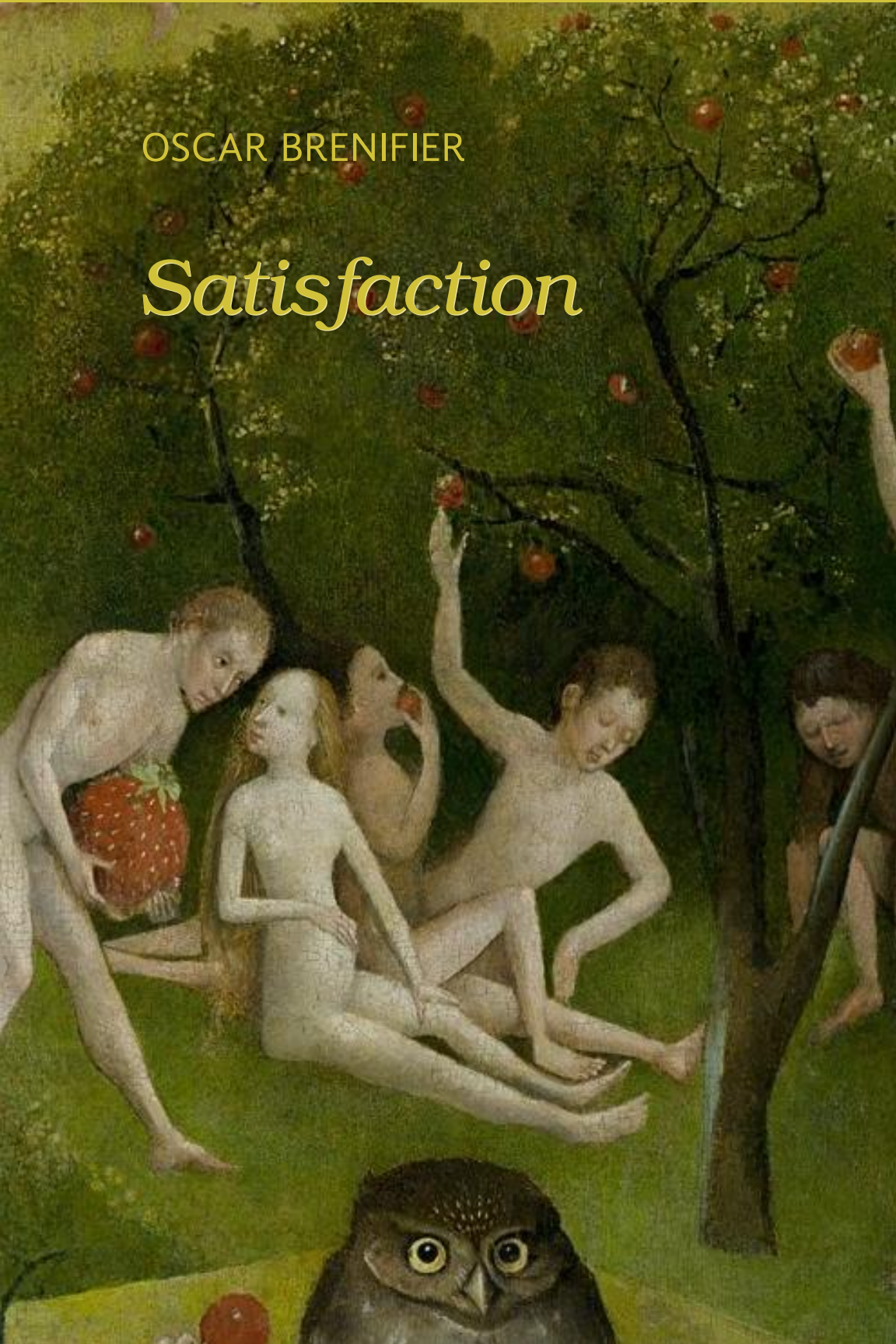


OSCAR BRENIFIER

Satisfaction



The Unsatisfied	1
Types of satisfaction	11
Immediate pleasure	14
Incompleteness of satisfaction	16
Ideality of the self	21
Little satisfaction, great satisfaction	27
Cultivate your garden	32
Satisfaction as tranquility	36
The absolutization of the self	40
The wellbeing	46
The satisfied	50
Instability of satisfaction	57
The Danaïdes' barrel	60
The fatality of need	67
Epilogue - Satisfaction and self-destruction . . .	75

Satisfaction

The mind needs satisfaction, comfort. We often deal with dissatisfaction, the phenomenon of chronic dissatisfaction, the anxiety that derives from this dissatisfaction, the anger and sadness that result from it. But there is a common way of dealing with this dissatisfaction, through a kind of psychological and existential consolation. We can call this strategy the phenomenon of satisfaction, and all sorts of stratagems are used to access it, to the extent it is really possible. This satisfaction is what is generally understood by the notion of happiness: “happy” is the one who is satisfied, the one who does not know the pain of unfulfilled desire or unfulfilled need, if this exists. But very often, the quest for happiness emerges from an unclear, indeterminate expectation, which covers a kind of infinite expectation, a boundless greed, without form or measure.

The Unsatisfied

Some people suffer from chronic dissatisfaction. Nothing can satisfy them. At the same time they strongly yearn for existential fullness, for being fulfilled, and this is impossible for them, what remains quite coherent. For the measure of their hope, of their expectation, determines the extent of their disappointment, of their despair. The people, the world, the reality, but above all themselves, although they very often are not aware of the phenomenon that inhabits them, cannot live up to their expectations. Nevertheless, they take their subjective perception very seriously. Spirit of seriousness would say Sartre, where one takes his reduced, biased and partial vision as an objective criterion, steeped in truth and universality. They believe it wholeheartedly. Having said that, there are two tendencies. Those who know how things and beings should be, whose lament is specific, they

are inhabited by an ideal, very ambitious, probably impossible, they are obviously disappointed but they know why. And those who actually don't really know what they want, what they expect: they just know that nothing is as it should be, without a clear understanding of the universal failure. They constitute the main block of dissatisfied people: those who ignore what they really want. This is logical, since the dissatisfied cannot be satisfied even with his own ideal, with his own representations. It would be too easy, too limited. Therefore he doesn't know what he wants, he mainly knows what he doesn't want. After all, from a psychological standpoint, it is easier to negate than to affirm. A negation can be made with certainty, but an affirmation will always contain an element of doubt. Thus, dissatisfaction would derive from an inability or difficulty to produce an affirmative statement or to take an affirmative stance on a given issue. This is based on our inability to fully perceive what we desire.

Therefore, the unsatisfied is often a "noluntarist", not a "voluntarist": he is focused in what he does not want. When one proposes to him to go out for dinner, he is eager to refuse everything that is suggested to him, which will never be adequate, but he does not know what he would like to eat. Everything that is mentioned seems unsatisfactory, as well as everything that could be mentioned, so he cannot propose anything: he knows in advance that it will not be suitable, there will always be something wrong. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to beg: "And then?", "What else?", "Is that it?". Being, for him, is not "what is" but "what is not". Existence is characterized by lack, by its dimension of non-being. He is an absolutist, but an absolutist who ignores himself. In fact, he is relatively impotent. Because deciding, risking an action, engaging in anything is doomed to failure anyway: it will always be "only that", something will always be missing,

Satisfaction

in quantity or quality. With others as well as with himself. This is the case, for example, with people who would like to write but cannot do it. Any attempt is doomed to failure, when it is not total paralysis. Anything he writes will just provoke a sense of meaninglessness, if only he tries. Certainly, the dissatisfied can sometimes experience certain satisfactions, he is not necessarily obtuse, but these little pleasures will always be tinged with gray; a shadow will always be prowling, that of finitude, of ephemeral, of incompleteness. His sense of contentment is fragile, it does not last, it cannot last, it is not able to survive the anguish, the criticism, the insurmountable challenge of reality.

Here we find the Don Juan syndrome. Every woman he meets arouses hope, soon sadly foiled. They are all imperfect and boring, especially if they imply commitment, if they require continuity. He always seeks some difference, some novelty, some "plus", the excitement of a promising otherness, a "not yet realized". Everything that is said, the already spoken, is unbearable to him: the horizon of an eternal unsaid, always to come, only the unspeakable smiles on him. Anchoring is impossible for him. Fundamentally, the ideal would be to access a new "self", but of course it remains quite difficult. Persistence, stability frightens him, it exudes boredom. He does not know transformation, true change; he knows only abandonment, shifting, giving up the prey to chase after shadows. The probable does not interest him, common sense upsets him, he is only interested in the barely possible, the rare and the precious, the possible at the risk of the impossible, as a mere phantasm. In fact, he is always pursuing his own ruin, as if this demise were his true, one and only destiny. The logical and ineluctable outcome of the non-being that inhabits him. For him, emptiness is not an absence but a primary reality, it has ontological and

Satisfaction

substantial value. Nothingness does not dwell in the gaps, it does not creep into the interstices, it is not an in-between, it is not an accident of the full: it is the constitutive matrix of what is, the space where objects, beings and phenomena are inscribed. Anything that is identifiable, anything that arises, anything that appears, is only a furtive, clandestine and surreptitious presence, in want of power and being. In a sense everything that exists is just a simulacrum for him, an appearance of being, as manifestation of non-being. How then could he be satisfied!

The dissatisfied oscillates between a state of frustration, an unpleasant emotional experience linked to the fact that his desire is not fulfilled, and a state of disappointment, a feeling of sadness when the desire is realized but the obtained satisfaction does not live up to the one expected. This failure of satisfaction may be caused by the fact that the objective result is not as significant as the awaited result, but it may also be that the consequences of this result, for example general approval, does not live up to what was hoped for. Or, while all expectations are met, the simple fact is that satisfaction is not the order of the day: it is radically impossible. Either because by dint of waiting the desire has been blunted, or because the subject himself is jaded, or because by principle, by nature, the dissatisfied can never be satisfied. The vital cycle of desire, of need, of expectation and satisfaction is distorted for him, something in his soul is fundamentally perverted. Chronically dissatisfied people are unable to rejoice in what they receive or what they have accomplished, for their minds instinctively focus on what they do not have, on what is not, on what would be likely to lack, rather than on what they have, on what is. This recurring problem is probably what justifies the Buddhist concept of "dukkha", the desire as a manifestation of greed which necessarily breeds dis-

satisfaction. Consequently, according to this philosophy, in order to free oneself from this endemic suffering, it is better to free oneself from desire than to satisfy it, not by repressing it but by transforming oneself.

Those who suffer from chronic dissatisfaction tend to be in a permanent state of sadness and discontent which prevents them from making the most of the present, from enjoying the positive in their existence, the simple pleasure of living. Nevertheless, let us note here that it is important and somewhat natural to feel a certain dissatisfaction in a recurrent way, as much about oneself as about others and the world around us. This feeling of lack and indigence encourages us to act, motivates us, invites us to confront ourselves or to work on our environment: this instinct of the "better" or the "plus" can indeed give meaning to our existence. Thus some chronic unsatisfied people study a lot, sit for many exams, and are looking for numerous certifications, some become eternal students. Others create businesses, get fully involved in them; they carry out various activities, often in an obsessive way, but in this process they tend to neglect themselves, to ignore their own being, relatively devalued. They always have an aftertaste of bitterness, if not a feeling of emptiness. Because it is easy to fall into the excess of this dynamic, especially when it arises from a desire for some absolute, for totality. In a sense the dissatisfied is realistic, since he always sees what is missing. We can even say that he is in tune with the material reality of the universe, mainly composed of emptiness. For it is true that what we are, what we have, what we do, everything that affects us is actually very limited and puny. Thus, feeling the poverty of our being and the misery of the world around us is legitimate in this sense. The lack of realism of the dissatisfied is based on his inability to conceive and admit that everything

Satisfaction

is by definition limited, that is to say to be reconciled with the principle of finitude. In this sense, his hopes or expectations are immoderate, rather not rational. In fact, one of the common symptoms of the unsatisfied is the recurring practice of "all or nothing". Either he wants to do everything, or he does nothing. And since it is difficult to "do everything", to say the least, he easily confines himself to "doing nothing". Either he procrastinates or he embarks on ambitious projects that are unlikely to succeed. The principle of "small steps" could not satisfy him, for lack of scope. Another articulation of the same pattern is expressed by the principle of "ideal conditions", which alone would allow him to accomplish what he wants to accomplish, conditions which of course remain wishful thinking.

