the discursive, between the simple idea and the concept elaborated through analysis. Often, intuition is conceived as an embryo of thought, a draft, unlike the concept that represents the mature thought, completed, which distinguishes and synthetizes. But could we not invert this hierarchy? Could the concept not be apprehended as the mediation of the intuition, the mean through which intuition elaborate itself? After all, is formalization not merely a manifestation and a testing? Thus, a sculpture can certainly be taken as an object in itself, but it can also be seen as the mean through which a sculptor becomes a sculptor. In the same way, the sculptor is the mean through which clay becomes a sculpture, a mean through which matter realizes its own potential.

The important difference between the first perspective and the following ones is that we have moved from a productivist point of view to an ontological one. In the latter case, what matters is the constitution of the being, in itself, and not by its manifestation through external and visible acts, by what is other. This is the noumenal reality of being, and not its phenomenal one. An originary truth, not a revealed one.

This difference expresses itself in the gap that creeps in between being and acting, a dialectical distinction and not a radical one. Action derives from being, it is its revealer and its accomplishment, it realizes its potential, but it is also the fading out of this being, its interweaving with what it is not. But, let us remember that the point is here only in order to articulate a dual perspective. Not more than in the relation between the senses and thought, do we pretend to hierarchize. On the contrary, we want to show how this process can and must be considered in its double nature, in its vital bipolarity. Being is unfolded through its deployment in alterity, just as it develops within the intimacy of its intrinsic constitution. The butterfly is not more real than the caterpillar. It is its culmination, but also its treason. But life is well done; the caterpillar will come back, even though the butterfly may forget it, intoxicated through its sudden emerging and the deployment of its own grace.

Is it not also in this way that experience works, through altering the singular being? Very often, the experience modifying us goes on unnoticed for the most part: it appears to us, without totally admitting it, as if time alone is acting, by itself. But time makes sense only when underpinned by an action, when it is generated and substantialized by some transformation. This time we take as evidence is, in a certain way, the sum total of all actions, however infinitesimal they might be, that we call instants. The whole issue of human freedom, of self-determination, is probably,

as much as possible, to choose our moments by ourselves, and thus participate to the maximum, in a deliberate manner, to the elaboration of our own being. Although the randomness of the world's reality deprives us of much of this alleged autonomy. In this way, experience is a real alienation.

When we educate a child, we teach him through various techniques different reasonings that challenge his desires or immediate thoughts. More or less elaborated reasonings, some merely consisting in expressing an argument of authority and showing that the transgression of this authority is automatically followed by some punishment. Pleasure, or happiness, is to a large extent only the mirror image, inverted, of such a problematic: pander to the immediate. Undeniably, this method teaches us how to behave in society, and it includes some degree of truth. Other ways try to deepen the internal logic of an act by demonstrating its consequences in a quite rationalized manner. "If you think or do this or that, this or that could be deduced." But, in the end, we always fall back on arguments of authority, value judgments or others. Everything lies in the proportion between the immediacy of the consequences and the construction of the reasoning. The next question is to know if by acting in such a way the child learns something new and external, or if he discovers some principle already present in himself. The argument of authority mainly focuses on externality, reasoning on internality, all of this remaining somewhat relative. Does one educate a child by developing what he is, or by taming him as one would do with a wild animal destined to figure in a circus show?

The Dices Are Loaded

The adult easily believes that he has completed his education, but in reality he only abandoned the conscious challenging of his being: he lets 'time' work things out, by

cowardice or by ignorance. Now, he wants to make his knowledge known, thus exercising his power of action. Doubtlessly out of his need to continue to grow in his being in a voluntary manner, a need he remains partly aware of, intuitively. He will seek to teach what he knows, he will want to pass on the mechanisms and the jurisprudence of his own judgment, particularly to youth, who represent for him the incarnation of this process constitutive of being. Certainly, this need is mixed with the more or less legitimate need to confirm his existence in the eyes of others. The differences between the two aspects – to increase his potential to be and to manifest his existence – still mainly express itself in these moments where a choice remains to be done between defending a formal truth and accepting that arise the unexpected and the overtaking, between truth as a conformity and truth as a call from the originary, between maintaining and accomplishing, between the visible and the invisible.