One of the most common ways to feed one's dissatisfaction is the reflex to compare oneself to others, whether it be the neighbor or celebrities, the "champions", in one area or another. Through this systematic comparison, we can always find something we lack, and the feeling of emptiness in oneself in contrast to others is at the heart of the pattern of dissatisfaction. Nowadays, the omnipresence of social networks, by the myths they convey, popularize artificial messages that encourage self-dissatisfaction, often in a superficial way. Everyone tries to "sell" himself by fabricating his own wonderful image, imitating the glorification of stars in different domains, like the "influencers" who promote themselves as models to follow and imitate. To the point that it can become really pathological for simple minds. Pursuing a dream or emulation can actually represent a path to follow, which gives us a reason to get up in the morning, to make efforts and to act, by taking up a challenge. But it is a matter of remaining aware of reality: the more ambitious a dream

is, the more it is reserved for a tiny minority, because of its demand for talent, efforts and probably circumstances.

The secret for us common mortals is to pursue our way because we like it, because it seems to us the right choice, the one that suits us, the one where we find ourselves, the one where we find fulfillment. But what often stands in the way is precisely the problem of dissatisfaction, which is linked to results, whether it be performance or production, social success or recognition. Dissatisfaction is generally related to greed, possession, results, rather than the process itself, the pathwork. Besides, this is what makes the dissatisfied powerless, if they allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the obsession with results. Otherwise this feeling of want can, on the contrary, push them to act, to find fulfillment, in spite of the anxiety it generates, or thanks to it. In different ways, we need dissatisfaction: paired with curiosity and ambition, it is a motor for development, discovery and improvement. The desire for perfection is a common pattern, for example in the "good student." With always this same floating ambiguity between wanting to learn as best or as much as possible and worrying about the results and the recognition of the ruling authorities.

Access to the concept of absolute, the quest for absolute, the contemplation of absolute is a fundamental principle of reason, characteristic of the human, a being capable of considering the ideal and the worst, a fragile entity caught in tension between finite and infinite. The absolute, whatever it is, always refers simultaneously to the fabulous and to the ultimate reduction, to the lack, to the principle of finitude, a sort of Jacob's scale between the earth and the heavens that our mind can ascend and descend at a breathtaking speed. Ascension and fall almost go hand in hand, if not simultaneous, so perfectionists operate consequently in manic-depressive

patterns. The dissatisfied is caught in a vice-like grip between his representations or phantasms of absolute and the limits of reality, the misery of the immediate. Fear of missing something and fear of the best. This tension can become quite unbearable. All the more so as the current means of information permanently offer us infinite possibilities, a kind of permanent presence of the grandiose through dazzling successes. The illusory impression is given to us by easy access to all possibilities; we are given a taste of the impossible, an illusion made accessible, visible, the impression that one can reach it. Virtual meeting places play the game of this “all is possible”: everything is there, you just have to choose, we are provided with the immensity of opportunity, suffering the vertigo of false pretenses, with its procession of disappointment and bitterness. Why stick to the given, and be satisfied with so little! The next one, he or she, will be even better. Do not stop along the way, so as not to miss a better chance, a better option. The desire for perfection is confused here with a desire for possession: it is no longer about what we do, but about what we can obtain. Which is anyway the substance of the desire for perfection: whatever absolute one aspires to, it is in fact a totality, a completeness, even more than a perfection. Greed is what it is really about, not accomplishment.

Chronic dissatisfaction is based on the chimerical belief that one can be perfect or fully satisfied, of course in a pre-reflexive way, for any attempt to reason on such an expectation or to make it fully conscious would tend to make it disappear because of its obvious absurdity. It is in a way not a choice, since it is not deliberate, one could say that it is a temperament, a way of being, even though there is a certain part of free will, of reason which would allow to control or somewhat moderate this extremely demanding attitude. If

Satisfaction

this inclination becomes problematic, if it prevents action, if it becomes a source of permanent anxiety, if it negatively alters relations with others, then we can attribute a pathological dimension to it and conclude there is something to work on, to reduce, to control. If the feeling of insecurity engendered in such a way incites the subject to constantly seek the appreciation and approval of others, if he permanently minimizes his own achievements, which allows him to justify his discontent, he will be consumed by bitterness and boredom. Thus, some will look for perfection even in the simplest, the most basic activities, such as cleaning their home or tidying up a wardrobe. Such a person is able to do and redo his storage without ever being satisfied with it, feeling paralyzed and frustrated by the result obtained. More general, secondary or even insignificant concerns, out of their obsessive dimension, can overtake what is essential and important. Consequently, any real novelty, any worthy initiative is avoided, for fear of being wrong, for lack of reflective thinking. Chronic dissatisfaction is actually an aspect of the narcissistic state of being: we are so absorbed with the frustration of our own wishes and desires that we grant them a very high importance.

Apart from obsessive behavior, the pathological dimension of this tendency will manifest itself through the frequency of complaints, since nothing is ever satisfactory. Others are regularly called upon as a witness, at the risk of being included as part of the dissatisfaction if they do not echo these complaints in a manner perceived as adequate. Or by the concern with nit-picking, usually expressed in speech by adversative clauses, especially the compulsive use of "but", a great tenor for chronic dissatisfaction. The dissatisfied is a regular practitioner of disproportionate or unachievable goals, an amateur of impossible hopes, implying

Satisfaction

a difficulty in valuing or judging the present in a reasonable way. Of course this leads to a periodic recourse to abandonment, the perfectionist's ultimate refuge. At the same time, any failure is amplified, dramatized, it is difficult and slow to recover. Thus numbing the mind, in whatever way, with whatever means, is another ultimate refuge of the dissatisfied. Failure becomes a system as well. Since dissatisfaction is based on insecurity, a fear of failure which can prevent us for striving for what we really want, one prefers the security of failure than the insecurity of taking risks.

Obviously, this perfectionism does not apply only to the self, although the rejection of the self remains its foundation. The subject will also be demanding with his relatives, he will find it difficult to accept their way of being and acting: he will criticize them easily and excessively. Thus the latter will distance themselves or avoid him, growing tired of his unpleasant or aggressive attitude. As a result, people prone to chronic dissatisfaction easily feel lonely and are more likely to be anxious and depressed.

It is not impossible to exist adequately with this persistent feeling of emptiness. As with all excessive or overbearing patterns, it is above all a matter of remaining aware of it. After that, everyone will see if they want to prolong this scheme, if they want to accept it and live "quietly" in its company, or if they want to work on it, to modulate it, to reduce it, to fight it. Some see in it a necessary aspect of their existential structure. But anyway, becoming aware of it will necessarily change the nature and dynamics of this worry, and make it psychologically more acceptable, more livable.

Types of satisfaction

Nevertheless, we all find a certain happiness, more or less great or intense, in various types of satisfactions. Helpful here is the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who attempts to distinguish forms of happiness through various categories. He names three, which apply to different existential modalities: material, political, and intellectual. But we will modify and extend its categorization somewhat, taking into account the cultural and societal changes between ancient Greece and the current civilization. We will propose the following four categories, related to material or sensual satisfaction, practical activity, social commitment or interpersonal relationships, and intellectual activity. Of course, these categories may overlap somewhat, in that these forms of satisfaction can easily be combined, although it is always interesting to ask which takes precedence when they come together.

The first category, "material or sensual satisfaction", which can also be called "immediate gratification" insofar as it hardly cares about the causal process, is generated by the possession of goods or wealth, the pleasures of flesh, distractions or amusements, or any form of pleasant excitement.

The second category, "practical activity, is generated by the simple fact of acting, either for pure pleasure, to activate or distract oneself, or by obligation, the latter providing moreover a moral satisfaction. These actions may have a utilitarian concern, either as a complement to the pleasure of acting, where the result of the action is part of the satisfaction obtained, or as an exclusive purpose, for example working to earn a living without this work providing in itself any pleasure. Or these actions can be carried out for the simple satisfaction of the activity itself, as one can be passionate about horseback riding or collecting stamps.

Satisfaction

The third category, “social engagement or interpersonal relations”, engenders satisfaction by the simple fact of interacting with others, again with or without a useful purpose. It can be for the simple pleasure of maintaining relationships, the fact of dialogue and living together, love and friendship, but it can also be to carry out community action, with a view to improvement, where the relationship to others is both the means and the end for any project, for example political or humanitarian action. The quest for and enjoyment of power are an integral part of this satisfaction, social status as well.

The fourth category “intellectual activity” includes everything related to the mind, whether knowledge, religion, personal development, spirituality, etc. We then belong to some intellectual elite, a very gratifying identity. Again, it may be purely gratuitous, for the simple pleasure of using one’s mind, but it may be for some good: salvation, wisdom, knowledge, competence, recognition, etc. Artistic creation is an overlap between this category and the second one, practical activity.

The fifth category is “moral or ethical behavior”, which implies cultivating some thinking, producing some action or speeches that make us a “good person”. This qualification of “goodness” can be of different natures, based on different paradigms, but it often includes the idea of taking care of others instead of being merely centered on oneself. The foundation of this morality can be religious, rational or practical, but it generally follows from a tradition, even though in the absolute, each person can elaborate his own personal code of behavior and be satisfied with it.

In a way, everyone more or less pursues these various forms of satisfaction, all very human, no one is totally foreign to any of these categories, even if only minimally. Everyone knows the sensual or material pleasures, the plea-

sures of action, however banal it may be, the pleasure of social relations, and even the joys of the mind, for example new insights, or proving others that one is right, the experience of feeling intelligent. But in this area, the difference between various beings will be made in terms of proportions, by examining which type of satisfaction is more sought after than another, what predominates in the existential and psychological approach of an individual. On the other hand, it seems to us that there is a significant line of demarcation between the various forms of satisfaction, also pointed out by Aristotle, between what comes from simple possession and the enjoyment that accompanies it, or even from the immediacy of pleasure, and what comes from accomplishment, work on oneself, challenge, achievement. In Spinoza, the second category refers to an increase in the power of being, with the joy, awareness and feeling of freedom that accompany it. The first category is often the subject of criticism among philosophers. Nietzsche speaks to us, for example, of the last man in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which designates the coming extinction of the human surpassing himself. It represents the passive state of nihilism, a despicable human figure, in which the individual will desire nothing more than well-being and security, and he will rejoice in his lack of ambition. This sad state opposes the affirmation of the "Will to power" and the elevation of man, whose symbol is the figure to come of the "Superman". Plato takes the equally critical image of a "full sponge", inert and waterlogged, saturated, as a metaphor for the total satisfaction of immediate desires. Hannah Arendt, for her part, criticizes the "little pleasures", contrasting the "charm" of small intimate things and their insignificance with the "grandeur" of public activity, with a special mention for French culture and its inclination towards this "delicate". "The modern passion for small things,

preached, it is true, by the poetry of the early twentieth century in most European languages, found its classic presentation in France in small happiness. Since the decline of their once glorious public domain, the French have become masters in the art of being happy in the midst of the "little things", between their four walls, between the bed and the cupboard, the armchair and the table, the dog, the cat and the flowerpot, spreading over all this a care, a tenderness which, in a world where rapid industrialization is constantly killing the things of yesterday to manufacture those of tomorrow, may well appear as everything what remains purely human in the world. This flourishing of the private, this enchantment, one would say, of an entire people does not make a public domain, but on the contrary only signifies that the public domain has been almost entirely reabsorbed and that grandeur has everywhere given way to charm; because if the public domain can be large, it could not be charming for the good reason that it cannot accommodate what is inconsequential."

Immediate pleasure

Admittedly, one encounters here and there a certain apology for immediate pleasure in the history of thought, but this remains quite rare. For example, Aristippus of Cyrene, a hedonistic Greek philosopher, IVth century before our era, defined the purpose of human existence as the search for pleasures and the avoidance of sufferings. In general, thinkers advocating satisfaction were eudaimonic rather than hedonistic, that is to say advocating the pursuit of happiness rather than that of pleasure, which implies postponing satisfaction, what could be called a "reasoned hedonism". Thus Epicurus and his disciples, for whom pleasures

Satisfaction

allow access to happiness, provided that they are natural, necessary and measured. We periodically encounter certain manifestations or traces of hedonistic thought, where the search for immediate pleasure is promoted, generally around sexuality, the pleasures of the table, pleasant conversation, tenderness, friendship, sociability, comfort and material wealth, etc. But very often, as soon as it is a question of a more constructed thought, of a more in-depth theory, the quest for happiness replaces that for pleasure, which implies a certain amount of work, an extension of satisfaction, a temporization of pleasure, where it is a question of being able to postpone enjoyment or bliss. The simple fact of having to postpone or wait implies the introduction of a principle of reality, recognizing that gratification, enjoyment or well-being cannot spare a period of slump, a negation of satisfaction, that is to say the affirmation of an effort, of a work on oneself. As a result, complacency, ease, becomes an obstacle to real satisfaction, even an enemy of the latter. Whether the happiness sought is a healthy body, personal equilibrium, peace of mind, appreciation of intellectual or artistic spiritual things, life in society, interesting conversations, we cannot ignore one form or another of asceticism, exercise, reflection, confrontation with oneself, which implies the development of a certain psychic or moral force, personal discipline, self-knowledge, a consciousness of the world and of others. Therefore, such a "reasoned" perspective easily ranks among the various forms of wisdom. Nevertheless, as an apology for "pure" hedonistic thought as advocated by the Cyrenaic School, or by the french writer Marquis de Sade, one can also support the idea of defending pleasure as the immediate goal of any action, regardless of the consequences, contrary to the criticism epicurean who judges that immediate excessive pleasure should be avoided

insofar as it leads to future pain. This is a psychological wager that we all practice at various times in our lives. On this subject, Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher, proposed the idea of "hedonic calculus" where one seeks to maximize pleasure in relation to pain. It establishes that each action having negative effects and positive effects, for a more or less long time with various degrees of intensity, certainty, extent or other criteria, the individual should make an evaluation and carry out those actions which bring him the most pleasure, which he calls Utilitarianism. According to him, the most moral action will be the one that meets the greatest number of positive criteria. Therefore, to ensure the happiness of the population as a whole, the State is necessary, because it alone is legitimate to guarantee respect for individual freedoms and can promote collective happiness. He must take legislative and social measures to maximize utmost happiness. But times produce new experiences, new knowledge, and Bentham had not foreseen what could generate what he proposed, more visible in our contemporary world, the promotion of a collective happiness described in the Brave new world of Huxley, as he had wisely envisioned it, albeit presented in excessive form. Let us summarize this reality as a kind of drowsiness of being where the quest and concern for pleasure, well-being and individual satisfaction take precedence, with a certain abandonment of the public interest, of reason, of universality, of existential commitment.

Incompleteness of satisfaction

Let us propose the idea that total satisfaction, the idea of integral happiness, devoid of shadow or lack, is an impossibility. For various reasons. First of all, our animal nature is in constant need, be it hunger, thirst, the desire to reproduce,

the protection of our physical integrity, disease, the decay of aging, the inevitability of death, etc. The same goes for our psychic nature, for the moral subject that we are, which reasons, projects, hopes, desires, fears, regrets, feels guilty or ashamed, etc. If through times and cultures the sages or inspired beings offer us the achievement of a peace of the soul free from troubles and needs, the realization of a reassured spirit, by different modalities, beliefs or techniques, it is in fact a regulatory ideal that is somewhat impossible to achieve. We use their advice and take advantage of it as much as possible, but we periodically notice the difficulty or impossibility of it: we will always be lacking in relation to the proposed ideal. We will always suffer from some dissatisfaction, from some moral or physical pain. It does not matter whether these needs are objective or subjective, natural or cultural, imposed by reality or manufactured by our psyche, it is rather impossible for us to experience real and substantial satisfaction.

Therefore, does this mean that satisfaction is unattainable, that happiness is factitious or illusory? If we forget for a moment the fantasy of totality or perfection, we can then examine to what extent or how this ideal could in part be realized. It is therefore a question of introducing an idea of proportion, of relativizing this realization, of speaking of a “rather”, of measuring or tempering such an expectation, its performance or its obtaining. Then we can assess to what extent what we get, despite the shortfall or the mismatch with expectations, is still acceptable or adequate, not to say sufficient.

Let us propose the idea that the human psyche is a place of combat between the pain and the anguish engendered by the lack and the fear of the lack, and the feeling of satisfaction that the spirit grants itself. Either by compensating the

lack, by concealing it, by sublimating it, or by fostering multiple diversions. The problem that then arises would be to distinguish real satisfaction from artificial satisfaction. Although we can ask as well whether such a distinction is useful, whether it has meaning or importance. Indeed, suppose a person who has a difficult life, for practical or moral reasons, but who succeeds in fabricating a myth, in inventing a “reality”, whatever it may be, and that he succeeds in making himself happy of this invented reality, that he succeeds in making himself happy because of the effectiveness of her invention. Can we therefore decree that his happiness is factitious, that it lacks reality, that it is not happiness?

Let us take a traditional and concrete example, one that can be recognized in the Christian scheme. A person suffers, for various reasons, but he tells himself that this suffering is normal, that it makes sense or that it is inevitable insofar as earthly existence is a “vale of tears”. And by accepting this suffering as our lot, we testify to our faith in God and in his word, which will be rewarded with access to paradise or eternal life. So whoever accepts this vision, this scheme, will be able to feel happy about this distant perspective, this future that awaits him. This scheme can be called a consolation, in the sense that this later perspective brings comfort to the immediate suffering. Consolation eases pain, lessens affliction and soothes the soul. But we can wonder about the power and effectiveness of this consolation, about its effectiveness, its substantiality and its superficiality, about its ability to satisfy and make people happy. We wonder to what extent the satisfaction it provides can compensate for the immediate dissatisfaction with reality. Anyone who does not adhere to this Christian scheme will be able to criticize it, they will see it as an illusion, a deception, a manipulation or other, and they will find it difficult to conceive that such a belief can

make them happy. Because of his non-adhesion, he will find it difficult to accept it or even to imagine it. To believe in order to understand, to understand in order to believe, is what tradition responds to this query. And the Christian is nevertheless proud, or at least rejoices, because he has chosen the right path, the one that allows him to jubilate, from the Latin *jubilare*, which means “shouting of joy”.

There is another schema, non-religious, but which remains quite close to the latter: the idea of sacrifice. It is close to it because it is also about a happiness which is deserved, which is obtained by the exercise of virtue, by doing good in a way which is displayed as disinterested, wrongly or rightly. Thus one can sacrifice oneself for one's children, for one's family, through domestic work or by exhausting oneself in the task of earning a living and satisfying the needs of one's loved ones. One can also sacrifice oneself for a group, for an idea, for a nation, etc. Here, it is not so much a question of obtaining a later life, but of being happy with the simple fact of “doing good”. Although by pretending to act for others, one unconsciously obtains a personal existential complement, by projecting oneself in the future or by plunging in the overflow of self. Once again, we can ask ourselves if this sacrifice truly satisfies the person who commits it, if the general assessment of his existence suits him, or if he is caught in a sort of compulsive pattern, for cultural, psychological or other reasons, which above all causes suffering through a form of alienation. Another form of this self-sacrifice can be identified in the person who, to the detriment of his own well-being, struggles to acquire wealth, power or fame, the results of which may bring him some satisfaction. We can then ask if the game is worth the candle, or conclude with the German philosopher Schopenhauer that “Life is a business that does not cover its costs”.

Satisfaction

Let us take another example, very current and common: the use of social networks as a tool or way of survival, compensation or consolation. These networks allow the user to create “another” existence, a virtual one. Either by highlighting privileged episodes of his life, moments of pleasure, happiness and tranquility, in order to show the world the joys of his personal existence. Either by making up a fake identity, for example through an avatar, by writing or speaking as if he was another person. Thus video games allow everyone to become a kind of superhero through this type of virtual production and interaction. For some, this “new” identity takes a prominent place in their psyche, giving them pleasure, happiness or satisfaction.

These various strategies will always pose problems for those who do not participate in them. They will criticize them, they will denounce their absurdity, because seen from the outside it seems illusory and superficial. Such a proposal seems unlivable to them. And their arguments will bear on the limits and flaws of the existential system thus proposed, but of course one can always find limits and flaws to any system. The general economy of the existence of others can easily be inaccessible to us, incomprehensible, unacceptable or absurd. We don’t understand why anyone would find satisfaction, meaning and happiness in building a house of cards or digging holes and then filling them up. But it can just as well be the case of a person who dedicates his life to playing a musical instrument, rehearsing every day for many hours, or of a person who works on old manuscripts, writing books that hardly anyone will read. However, in all these cases, some find a certain satisfaction in it, despite the loneliness or the strangeness of their approach. Moreover, those who criticize it presuppose that they would rather devote their existence to something else, but it implies that this “something

else” should still speak to them, or that they would be able to realize it. The issue is not so much to compare one scheme to another, but to compare the scheme in which a person is engaged to another scheme in which he might be engaged. Some people have a sort of tragic vocation, an attraction to pain or self-sacrifice, how to make them understand or accept that other paths are more attractive, more rewarding, more accessible? And why would they accept these schemes that do not suit them? Even if to others, seen from the outside, these adopted paths seem foolish, vain, destructive or suicidal.

Ideality of the self

There is a common phenomenon of mental distortion in human beings, due to their intellectual capacities, mainly reason and imagination, which amplifies and deforms representations and desires, twists them and transforms them, depending on the situation, according to the psychological modalities of the moment, diverse states, frustrations, hopes, pains or other mood changes. We can examine these distortions in different ways, but there is one angle that we find interesting, which we can call the “idealized self”. It is idealized in two senses. On the one hand, it is forcefully fabricated by thought, in this sense it is not natural. Quite subjective, it does not proceed according to reason, evidence or common sense: it is artificially concocted, it comes from an imagined representation, consciously or not. On the other hand, it is hyperbolized, perfected, amplified, magnified, embellished, or any other process of exaltation or glorification of the self. The ideal is therefore no longer a simple aim, it is no longer only a regulating ideal, it becomes a “hard” reality. One could say that the first modality is ideational in

the sense of being constituted with ideas, the second is ideal in the sense of an absolute model. But the two can be combined quite easily: on the one hand we create criteria, goals, needs, identity, on the other hand we invent an achievement, an image, a perfection that we take for granted, for reality. And of course this "invented reality" provides the subject with a certain satisfaction.