Throughout all these practices, different degrees of testing and self-constitution will reveal themselves. A certain number of accomplishments will take place throughout this process that is both continuous and discontinuous. Crucial moments, more or less long, determining inflexions, which we can consider as elementary singularities composing being as a global totality. A hierarchy thus reveals itself, a kind of graduation, architectural, structural, and ontological in fact. A verticality appears, or shows through, but the screw is no less important than the beam, the speck of dust is not less consequent than the comet. Because it is the capacity to act, the degree of inflection, and most of all the act of singularization itself which determine the ontological bearing of a singularity. To come back to truth, this means that it is not the statement of a truth that is true, taken as a kind of eternal and unassailable word, but the gushing of a truth carrying moment. In other words, an incarnated truth, a truth of being, and not a truth of speech or externality.

Speech itself can be this moment of truth, but it won't be so in itself, but through the materiality or the alterity it will meet and fertilize. Because truth is not a posture, but a challenge and a begetting. What is more true than the assertion that truth will always be true, but what could be more banal and more deadly!

It is for this reason that a truth already enunciated is in fact no longer a truth. It is for the same reason that a truth is always 'relative', even if it is always true. But to 'deserve' the vision of this relativity, one must already consider the truth of this truth, without which one could not see its falsity, since one would totally ignore its status of truth and thus its very substance. Every speech is somewhat true; although it remains above all to be known how it is true and how it is false. "This entity simultaneously exists and does not exist." The trick is to be able to distinguish its existence from its non-existence. Even if the existence can, *a priori*, logically, have a greater ontological value than non-existence, it is not a given that the dialectical requirement imposed by the concept of truth can proceed that fast.

Truth in itself; timely truth. Absolute truth; relative truth. Temporary truth; eternal truth. How is the distinction that belongs to every individual articulated in relation to this dual perspective, between truth of being and truth of knowledge, between essential truth and momentary truth? No one escapes the articulation of this problematic. No one escapes the judgment that results from it. Not because we will lay out this problematic. Not because we will judge. But because, whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, we will not escape the tension of this fracture, we will not escape the axe of judgment. Whether it is a question of truth, esthetic or ethics, 'ourselves' will be judge, to the extent we accept the judgment, because we will be judged on our ability to play the game well, and on our learning to be judged. A tribunal of existence, tribunal of history, tribunal of being, where life, painting, science and

music, the comet and the speck of dust, and especially our neighbor, even far away, enunciate the laws and transgressions that make us be. We are left with a meager choice: to see or not to see. Our vision is nearsighted or farsighted, but by not seeing, we will die. Decidedly, the dices are loaded!

Love and Disillusion

We had not talked about love, or too stealthily, we have been criticized for this. Thus we decided to correct this oversight. Although the true followers of love will accuse us, and rightly so, of persevering in an unforgivable manner within the metaphysical sin.

Love is a strange phenomenon, unavoidable and necessary, since alterity is intrinsic to being. It is both rupture and continuity, link and boundary. In its metaphysical dimension, it simultaneously represents the frantic search of the same and of the other. It is the quest for the other, to the extent that, conscious of our lack, we seek to complete ourselves with what we are not: we are searching for and desiring this other, which fascinates us and yet ails us. It bothers us because we hope to find ourselves in what we are not, by a kind of desiring projection, a waiting alas impossible! The similar goes towards the similar, it is said. It might be true. Yet, the similar is magnetized towards the dissimilar. How to find ourselves in this? No wonder that love forms an inseparable pair with hatred. For, through this object we are looking for, we necessarily meet deception and frustration. We are searching for it because it is different; we are desperate because it is different. Maybe we should look for this object without ever meeting it, as the sole condition for maintaining our love. But there again, we despair; we hate this thing for its absence, for its silence, for its refusal to be possessed. Nevertheless, love in its general acceptance, the desire for the 'similar other', the identification to the 'similar other', is the best manifestation

of this intrinsic alterity characteristic of being, as much as of mind, matter or life.