From childhood, obviously depending on the circumstances, some people have experienced this idealization, through parental discourse. "My little treasure", "My lovely princess", so many qualifiers that are explained through parental love, which express the happiness of having children. But it can give the child the impression that he is the center of the world, and that he is in himself wonderful, without any substantial reason. Simply because he is the child of his parents, because his parents find in him a compensation for their own existential wants, a pattern periodically quite visible in some people. We can offer here as a defense of such a scheme that a newborn has before him all accessible possibilities, that we cannot exclude a priori his potentiality of genius, his prospect of being marvelous or extraordinary. Any parent can thus from birth dream without limit as to the future of his child, perceiving in him the indeterminate infinity of existential power, in opposition to his own limits and determinations, painfully well established.

So we take advantage of the child to fall into ecstasy and dream. Nevertheless, through growing up, the child will experience the feeling of limit, especially when going to school. But it is tempting for the parent to ignore this reality and continue to dream while thinking of his child, in effect producing an illusory pattern that he will express through his words and actions. Of course, we can conceive of this parental attitude as beneficial, insofar as it nurtures in the child a feel-

ing of his own worth, of the fact that he is loved and appreciated. But very often, the dose is excessive, already because it does not correspond to the reality that the child encounters, as a sort of performative contradiction. He notices well, by going to school, by comparing himself to others, by confronting himself with teachers, that he is perhaps not so wonderful as that. This discovery of one's own limits is part of learning to live in society, it is constitutive of the development of personality and self-discovery. But this discovery, and the confrontation with a more idyllic vision of oneself, which is called maturation, will take place more or less well, more or less harmoniously. Some children may find themselves negatively affected by it, suffering from what may feel like humiliation, some manage to somewhat deny this reality by maintaining their illusions despite the conflicts they encounter, some manage to fit in adequately with this new reality by learning to play the game, surfing on the discrepancies, some remain impervious, indifferent to the hustle and bustle of social play and diverse relationships, which hardly affects their tranquil identity. Thus, the degree of satisfaction generally depends on an interaction between the perception of a self and our experience of life in society, which will be managed in diverse ways, with various results in terms of the enjoyment of existing, bringing diverse satisfactions and dissatisfactions. But, whatever the case, later on, the adult will necessarily know the experience of the "double self": a self that we will call objective, more real and empirical, and an idealized, magnified, improved or downright invented self. This duplicity of being, this double game, he will experience through a tension between two poles, and he will undoubtedly undergo over time, according to the circumstances or the internal moods, a recurring movement, a manic-depressive alternation, as a kind of mental elevator,

an ebb and flow, between his less satisfying empirical reality and his more joyful idealized reality. Of course, if this movement is too sharp, too intense or too fast, it will generate a certain instability of the being, which can take a pathological, painful, very unsatisfactory form, due to the absence of regularity and self-control.

Nevertheless, a problem arises here, about the nature of reality and our preferences about it. Because very often, in common discourse, when it comes to determining the veracity of a statement, a vision that can be called objectivist or scientific tends to favor a certain form of reality: that which is observable and measurable, which derives from common sense, as opposed to the personally experienced reality, the guarantee of which is expressed only by the testimony of the subject who goes through it and lives it. We can describe this opposition as that between a vision of the world where we declare that the Earth revolves around the sun, and a vision of the world where we commonly state that the sun rises and sets, two opposite phenomenal descriptions. However, if the average person were asked whether they prefer a happy life in illusion or an unhappy life in reality, the answer would be less than certain. Depending on their sensitivity or their intellectual concern, we can expect different answers, although it seems to us that in general, according to their observable behavior, human beings will prefer the option of happiness to that of truth.

Therefore there is a kind of hiatus between avowed discourse, somewhat rational, in any case reasoned and expressed, and “discourse of subjectivity” or “discourse of experience”, as strange as this expression may be. We can also call this the opposition between “thinking of reason” and “thinking of being”, more immediate and intrinsic, an opposition which stems from a constitutive fracture of the human

being, constantly in struggle with himself. This explains the surprise that we can often have when we listen to a person talking about himself: we blithely confuse what we would like to be with what we are. This is easily explained by the fact that the “desire to be” or the “expectation of oneself”, what seems good or desirable to us for ourselves, perhaps also what we strive to be, is of great significance in our psyche. Thus the idealized or rationalized self is of great importance in our existence, and it often becomes even more important than our real self. Nevertheless, one can criticize this last formulation, insofar as the existential reality is constructed subjectively as well as objectively.

We could then replace this formulation by opposition between a self “experienced subjectively” and a self “experienced socially”, insofar as the social dimension of our being easily remains the criterion of a certain objectivity, despite the limits of such an affirmation. The principle of reality can be described as the confrontation with what escapes our subjectivity, with what is exterior to it, with what resists and confronts it. For example, we can consider that others often have a more objective view of our personality than we can have. But is this also the case for our satisfaction? Does the other know better than us what satisfies us, or can he know it? The psychologist, for whom there are criteria of mental health and pathology, will criticize the idea according to which the satisfaction generated by our idealized self seems or claims to satisfy our psychic or existential needs more than our empirical self. He will see in it a pathological fixation, a neurotic behavior. The compensations thus produced are for him illusory and the mind clings to them like a drowned man to his buoy. The psychic energy normally and healthily used to realize oneself is now channeled and

diverted in the artificial fabrication of an ideal image, it is exhausted in a vain race for perfection.

Nevertheless, one can wonder if the intoxication of a moment, however tenuous and ephemeral, cannot satisfy us more than the monotony of a life deprived of this strong stimulation. By its intensity, it allows us a form of overexistence to which we would not otherwise have access. Certainly, the price to pay may be considered expensive or exorbitant, even exhausting over time, but it seems to us that there remains an existential choice, even if for some or for many such excessive and unstable choices will seem unreasonable. Thus the French poet Baudelaire, in *Artificial Paradises*, more specifically in the part entitled “The Poem of Hashish”, writes: “There are days when man wakes up with a young and vigorous genius. His eyelids barely released from the sleep that sealed them, the outside world offers itself to him with a powerful relief, a sharpness of contours, a richness of admirable colors. The moral world opens its vast perspectives, full of new clarity. The man gratified with this bliss, unfortunately rare and fleeting, feels at the same time more artistic and more just, more noble, in short. But what is most singular in this exceptional state of mind and senses, which I can without exaggeration call paradisiacal, if I compare it to the heavy darkness of common and daily existence, is that it was not created by any clearly visible and easily defined cause.” He then describes how taking hashish can produce a similar but exacerbated effect, to the point where the mind feels deified, where the individual believes himself to be God. He also explains how its consumption was originally used by the Old Man of the Mountain, in the medieval Orient, to give his followers a taste of paradise and thus modify their behavior. If one can criticize the artificial, frail and evanescent dimension of such experiences, it is nonetheless

true that knowing or having known such moments puts the rest of our existence into perspective, showing us the dull and boring appearance of daily life. We can therefore think of this opposition in two ways. In a negative way, by criticizing the forced and non-customary aspect of the affair, and its consequences in terms of the subsequent depressive state that such excitement or ecstasy can induce. In a positive way, like a very special moment that we must live, like an experience of overexistence that enhances our life experience, the intensity of the instant marking our memory forever, a great moment, a heroic instance whose memory can always benefit us. A bit like those people who have experienced a brief moment of glory, a great milestone in their life, an instance which therefore constitutes forever a psychological “revenue”, because this episode of their life has since allowed them to develop a personal myth which embodies their identity. Even though their epic might sound banal to others.

Little satisfaction, great satisfaction

Everything is possible in the field of satisfaction. One can be very surprised by the satisfactions of each and everyone, by what, according to him, provides value, meaning or prestige to his own existence. In a way, fortunately, the spirit is animated by a sentiment of comfort, where one gloats and boasts about a pitiful achievement. “Beggars can’t be choosers” says the proverb, and should we also congratulate ourselves, find pleasure and satiety in our meager pittance. Just like an animal in its den, the mind will settle as well as possible in its place, adapt to its own condition, however limited, reduced or insignificant it may be. My home is small, my home is dirty, my home is broken, but it is my home...

This phenomenon becomes very visible, for example, in certain people who suffer, whose life is miserable, who nevertheless brag or take pride in their unfortunate condition; they will concoct a plan, find an angle, a means, a yardstick by which they will grant themselves a feeling of superiority. One can certainly criticize such an attitude, but we can also justify it as a capacity for adaptation, as a principle of reality where one is reconciled with his own factuality, including by means of a distortion or an embellishment of this reality. Faced with this ambivalence, we can indeed ask ourselves questions about the legitimacy of the feeling of satisfaction. Being satisfied with oneself, is it a virtue, a form of wisdom, an access to peace of mind, a recipe for happiness, or is it an illusion, a form of complacency and fatuity that prohibits everything to challenge oneself, which inhibits all accomplishment?

To deal with this issue, let us propose the distinction between two kinds or qualities of satisfaction, one which we will name “small satisfaction”, the other “great satisfaction”. The first differs from the second because it is part of a dynamic of hunger and satiation, therefore caught in a pattern of needs that should be satisfied, instead of a quest for self-challenge and accomplishment. We seem to perceive two conditions necessary for its operation and its maintenance. On the one hand, its path is strewn or punctuated by small pains, small disturbances, small expectations, sufficiently tenuous not to arouse real anxiety. On the other hand, we are convinced or certain of being able to satisfy them without too much inconvenience or effort, in a way that is not too unpleasant. Finally, the process is under control, its progress is more or less mastered, which again protects us from any anxiety. Thus, these tiny alterations of our internal balance, these slight physiological or psychological

inconveniences, because of their weakness and the certainty of their resolution, contribute to the feeling of satisfaction. Imagine, for example, a person for whom a pleasant life revolves around daily meetings with friends, meals taken together in an agreeable setting, pleasant conversations that no shadow comes to disturb, as much as possible. These moments set the tone for his existence, they establish its structure, they constitute his daily pleasure and thus give meaning or sense to his life. It is not so much a matter of sense in the sense of a signification, one could find in it a certain insignificance, but one finds there the principle of a sense in the sense of a direction, which for many people is a sufficient answer of their desire for meaning. And every day, before this joyful reunion, the subject feels within himself the need for the encounter, he experiences a lack, and it is the mark of this lack that will guarantee the pleasure to come, the substantiality of his subsequent satisfaction.

Obviously, if the subject was very worried, if this feeling of lack was really painful, his tranquility would be affected, he would be tormented by the weight of uncertainty, he could not say he was satisfied. We encounter this pain in the feeling of love, where the fear of not truly encountering the other can be very painful, generating psychological instability. From this we can conclude that if friendship, a more peaceful and less anxiogenic feeling, can generate a certain general satisfaction, through a kind of stability, this is not the case with the feeling of love, subject to excess, to pangs of worry, for whom uncertainty is too painful to be pleasant although it provides some enthralling excitement. Likewise in gambling, uncertainty is a pleasant spice that makes the game interesting, insofar as one does not want excessively to win, provided one does not have too much to lose in the game. If the stakes are too high or too risky, the game is

Satisfaction

no longer a game, it becomes a suffering. Unless again, for various reasons, the subject needs this excess, this suffering might be necessary to him. But from then on, desire is no longer a desire, it is a need, a necessity. And if we can accept without too much damage that a desire is not satisfied, a need must be satisfied. Its dissatisfaction is very painful, the mere possibility of dissatisfaction is too harsh. One who is in need can hardly aspire to a satisfying existence: he lacks the relative tranquility or the feeling of control which authorizes satisfaction. Admittedly, some people seem to find their well-being in radical uncertainty, in permanent risk-taking, in pressing anxiety, for example in business or politics, but they are too subject to the pitch and roll of contingency to consider themselves truly satisfied. If a certain tranquility or constancy is not established, which is quite difficult in certain activities, if only by the vagaries of the reality principle, it is difficult to consider oneself satisfied. Already because in this kind of field, greed is great, there is always a need for more, actually just like in the practice of love. This type of existential schema falls into a category that we will qualify as manic-depressive, where the subject oscillates between moments of extreme satisfaction, jubilation or ecstasy, and moments of discouragement, disgust, anger or depression. It is therefore difficult to call it satisfaction, although some people seem to find it pleasant or existentially useful. Unless you accept the idea of finding satisfaction in dissatisfaction.

But back to our quiet character, who finds himself satisfied with his daily conviviality. As we assumed, he usually doesn't feel very worried or threatened, the situation is pretty much under control, the ritual is working. However, there are two problems here. The first is the illusion of certainty on which such a scheme rests. Indeed, if things

seem to go without saying, if we can count on a certain stability, this is only conditional and relative. Various events can arise that shake this relational “edifice”. Various unpredictable events can change the situation. The recent example of the viral epidemic which has spread across the world, in fact modifying our behavior, for health and political reasons, forcing us to modify our usual practices, shows how the most obvious evidence is not a given, forcing us to revise our idea of certainty. Who could have imagined in advance such a scenario, worthy of science fiction? A gesture as obvious as having dinner with friends became an impossibility, or at the very least lost its “it goes without saying” status. And we have indeed heard testimonies of people for whom the impossibility of meeting, of celebrating, of having dinner with friends, posed real existential problems. Of course, in our sensitive society, we were implicitly invited to have a certain compassion for these people. But we could just as well, at the risk of appearing inhuman, wonder about the existential values of these people, and even think that this situation of constraint was an excellent opportunity for questioning themselves and reflecting. After all, we enjoyed dining and dancing on the Titanic.

The second problem we see from this quiet perspective is the denial, ignorance, or rejection of negativity. Because in such a context, everything is done to maintain the pleasant dimension of the situation. For this reason, we will avoid annoying questions, disturbing subjects, points of divergence and tension, anything that could overshadow the picture but which nevertheless would have a certain substance. Unconsciously, or knowingly, taboos are settling in, without being able to prevent their shadow from constantly prowling, various prohibitions that weigh by the absence they engender. Because we cannot prevent noticing the illicit periodically

surfacing, or slightly transgressing the rules, when it does not occasionally explode, with the inevitable consequences of such a rupture or such an overflow. More than one festive occasion, alcohol or excitement helping, will have thus broken the dikes of propriety, politeness and courtesy, as Berthold Brecht shows very well in his play "A Respectable Wedding." The "joie de vivre" will thus have shown its true face: a superficial gaiety that seeks to hide a certain self-contempt. The small satisfaction actually seeks to hide, compensate, forget or deny a great dissatisfaction. But reality is tenacious, truth only seeks the opportunity to express itself. Family meals, with the implicit obligation of happiness they impose, offer a common and flagrant expression of this phenomenon. There always reigns a certain boredom, a certain irritation, visible or concealed, which must hide or disguise itself behind remarks as joyous as they are insignificant, a certain bitterness behind the tasting of good little dishes simmered with "love", which risk to emerge at the slightest opportunity.

Cultivate your garden

There is another interesting example of this "little satisfaction": the recommendation that Voltaire gives us at the end of *Candide*, which has become a classic refrain. The injunction to "cultivate your garden" as a path to wisdom, which can make sense for several reasons. Because man must work, since he "was not born for rest" writes he. Because cultivating one's garden implies a return to an original simplicity, contrary to the complication of life in society. Because cultivating one's garden, producing one's own food, implies counting above all on oneself to meet one's needs, which is a benefit, even a necessity, when one thinks of the selfishness

and wickedness of humans. Because cultivating your garden involves living in the countryside, which allows you to escape the urban, inhuman and cruel world. Because cultivating your garden, in community, implies harmonious relations where everyone collaborates, and not the usual rivalry of an unequal and competitive society. But there is another idea contained in the text, explicitly, which seems important and marks the ironic or critical dimension of the whole affair. It is good to cultivate one's garden because this laboring prevents us from reasoning or thinking, an anxiety-inducing and painful activity. Thus this activity is considered "the only way to make life bearable".

Let us bring this idea closer to the perspective of Blaise Pascal, for whom on the contrary this activity would constitute a means of diverting the minds of "gardeners" from the existential misfortune of the human condition, from its weakness and its mortality, a diversion which he calls "entertainment". Simultaneously, it entertains us, occupies us pleasantly, and it creates a diversion, it dismisses and protects us mentally from painful preoccupations. Pascal writes the following. "But when I thought more closely, and after having found the cause of all our misfortunes, I wanted to discover the reason, I found that there is a very effective one, which consists in the natural unhappiness of our weak and mortal condition, and so wretched, that nothing can console us, when we think of it closely. Whatever condition we imagine, if we combine all the goods that can belong to us, royalty is the most beautiful post in the world, and however we imagine it, accompanied by all the satisfactions that can touch it. If he (the king) is without entertainment, and if he is left to consider and reflect on what he is, this languid bliss will not sustain him, he will fall by necessity into the views that threaten him, the revolts that can happen, and fi-

nally, death and illnesses which are inevitable; so that, if he is without what is called diversion, he is unhappy and more unhappy than the least of his subjects, who plays and amuses himself. The only good of men therefore consists in being entertained by thinking of their condition either by an occupation which distracts them from it, or by some pleasant and new passion which occupies them, or by games, hunting, some endearing spectacle, and finally by what is called amusement. »

There are thus two aspects of this "bliss" which show its facticity or illusion, both linked to the refusal to think, to the abandonment of reason. On the one hand, to escape the "subjective reality". The fact of not thinking of oneself, of the mediocre, absurd or insignificant dimension of our person, what Pascal calls the "hateful self", which is obsessed with itself and believes itself to be at the center of everything. The anguish of the subject thinking himself, reflecting on his own value and nature, confronting his own nothingness, can prove to be painful and make difficult, even impossible for some, the Socratic injunction of "Know thyself". Thus, the voltairian gardening gives us a fragile peace of mind, because we cannot truly get rid of self-concern. On the other hand, by focusing on the activity of gardening, we also escape "objective reality". One could even say that this gardening goes against life, since it prevents any transformation, it freezes reality. That is to say that we forget the presence of the world, we ignore all the concerns deriving from taking this painful reality into account. The problem is that this reality is tenacious, it cannot be constantly and eternally ousted or ignored. On the one hand, it undermines us from within, through the natural concerns that come to mind, about ourselves and the world, which cannot be permanently kept at bay. For example, it seems impossible to

us not to periodically think about death, or not to worry about the existential or moral value of our own person, or even not to wonder how we are perceived by others. On the other hand, this reality manifests itself objectively, due to the permanent transformation of the world, the contingency of events of all types that affect us directly. Thus the gardener undergoes in his garden the vagaries of reality, for example the whims of the weather, which can prove to be catastrophic for him, or the various animal invasions, mammals, insects or others, which are just as problematic. This denial of reality, this rejection of reflection makes us closed in and “unavailable”, as the Chinese Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi puts it. We shut ourselves up in our little world, we tense up on our representations and our expectations, which necessarily is at odds with the peace of mind necessary for real satisfaction.

In the daoist tradition, we can find as well the principle of a practice, a physical activity, that is supposed to produce a form of consciousness, even of illumination. Zhuangzi gives the example of a meat cutter, a wheelwright, and others even quite absurd such as a cicada catcher using a long pole to capture the insect. We can consider that such an exercise is not a factor of complacency, it does not constitute a psychological decoy, for the following reasons. First, because the intention is a way to challenge oneself, not a mere “production”, or a repetitive thoughtless activity. In this sense, through the process, one comes to know himself and understand the way the world functions, the Dao. Second, because the horizon of the practice is not self-satisfaction or getting results. In fact one has to forget himself to practice this aske-sis, and give up worrying about results. The latter are a consequence, not an antecedent purpose. The mental horizon is one that is “beyond the self”, the self is a mere tool or oppor-

tunity of accomplishment. Thus the true meaning is spiritual, not practical, even if it operates within the context and constraint of a practice. The attitude is humility and surrendering, not gloating and complacency. In the ideal of production, the motivation of the action is in fact to get rid of the action, to encounter no more need for the action, and to rest upon the accomplished deed, instead of thriving on the challenge. In the Daoist exercise, not only is the result not the purpose, but even the action is not the purpose, since it is focused on some type of nothingness that makes any action meaningless and empty, in spite of the engagement in the action. This reminds us of some formally absurd exercises proposed for example by the cynics or the christian tradition, where the point of the enterprise is to test the faith or attitude of the subject, rather than doing something useful or rational. There is real tranquility, because the whole point is not to produce tranquility. One can there distinguish tranquility and comfort, since challenge is the substance in the first, tranquility being only an accidental byproduct, when tranquility is the explicit and expected purpose in the second.

Satisfaction as tranquility

Let's propose a hypothesis: satisfaction is a form of tranquility. But tranquility of the soul cannot be an end in itself, the feeling of satisfaction can only be a means and not an end. If this tranquility is a goal, the individual will want, think or claim to have "arrived", then the mind will become drowsy, dull and even numb. Thus the quiet subject will arrive at a kind of acedia, as experienced by the reclusive monks in monasteries, who devoted their existence to prayer and mentally exhausted themselves in contemplating

the absolute. They had reached the "summit", they simply had to stay there, but the spirit becomes exhausted on these heights, it must come down and confront finitude. This is what Plato describes in the Allegory of the cave, or Nietzsche in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, where in both cases the contemplative being feels obliged to come down from the heights which nevertheless fascinate him, he feels the need to mingle again with the ordinary mortals, knowing the fate that awaits them. Or again, when Christ withdraws into the desert, it is only a moment of transition before returning to his preaching, a moment when, moreover, he will experience the temptation of the devil. Indeed, by a reversal effect, what the Greek philosopher Heraclitus called "enantiodromia", everything that exists, every phenomenon, necessarily evolves towards its opposite. This principle according to him mainly concerned human behavior, but later, dialectics, in particular with Hegel, applied this scheme to all natural processes, through the idea that all phenomena contain their potential for negativity. This is what we also find in Daoist philosophy, the ancient Chinese philosophy, which is based on the principles of opposition and complementarity of Yin (feminine principle, passivity, attention, receptivity) and Yang (masculine principle, force, action) which permanently contradict and generate each other. Let us mention that this concept of "enantiodromia" and what it covers have largely been abandoned in the West since Aristotle, since the principle of noncontradiction, logic, postulates rather a linear and relatively continuous thinking, like the idea of progress, instead of the recurring breaks and shifts of the Heraclitean concept.

Thus the spirit needs "something" else, some external or transcendent finality, some stimulating, provocative or disturbing activity, some endangerment of its being which

makes it exist and thrive. Every subject needs to exercise his own power, to develop, by realizing the limits of its existing patterns, both by putting his action to the test and by projecting his being into the abyss. He needs to experience the lack, not as a pain that absolutely must be palliated, which would reveal a "need", a loss of freedom and an anxiety, but as an aesthetic horizon, the perspective of which both enchants and challenges him. However, this reversal, if it is not assumed, if it is not planned or desired, can very well "turn bad", as it is frequently described in literature. For example the classical drama of Doctor Faustus, who has read everything, who knows everything, but is disappointed by his own satisfaction, realizing the futility of his achievement, and will therefore sell his soul to the devil.