This paradoxical desire for the other and the same exceeds us, it haunts and animates us, but we do not master it at all. It is passion and passivity. It moves us since it forces us to look for it, it paralyzes us because it obsesses us, it exhausts us because it is ungraspable. In this sense, it constitutes our relationship with reality: it reminds us of our lacks, invites us to completeness while forcing us to contemplate our condemnation to finiteness. Indeed, we love, whatever the meaning of the verb to love may be, but we want to be loved even more. In a strange paradigm reversal, by a kind of existential transvaluation, more than a subject, we want to be an object. We are not so much looking for another being, as we try to become the object of desire for another being. We want to seduce and to become the act of loving. In this we blithely confuse the subject and the object. We bury their distinction in the word 'love', by pronouncing two syllables by which we gargle ourselves to satiety, by attributing powers as staggering as infinites to this magical word. We get drunk with the dissolution it offers, we get high on our own feelings till we lose consciousness. We want to be dissolved, and we are dissolute.

Nothing is supposed to be more free than the word love, the favorite subject of all romantic flights. However, nothing is better exploited and calculated than love. Is it a gift? Is it a possession? After all, is it not the child of poverty and expedient? Nothing is less reliable than love, nothing is less tenacious, nothing is more paradoxical. It is a rupture in the great scheme of being, a rupture doubtless necessary. It bypasses, bursts in, messes, it enrolls in all registers and crosses all categories. It ignores logic, mocks the principle of identity as well as the one of non-contradiction. Love is the place par excellence where we accept and long for the disappearance of the subject, our own annihilation. We accept and desire it with the greatest fervor, the greatest

delight. In it, death is a real pleasure, as is told by numerous stories of which the moral can be summed up as “love is stronger than death”. Love offers us a sublime fusion, a delightful confusion. As we have mentioned it earlier, love perceives the loved one through the pleasure and pain that this ‘other self’ imposes. An unsettling mixture in genres, that offers us an unparalleled pleasure. We must suffer, because a love satisfied with itself lacks this lack without which passion would remain a mere fad.

And thus, what do we love? Is the object of love real, is it defined, is it clear? Do we love what we love, what represents what we love, or what provides what we love? Do we love an object, a being, or love itself? Is unconditional love possible, or is it nonsense? To love without condition, one would accept to love anyone, anything, without reason or expectation. One should not expect to be loved, nor enjoy the beloved object, otherwise limit, condition and dependence would be installed. One would have to simply love and enjoy this love that inhabits us, this love which we are. In short, to love in an absolute manner, one should not love at all, thus all the weaknesses would disappear, all the vagaries of love. Such a love would be its own purpose; it would have no other purpose than itself. Indeed, it would not exploit anything or anyone, but it would disappear, victim of its own power, crushed under its own weight. The absolute of love is being, contemplating itself, in the full extent of its alterity, an ultimate form of narcissism is this disease of love.

There is no love without a subject, but especially no love without an object. That this object falls within matter, life, mind or being, it matters not. Yet, the subject is dying within his own separation: he dies from not dying. The subject expects from its object total plenitude, unequalled happiness. Any partial or incomplete fusion would leave it miserable and speechless, a misery he will justify by all kinds of explanations, sound or tendentious. We will never

be far from resentment. The irony of this situation is that it is mainly the possession of this object, more than its resistance or its loopholes, which might very well cause unhappiness, anger and bitterness. Distance, obstacles or impossibilities can well feed passion, contrary to possession or presence. Moreover, the loving investment, the hopes, explicit or not, that we project on the desired object, will always exceed the possibilities of that object. We will be angry at it for that, in a totally irrational manner, without any consideration for the principle of reality. It is a phenomenon that allows concluding that it is not possible to love a given object, but only its ghost, the one we make up by overloading an object or a being with various attributes and powers, which idealize and even betray it in an outrageous way. It is this very ghost that fulfills us. We love the happiness that the being or the thing must provide us, what the being or the thing allegedly promised us, more than the being or the thing in itself.