And as we saw earlier, there is another reason why peace of mind cannot be an end in itself, why the feeling of satisfaction can only be a means and not an end. On the one hand because of the inner reality, the nature of the mind, as we have just described it, on the other hand, because of the external reality, that of the world around us. Zhuangzi warns us against two fundamental excesses, obsession with the interior and obsession with the exterior, both of which lead us to our downfall by two different paths, by opposite consequences. As we have already mentioned, the "quiet" person, satisfied with himself and his condition, if indeed this state can be accepted as a permanent reality, is locked in his bubble of satisfaction. In general, he has created a context, sheltered from the world and its vagaries. Whether this shelter is of a psychological, material, spiritual, communal or other nature, it preserves him from chaos, from aversive conditions, the unexpected, the contingencies of various kinds. A kind of fortress is built, ramparts are erected, dykes put in place which should protect the subject from the ebb and flow

of the environment, from the assaults of circumstances and the environment, human, material or other. Unfortunately, or fortunately, this can only work for a while, because chaos inhabits the world. Zhuangzi explains to us that "Hundun", chaos, is the mother of everything, including the Dao, the principle of principles, which accounts for the nature of reality and the functioning of things.

Thus, according to Daoist thinking, any rule, any law, any scheme, is likely to be turned upside down or shaken up. It is moreover its criticism of Confucianism, its historical "enemy brother" in Chinese thought, which postulates the establishment of a perpetual harmony governed by established rules. Thus, the person who is protected by a determined environment in which he finds contentment is not ready to accept the upheaval of this environment, because it is on this "private" and protected reality, a reduced context, that he has waged his happiness. He has established a place, an enclosed space, governed by self-fitting constraints and rules, in which he feels comfortable, at home, well settled. But because of this he is a prisoner of this perimeter, of its conditions of possibility, he is therefore at the mercy of any shock due to external or internal causes: the upheavals of the general conditions of possibility of its private conditions of possibility. What is called on the psychological or existential level an earthquake. Yet the mind, despite the efforts, anxiety and reflection consubstantial to it, cannot fail to periodically consider or imagine the disappearance of his little paradise on earth. If only for example because his body does not belong to him, any more than the environment belongs to him, as he is subject to weakening, to pain, to death. However, the person who fabricates a tailor-made happiness is at the same time not prepared to envisage the rupture, the abolition of the conditions of possibility of his "happiness", nor

is he in a position to face it. He does not want and he cannot deal with this problem, it does not enter into his existential device. He is not available.

The absolutization of the self

There is a third problem that seems important to us in the concoction of a canvas or a framework of satisfaction: the phenomenon of absolutization, hyperbolization, glorification, or reification. We hypostasize - that is to say that we objectify something which is in fact a mere subjective construction of the mind - mainly two entities: the subject, the one who desires satisfaction, the "I", the "me", and the object, what provides this satisfaction or is supposed to provide it. Already, this "me", hateful as Pascal said. "The self is hateful. So those who do not remove it, and only cover it, are always hateful. Not at all, you will say; for by acting as we obligingly do for everyone, there is no reason to hate us. This is true, if we hated in the self only the displeasure that comes back to us. But yes I hate him because he is unjust, and he makes himself the center of everything, I will always hate him. In a word, the self has two qualities; it is unjust in itself, in that it makes itself the center of everything; he is inconvenient to others, in that he wants to enslave them; for each self is the enemy, and would like to be the tyrant of all the others. You remove the inconvenience, but not the injustice; and thus you do not make it lovable to those who hate its injustice: you only make it lovable to the unjust, who no longer find their enemy in it; and thus you remain unjust, and can only please the unjust."

Indeed, the subject places itself as the center of the world, as the alpha and omega of reality, which is just as distorted and primary as was the geocentrism that we have rejected

since the Renaissance. Without necessarily admitting it, the one who seeks to be satisfied considers himself to be the navel of the universe. Even more simplistic, it is not a matter of satisfying for example his own reason or truth, or his taste for the absolute, some impulses likely to lead him a little further, allowing him a certain decentering, because it is rather an issue of satisfying his desires, to flatter one's subjectivity, the most private and reductive part of the self. The "satisfied" wants to feel good, he wants to be at ease, he wants to forget his anxieties, to experience imperturbable happiness. Everything must therefore be meant for this purpose, the rest must be ignored, forgotten, denied or countered, because too disturbing, too annoying. Thus the subject remains in adoration with himself, which can be qualified as the lowest level of being, by the reduction of the reality that he performs. At the same time, he operates a reduction of the world and of himself, of his own being, by focusing solely on a need for immediate gratification which he makes the substance of his being. It closes off any opening onto the infinite, any gap on the indeterminate, any availability to the alterity of the self. However, this access, this indentation of his personal being is just as much a necessity. This non-coincidence with oneself is a reality just as intimate and inescapable as the "obvious" satisfaction that he pursues. Moreover, the latter will be eternally undermined by doubt, despite the efforts made to indulge, and the successes obtained through the efforts of complacency. The human being senses in himself a need for something else, however indescribable and unidentifiable the object of this call for otherness may be. Thus, artificially, he tries to aggregate around this satisfaction the idea of an identity, the evidence of a self, an essentiality which gives him an impression of stability or even of eternity, which claims to prohibit any doubt, protect

him from any dissatisfaction, by saturating his being, as in the image of the sponge full of water evoked by Plato.

The second form of glorification or absolutization concerns the object, that “thing”, whatever its nature, which constitutes the matter of his satisfaction, the purpose of his quest. Whenever he will be minimally conscious of it, he will paint an embellished, sentimental, romantic, even a philosophical portrait of it. He will make it the value par excellence, attributing to it a moral, metaphysical or aesthetic value, although very often this object mainly fulfills a practical or psychological function. This is for example how the myth of “cultivating one’s garden” works, which conveys a very idealized image, quite appealing to common representation. We will perceive in such a cliché, in turn or simultaneously, a relationship with nature, a reconciliation with origins, an idyllic atmosphere, a bucolic tranquility, a romantic and sentimental aesthetic, an ancient and authentic wisdom, etc. Of course, there are worse forms of satisfaction; this one has at least the advantage of a panoply of plausible arguments that one can deploy and decline at will. Even if more than one follower would be unable to do so, or would be hardly interested in such a task, since it is a question of bypassing reflective activity through this “gardening” occupation. It must also be admitted that in general this “business” works quite well, so it has its letters of nobility. But let’s take a look at its purpose for a moment, because even if we say “cultivating your garden”, it is not in fact not so much a matter of producing a garden, but rather vegetables, flowers, fruits, trees. Certainly, it can also be the garden, as an aesthetic space, but it is all the same to grow plants, whatever their nature. And this flowering can happen, or it can not happen. Environmental, climatic, parasitic, animal, chemical or other hazards can affect the deal, and the result

will be modified. Already in this case there is an issue, an important difference: is it the result that counts, or only the activity?

The most worried person, whose satisfaction is the most fragile, is the one for whom the result is most primordial. Whether the need is food or aesthetic, whether it is a problem of “material need” or “image need”, or the principle of simple remuneration due to work, a tension will take place, the expected object will be somewhat sacralized, significant value will be given to it. Its presence or absence, its appearance or its obstruction will generate pleasure and satisfaction, frustration and annoyance. The mere hypothesis envisaged of an absence of result will cause worries and pre-occupations. This satisfaction is therefore plagued by the representation of an object set up as an unavoidable or indispensable purpose, the absence of which would be considered harmful, the impossibility or destruction of which would cause sadness, bitterness or anger. Any reality that is not part of this production is therefore classified as irrelevant, insignificant, meaningless, or even non-existent.

Second possibility, the importance of the activity in itself, without any real concern for the result. However, this provision is rarer. It already allows greater freedom, it involves increased work on oneself, it provides a certain margin of maneuver to open up the subject when facing his object. It is a matter of work or creation and not of production, as the German philosopher Hannah Arendt distinguishes it. There is a certain gratuity in the second case, unlike the utilitarianism of the first, constrained to the realization of an object. Nevertheless, once again, we are faced with a form of absolutization of this activity, the deprivation of which would be painful, which would lead to a loss of meaning or interest in life. This creates a kind of latent anxiety, a rigidity, which

can become a source of dissatisfaction. An identity is established through this activity, a conditioning of existence, and thus, by this structuring or this formalism, a fragility is established.

Nevertheless, remains to examine the permanence or the stability of this activity, its autonomy, its degree of freedom. Let's go back to the idea of cultivating one's garden: it requires a place, a kind of property where one can act as one pleases, and free time to devote oneself to it, financial means which allow access to certain tools, seeds or products. When it comes to the activity of thinking, nothing conditions it, nothing external can stop it, it needs neither specific tools or products nor a particular place, even if of course certain contexts are more favorable than others. It is not limited by anything, except by the action of the subject himself. This is what made the Dutch philosopher Spinoza write that the activity of reason is a source of joy and freedom more than any other occupation, because it is without external constraint and autonomous. Especially since its object is infinite, which is not the case with gardening, always limited in its scope and action. And even though some may still attach themselves to gardening as a pure activity, it remains very difficult not to worry about the result and not to deplore the limits or the possible impossibility of it. Aware of this problem, Tibetan Buddhist monks compose their mandalas with sand, these pictorial representations traditionally used for initiatory practices, with the aim of finally erasing it, thus recalling the ephemerality of all existence. Therefore they ensure the detachment necessary for spiritual awakening. So we can say that contentment is really possible insofar as frustration becomes possible. The higher the expectations, the greater the risk of disappointment, a risk generating the anxiety that accompanies the simple fact of envisaging this disappoint-

ment. Also humility, the absence of pretension, poverty, the negation of distress about possession, obedience, the disappearance of concern for freedom, are recurring values in various religious or spiritual traditions, as conditions of salvation. Thus the “sacralized object” can take the form of an activity, because this activity gives us a status, an amusement, a pastime, because it gives meaning to our life, because it protects us from ourselves, even from the nothingness of absurdity.

If the human being, given his animal condition, is endowed with an instinct for survival, this vital self-protection is constantly challenged by psychological, relational or spiritual needs which, insofar as they are not satisfied, can undermine or annihilate the satisfaction of this animal instinct. This includes the moral or cultural patterns that generally amplify and support this challenge. It is in this sense that all satisfaction is fragile. Both because its object, that on which it rests and is articulated, is always threatened by circumstances, and because the internal psychic processes, relatively unstable and uncontrolled, periodically question it. There is a kind of need for infinity, an intrinsic greed of reason, which constantly reshuffles the cards, which makes us rethink and doubt, constantly threatening the fragile edifice of satisfaction. Certainly, there are times when we seem to be fulfilled, joyful, happy, there are circumstances, intervals, more or less prolonged periods when we no longer expect anything, when we are satisfied, whatever the object of this satisfaction. That being said, the nature of this satisfaction, its potential for durability, its substantiality, reveals the spiritual level of the subject in question, its potential for illusion, its fragility, the cracks in its being, even its degree of humanity. We can examine these moments when nothing seems needed, the context where the individual seems to be satis-

fied, the climate of satiety which seems to fill him, and infer from this momentary “happiness” the nature of his personality.

The wellbeing

There is a trendy concept, imported from Scandinavia, which is called *Danske Hygge*, “Danish well-being”. This practice can be defined as “doing good to oneself and being satisfied with the simple pleasures of life”. It is even touted as a soul comforter. We are supposed to let the mind escape by savoring small things, by creating a comfortable relaxation context. Some elements of this practice are thus described. “Create a warm space by eliminating clutter, do household chores enthusiastically, set up a cozy corner, light candles in the room, get a few throws or blankets, decorate the house with plants, pour yourself hot drinks from your favorite cup, snuggle up in a good armchair to read a book or watch your favorite series, knit or make gifts, eat good meals, take a relaxing bath, wear comfortable clothes, take your time and not rush, etc”. One of the key themes, quite telling, is to turn one’s home into a sanctuary, which involves protecting oneself from the outside world, considered unfriendly. Strangers, aliens, are seen as an unwelcome addition which will disturb the peace, create unease and make everyone feel uncomfortable. Figuratively, the stranger opens the door and lets the cold in, a cold which from another perspective could be considered “a breath of fresh air”. This fear of the stranger, the comfort of the “near and dear”, is an important cultural issue. With strangers you have to be on your guard, you can never relax. So the *hygge* has to be exclusive, not everyone can be invited. But this dark dimension of the *Danske Hygge* is conveniently overlooked by its promoters.

Satisfaction

A surprising aspect of this new ethic is that it presents itself as “taking care of your mind and your body”. It is interesting to compare this injunction to the Latin *Mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy mind in a healthy body), the principle of which was that of exercise, both physical and mental, that is to say self-challenging, instead of the complacent spirit of the *Danske Hygge*. The latter can be seen as an excellent example of Nietzsche’s “last man”, the individual devoid of aspiration, immersed in the immediate bliss of his own satisfaction. For this thinker: “Man is a rope, between beast and superman stretched – a rope over an abyss (...) What is great in man is to be a bridge and not to be a goal: what in man we can love is that he is a passage and a decline, the decline of man so that the superman may live.” This bridge, this aspiration or opening, is for him the essence of “Become what you are”. The “last man” designates the coming extinction of man’s surpassing of himself. It represents the passive state of nihilism, in which the human will desire nothing more than well-being and security, and will even rejoice in his lack of ambition, drawing satisfaction from his own inertia. “Misfortune! The times are near when man will no longer give birth to stars. Misfortune! The times are close to the most despicable of men, the one who no longer knows how to despise himself.” This is what we find in contemporary injunctions about happiness, which is in fact defined as a slow falling asleep of mind and body. We can also ask ourselves the question about this contemporary phenomenon. This luxury of boredom and this desire for well-being, which was once the privilege of a very small elite, have become the lot of a substantial mass. Is this the consequence of “God is dead”, thus abolishing all requirements, as some thinkers had predicted? Is it the result of a higher standard of living, where a greater proportion of the population does not

have to really worry about its material survival? Is it the disappearance of great social and political aspirations? Because we see indeed that those who have a religious concern, those who find it difficult to survive economically, those who are engaged in some struggle with community principles, are less focused on this quest for well-being as such. It seems to us that in order to be satisfied with one's existence, one needs a kind of dissatisfaction, a familiarity with an impossible aspiration, one form or another of radicality, an ideal of transcendence or of absolute, an openness to infinity. It is only because this dimension of being is absent that we come to think that consuming our favorite drink from our favorite cup could bring us happiness. The two Danish international intellectual celebrities that are the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and the novelist Hans Christian Andersen must be turning in their graves, although both have precisely experienced many setbacks with the "good" Danish society.

In reality, we are anxious for lack of aspiration, thus strangely we just attempt not to "aspire" anymore, trying to throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. By not thinking anymore, we think we can reassure ourselves. By no longer seeking truth or meaning, by no longer challenging our own thinking, our anxiety is supposed to disappear. This is also the theme that we encounter in various psychological or associated spiritual practices, such as meditation for example. We are worried, so stop thinking, let's stay in the immediate present moment and the problem will go away. Without realizing that despite the temporary help that these techniques can bring us, they cannot by themselves fill our feeling of nothingness and our existential angst. In any case, from our standpoint, it is not an issue of filling this gap of being, but of taming it, of reconciling with it. "Do not invite

yourself to paradise before you are dead", says the Turkish proverb, because here below, imperfection is part of perfection, lack of being is part of being, finitude is condition of existence and eternity. Certainly, in the past, religion provided remedies for our anxieties, palliatives for our existential pains, which somewhat short-circuited reason. Whether it dealt with the absurdity of death, the incessant repetition of daily gestures, the permanent struggle for survival, the incessant confrontation with others. But at least these proposals opened up to infinity, they required a minimal asceticism, self-discipline and work on oneself, awareness, even though the faithful were often not so faithful to these ethical requirements, not hesitating to betray them, cheerfully or hypocritically. Strangely, principles, even when we betray them, give us comfort just by their demanding presence.

Now, we seem to perceive in our contemporary Western society a premature aging, a dulling of existence, a discoloration of humanity. We are looking for intellectual and moral comfort, we do not wish to be disturbed, we do not want our feelings to be hurt or our thinking to be troubled or shocked. Self-reflection, as a *mise en abyme*, as critical and distant thought, is not welcome. Under the guise of pluralism, the subject is sacralized as an end in itself, where all aperture to transcendence and infinity are eliminated. We then become very sensitive, we get offended when our expectations are not met, when we hear bothersome ideas, we get frustrated or easily depressed. We are getting old, an aging which is in fact an infantile regression, a phenomenon of early senilization. The individual is not a mediation, he is his own finality. As a result, the soul loses its amplitude, it oscillates on a very restricted course, its bubble of contentment is tiny. Apparently, it is satisfied with little, but in fact it is dissatisfied with much. It sees danger everywhere, it creates

a comfort zone to secure itself. From time to time, the individual is invited to step out of his comfort zone, instead of offering to make the whole world his comfort zone. By way of conclusion, let us propose that accessing peace of mind implies above all to not seek this peace. We can also conceive of it differently. All satisfaction leads to some dissatisfaction. Any desire for satisfaction leads to some dissatisfaction. Disappointment awaits us. It remains to be determined whether this dissatisfaction is a cause of pain, frustration, or whether it presents itself as an opportunity, an opportunity to face oneself and challenge oneself. Those who seek satisfactions above all will be offended by their absence, by their lack, whereas those for whom the challenge lies in the emergence of a power of being will find on the contrary in this negativity a benefit, a salutary lesson.

The satisfied

There are people who feel they are satisfied, who would like to think they are satisfied, who act as if they were satisfied, those who could be called "the satisfied". They seem happy with themselves, they give themselves a certain value and somehow express their satisfaction. Among these satisfied people, we could distinguish those who have a reason to be satisfied, in general because they hold something that the majority does not have: wealth, power, fame, wisdom, or even more insignificant things, like a nice house, a big car, some micro-power, children, a job, etc. Admittedly, the former can be more arrogant, the latter more humble, but this is not a rule. It is sometimes surprising to discover how certain shy-looking people, when you dig a little deeper, when talking to them or in particular circumstances, suddenly manifest how superior or "blessed" they believe themselves to

be. In fact, with or without reason, most contented people are inhabited by a certain pretension, a certain smugness, a certain conceitedness: they think they have something that others do not have. Satisfaction operates most of the time through a comparison. Others play an important role. And in the same way, or for this reason, it must express itself, it must show itself, in one way or another. This need for comparison and display shows its dark side: envy, since there is a permanent comparison with others, a kind of competition. We can see what the German philosopher Hegel calls “the struggle to death for recognition”. This battle is quite visible in those who practice outright arrogance, but it is just as present in those who express it in homeopathic doses, and it is no less significant in their inner-self. We can express this smugness in an aggressive way, or in a softer, more subtle, more affable way, except when this our identity feels threatened, attacked or cornered, when this “soft” strategy does not work, or when it is criticized.

A striking example, a compelling pattern that one encounters particularly in certain cultures or individuals, is that of the person who wants to be of service to others, who wants to advise them, who even feels morally “obligated” to others. He therefore practices what can be called “the gift”, with two possible postures. Either he waits for the “counter-gift”, in the form of reciprocity or immediate gratitude, the other then becomes in fact his “obliged”. Either he refuses the “counter-gift”, prevents it or simply shows some resistance to its acceptance. This may surprise the interlocutor, who does not understand this resistance. But sooner or later he will perceive that this obligation will take on a more subtle, more emotional, or delayed form. It is for example the concept of sacrifice, which in fact is never totally gratuitous, but which provides an intense feeling of satisfaction, ampli-

fied by the gratifying effect of suffering. Another modality in the same vein is the one who wants to help, the person who wants to give, but who cannot bear to have his offer ignored or refused, and who seeks to impose it. This latter phenomenon is common in family relationships, where for example the parent finds it difficult to accept that his opinion or his offering is refused by his child. The parent is content with himself, with his wisdom, his knowledge, his experience, his generosity, his own goodness, and he wants to show it. While the child, in a pre-reflective way, grasps the stakes of power that this implies and refuses, even when what is offered to him makes sense or would be useful: he too wants to be satisfied, by feeling powerful and autonomous, by being himself, whatever that means. But in a general way, the present satisfaction is generated by the fact of being a “good” person and being recognized as such.

Another example of satisfaction, quite close, can be called the “scheme of repressed arrogance”. These are people who think they know, who think they are smarter or wiser than others, without always admitting or admitting to themselves this feeling of superiority. The world, society, others, should operate according to their principles, their ideas: they know what is good and right. They are on the just side of things. But they do not necessarily manifest their convictions: either they speak little, or they avoid displaying their feelings clearly. They only do so when they feel confident, when they think it is safe to speak, or when provoked, when they feel attacked, and then they will speak under the influence of anger. Otherwise, “they say nothing, but do not think less” as the expression goes. They are inhabited by a childish desire to control their environment, knowing that this messy world is impossible to control: it is unfair and random, anything can happen. Even if they cannot determine what is

happening globally, they try to minimize what is happening to them personally. And their mind easily contemplates horrible possibilities: they are worried and fearful. As a result, they maintain hypervigilance, in order to take or retain power as much as possible, counteracting as much as possible the power of others and the chaos of the world that would go against their wishes. This constant state of struggle for control leads to the impossibility of relaxing and to anxiety, but they are satisfied with themselves: they are good people, they are moralists, they know better than others, even if they feel somewhat helpless. They can also be called “shy megalomaniacs”, which is the case with many shy people. Because this shyness is explained by the fact that they fear the judgment of others: this other who will never judge them at their fair value. Precisely because deep inside they have a feeling of superiority, but they fear that by speaking out they will be the subject of an arbitrary, unjustified or malicious judgment. They are very sensitive, they seem weak, but as soon as the opportunity arises or the circumstances lend themselves to it, they show their true face. A typical example is a person who does not appear to look or dare to come forward in a public situation, but who privately pulls out his claws and is aggressive and dictatorial, the so-called domestic tyrant.

Another case of the “satisfied” is the nice person. Any opportunity for him is opportune to express his kindness, to help, to show his good heart, his gentleness, his altruism. For example, in social networks, he loves to put little hearts in the messages received. Of course, he is worried, because he wants to be seen, accepted, appreciated, valued, and he can easily feel rejected and hurt by bad people. But the latter are the wicked, and he is not like them, he is a good person. Moreover, he is smiling, but his smile nevertheless remains

Satisfaction

that of a beggar: he is constantly in search of confirmation and recognition, he eagerly awaits the smile of others.