Promises, it seems, engage only those who believe in them. Thus, a main cause for break ups in couples is often that the spouses complain that the other has changed, “he is not like before”, they regret, as if such a transformation was possible! Simply, while busy making an idol, they had not taken their time to see the real person, or else they were too busy trying to change it, or to make it more in tune with their expectations. But over time, through exhaustion and events, reality finally pierced through the veil, a cruel reality imposing itself bluntly to a disconcerted stare. It goes the same way for the love of money, power or glory, as well as for the other great classics, which always end up betraying the love that embellishes them with a shiny halo. Somewhat like in the story *The Emperor's New Clothes*. One day we discover the facticity of the disguise, the illusion of its shimmering, and we feel somewhat idiotic, for so much the deception was visible. We then have to blame someone: if we ‘discover’ the bride was too pretty, it is

because someone wanted to entrap us. Unless we blame ourselves, which would already be more coherent. Without noticing that it is our own subjectivity that fooled us: it is well placed to manipulate us, it knows us like its own fingertips.

The objects of love are changing, limited, fragile, imperfect, but we want to believe in them. It would be better to love something immutable, infinite, perfect, we might then have a chance to meet some immutable happiness, infinite and perfect love. But we would have to take on such a distance that this love might not deserve the name of love any more, in any case in the eyes of those who believe they can possess the dreamed object or person. For this reason, some prefer to love God, truth, justice, science, or another kind of absolute. The risk is minimal, because nothing in the object itself allows disappointment anymore. The subject is both free and condemned to himself: only he - through his moods and his expectations - can be the cause of any deception. Such a love, radical or inhuman, could only be unconditional and conceived in reason, as unreasonable as it may be. But one must not confuse the absolute with some institution exploiting it, or with a set of circumstances, a distinction that is not obvious. Henceforth, we declare that this absolute loves us, we feel loved by it, without any condition, not because we bring it something, neither because we are worthy of being loved, but only by what this absolute incarnates, which overlooks all contingency. Nevertheless, we bring something to it and we make ourselves worthy of being loved, so as to enjoy this love, otherwise the pact could not function. A strange deal, but why not, it is a love bet like any other. But basically, one can love everything in such a strange way: we only have to put ourselves into such a mindset, and there it goes. One only has to love, regardless of the object or of the absence of any object. Love is a concept with such plasticity.

Finally, let's comfort ourselves. For, if falling in love is a choice generally happening without our consent, this does not prevent us in any way to defend the idea that a devouring passion might represent our true freedom. Already, love makes us glimpse at the fullness of being, through the crack, through the fracture, through the chiasm. Then, it defeats the routines of the soul, it teaches us how to abandon this horrible "yes, but", reticent, cautious and homey. Totality makes some sense, through a concrete universal. The function of the "beloved" is not decorative or accessory; it is neither a vitamin supplement for the soul. Indeed, we can say that love generates illusion, that it is a bundle of subjectivity, but in a similar way one can retort that it operates at the very heart of being, that it is its link, its articulation. One can consider that power, the primary form of being, thus operates through the singular. The absolute could not be opposed to its own reduction; the latter must simply be considered as a necessary condition. Regardless, in the end, if this singularity is blinded by the limits of its own condition. After all, a parcel of divinity still remains a divine substance. In any case, in the house of being, whatever that being may be, haunted by its own dissatisfaction, a place always remains vacant for the unknown, for the gap, for the surprise guest. A sufficiently important place for its owner to finally start considering that he is actually just a guest therein.

Fluidity

Dear reader, real or imaginary, it is time for you, as for me, so it seems, to move on to a more substantial or vigorous challenge. Tell yourself that, in the present place, it is not so much the content that matters any more, the supplement of soul, but the mental process. It is not question anymore of 'truth' or 'truths', but rather of 'fluidity' or 'transparence', of 'reversal' or 'transvaluation'. Here, nothing is true, nothing is false. Nothing is certain, nothing is uncertain. It is just a matter of thinking, an ascetism that may be

bothersome. Let's think that the mere fact of thinking can allow us to escape our own misery. But the evocation of some ideas already scares us. It is tempting to move back, to go undercover, so many alibis are available. We should have probably written this warning by way of introduction, but we did not think about it: this intuition has emerged throughout the text. But it is never too late to practice conversion, the art of thinking par excellence.