The satisfaction enthusiast will do everything to be satisfied, or at least to believe in his satisfaction, to claim it, to display it, at the cost of a distortion of reality. He does not appreciate the dark side of things, especially that of his own being. The void, the absence, the negative, the unbearable nothingness. He will try to avoid them, to forget them, to deny them, to hide them with the most impudent lies, in particular by practicing the lying by omission. Satisfaction, contrary to appearances, is without rest or truce. Its cost is grueling labor, tireless effort. You have to work constantly to produce an image, to convince others and above all to convince yourself, which is the most difficult thing. Its practice stems from an impressive ability to embellish reality, to transform it, to warp it in order to produce the desired effect, so that the show operates. Strangely, the more extravagant it is, the more believable it is. Even when the boat sinks or the house collapses, when civil war reigns, it is necessary at all costs to maintain appearances, serenity, happiness, *joie de vivre*, love or any nonsense. As in advertising, it's all in the message, regardless of the reality.

There are various forms, various modalities of elaborating and expressing one's satisfaction. Some opt for a forced cheerfulness, they want to be sparkling, enthusiastic, they joke, they like distraction, they banter or even exult permanently. Some show themselves rather settled, calm and thoughtful, they want to be quiet or distant, nothing surprises or scandalizes them, they opt for the posture of the wise. Some are imposing, pompous or arrogant, they want to show their importance, their flagrant superiority, they are clearly above the fray, they can be hurtful or condescending. Some show themselves to be learned or profound, they ex-

press themselves in an affected, complicated or disdainful way, they pontificate, they profess, they exhibit the weight of their knowledge, they reveal the incomprehension that surrounds them. Some are kind, affable, they surround others with their consideration without even being asked, they are good, they are gentle, they are generous, they are useful to others, they are full of empathy. Some play the idiots, the naive, they are spontaneous and sincere, they only see the good in everyone, they are carefree, they are positive, they live in an amusement park where reigns a stupid banality, a permanent happiness, where everything is cute, everything is nice. Some are busy, they are always busy, they do not have time and they run in all directions, they saturate their daily life with countless activities to finally get a well-deserved rest. Some are moral, they represent good, justice or equality, they criticize evil or make themselves the apostles of virtue, according to their temperament they attack or defend, but they represent integrity, high principles, decency and duty. Some talk and talk again, they drown in their own words, from morning to night they talk, they look for someone to talk to, to tell stories or to convince, without worrying about reason, in order to invent reality, and if they cannot find some helpless or compassionate victim, talking to themselves hardly frightens them. Of course, it is neither forbidden nor unthinkable to combine these different genres, some of them can moreover overlap or be combined quite easily.

Whatever the role for which the “satisfied” opts, whatever the form of satisfaction he will have chosen, undoubtedly unconsciously, it is obvious that like any role, the function knows its limits. To believe in his character, the actor needs spectators, at least to make his job easier, to provide him with motivation, granting him the energy necessary in or-

der to deploy the hero he claims to embody. Then, when the witnesses disappear, when the lanterns go out and the curtain falls, when the clown, tired of having toiled so hard playing his comedy, finds himself alone in his dressing room, laughter is no longer appropriate. When for various reasons, external circumstances or intimate troubles, it is no longer possible to assume the function, to play the game, a reversal takes place. A feeling of absurdity creeps in, surreptitiously or suddenly, violently, arousing bitterness, sadness or anger. The strength of the psychological backlash will be proportional to the efforts that have been exerted. It is clear that it is not possible to play a role permanently, without being confronted with its vanity, its inconsistency, its frivolity, its arrogance. The repetition, the formalism of the ritual, the pressure of the need, the existential obligation, the feeling of absurdity, the psychological fatigue, are responsible for reminding the satisfied of the facticity of his character, and the lack of freedom that accompanies it. In addition, the shadow of this character, his evil twin, the bad conscience and the negativity of this specious garnering constantly lurks. At the turn of the road, the slightest breath could shake or bring down the house of cards. It is therefore necessary to redouble our care and toil, multiply words and actions, because any semblance of emptiness would reveal the tenuousness of the enterprise. Moreover, when the satisfied person senses a threat, his action suffers, his routine changes, he can easily abandon the position and get angry. He relies on the social pact, which prohibits intrusion, parrhesia or conflict. Everyone must act "as if", just as in kindergarten, to the extent they are well brought up. Others must play the game, enter the circle, for the pact to be realized, for the illusion to endure, in order to seal the relationship. It is so easy to get along well, peace to men of good will, welcome to the manor

of good conscience. We can have pity on those who do not know how to play, on those who do not want to play, unless we are irritated by them. Sometimes this other gets tired, by dint of promiscuity, he gets tired of the game that is offered to him, in general not for the sake of authenticity but to impose his own whim

Instability of satisfaction

The dissatisfied is obsessed with the negative, which both attracts and repulses him, which he constantly fights, which makes him act. The satisfied rather tries to deny this negative, to hide it, to escape it, but implicitly he is no less obsessed by it, although he prefers to remain unconscious, trying to keep this shadow in the shadows. He prefers to set up a cozy space, a sort of little existential paradise. His actions, his incentives live up when under safeguard, thus the importance of protecting this privileged scene. Some are doing quite well, the walls are still quite strong. They rather find contentment in the myth they inhabit. As long as the negativity is not expressed in too blatant a form. Others succeed by a phenomenon of sublimation, making this negativity the engine of their existence, while denying the negativity of this negativity, a reality that they should not be reminded too much of. But they nevertheless pay the price, themselves and those around them, because such denial is never without consequences. One of the common strategies, when the specter of the abyss looms on the horizon, when the shock threatens, or when initial upheavals are announced, is to cover this threat with a veil of insignificance, to dilute its value and strength, in order to remove it with a simple hand gesture. To reduce its importance: it was only a brief moment of bewilderment, it will be better later. Un-

til, by its own inertia, nothingness imposes itself in a more emphatic, more pathological way. The fragile stability of contentment. Truth always ends up imposing itself, however pregnant, tenacious and seductive the illusion may be. Some have nevertheless developed more solid patterns than others, they are quite successful in not hearing bad news or forgetting them, eliminating those who peddle it or running away from it. They know how to somehow integrate accidents along the way, overcoming these obstacles, pitfalls or embarrassments, accidental or resulting from the will of others. But you never know when and how the soufflé will collapse, or on which side, a prospect of anger, sadness, resentment, even of madness.

The world is imperfect, being is finite in nature, life is a long process of survival, in the face of lack, in the face of illness, in the face of death, in the face of uncertainty and the anxieties it engenders. Nevertheless, temporarily there are oases of tranquility and enjoyment that persist as best they can. Some have become masters in the art of deceitful preservation, others have found a way to accept reality in its entirety, its tides, waves and undertows. Admittedly, the satisfaction of the latter is more solid than that of the former. The former is more primitive, more animal: it lives rather in the moment, it thrives on small pleasures, whatever their nature, as we described earlier. Little heavenly moments coupled with a desperate hope of eternity. But it does not know how to welcome the irruption of reality, to welcome disappointment, to face the unpredictable, it does not know how to perceive its benefit, because it apprehends the challenge, it denounces it, it fears it, it disgusts him, he doesn't know how to see in it the opportunity to deploy its power of being. Such an individual is like the patient who prefers to fight, erase or divert the symptoms of his illness,

rather than seeing the usefulness or the necessity of these intrusive manifestations. Daily symptoms of this disease of the soul, signature of man, which we prefer to ignore.

To explain this specific pattern of satisfaction, Sartre proposes the concept of bad faith. By playing a role, by over-playing it, by trying to invest themselves in it, body and soul, the individual slowly constitutes himself an identity, an existential stability, a reason for being, an image. But as a result, he loses sight of his freedom, he detaches himself from reality by attaching himself to an empirical facticity, artificial because superficial. Thus according to one's history, according to the circumstances, according to one's possibilities, one will become a teacher, an entrepreneur, a seducer, a parent, he will be tough, gentle or savage, a role that he will work on over time, an image that he will refine slowly, to the detriment of the truth, to the detriment of our being which rejects any determination, which refuses any rigid and protective anchorage. Thus each individual is the site of a contest between his empirical self, which operates in bad faith and tries to build and preserve its fortress, and the transcendental self, subtle ally of the principle of reality. The first operates through an instrumental reason, the purpose of which is already established, "all bets are off", the second through a free and open reason, where everything is questioned, where the quest is permanent, where the chips are never down. Strangely, one could support the idea that our true identity, or our substantial identity, is elusive, indeterminate, detached, and in this sense we remain available to the world, we remain open to otherness. Is it satisfactory? No doubt not, because satisfaction is no longer required, it loses its meaning, and perhaps because of this it remains possible. Instead of dispersing in the superficial scattering of empirical being, endlessly in pursuit of existential crumbs,

the spirit finds itself quietly in its own non-being. He observes himself as one observes a child playing in the garden, taking his childish preoccupations seriously.

Another interesting track is that of Zhuangzi: availability. Remain open to the world, contemplate it quietly, in a detached way, in order to be able to react in the appropriate way. Play the game, understand the rules, but don't believe in it too much. Perceive the lines of reality in order to better get along, although remembering that Hundun, chaos, is the mother of all things. Even though the harmony of the Dao ensures that everything is in its place, that everything that exists acts as it should, the mark of indeterminacy remains visible and slips into the interstices. Thus it is a matter of not clenching the rules, and not adhering too much to the established principles. It is not a question of therapy, but of an openness to the world and to oneself, a self that is not separated from the world. Our only real personal identity, says the philosopher, is the Dao. Neither dissatisfaction, since we enjoy reality, nor satisfaction, since we possess nothing.

The Danaïdes' barrel

The infant, a small being who has not yet really reached his own humanity, quickly oscillates between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Even more than by desire, he is driven by needs, which must be satisfied, otherwise he will be in pain and even traumatized, whether these needs be physiological or psychological in nature: meals, cuddles, distractions, etc. Either he suffers from the need, he is unsatisfied, or his demands have been satisfied, and he enjoys his satisfaction. He constantly alternates between these two states, without interruption. As soon as he wakes up he enters this fluctuation, an incessant rolling. Growing up, hopefully he will

experience desire, meaning that he will learn to detach himself from himself, accepting that his expectations are not met. The amplitude of this oscillation will therefore come to be attenuated, without ever disappearing, because life, human existence, cannot achieve complete stability. Certainly, equanimity, emotional constancy, can be considered a virtue, a psychological regulation that guarantees the autonomy of the subject when facing the world and facing himself, but it always remains an ideal to be achieved. The tranquility of the soul is advanced by many forms of wisdom as the main canon of personal achievement, for example the *ataraxia* of the Greek philosophers, the absence of passions. But it seems to us that there is a kind of illusion of neutrality that would allow us to escape the reality of the world, as if it were a question of protecting ourselves from it, of withdrawing from it. Admittedly, this withdrawal is possible, even useful and necessary, but it only constitutes a moment, an ephemeral possibility, a reflux of the soul which has meaning and significance only in its relation to the flow, that is to say a benevolent reception of reality, a grasp of otherness, its taming, its appropriation. If we are not at home everywhere in the world, if we do not make the totality of reality our own, we will constantly feel threatened.

Mâitre Eckhart, German philosopher and theologian of the Middle Ages, proposes as the supreme value of Christianity the concept of “detachment”, which for him is the most powerful access to God, since God then comes to us. More powerful than love or mercy. But to have meaning, to be “complete”, this detachment is also accompanied by the “detachment of detachment”. In other words, to attach to detachment would be a paralogism, an error, by hyperbolizing the concept, whereas its nature must remain dialectical and reflexive. In the same way, Zhuangzi, who proposes the con-

cept of "taking a leisurely stroll" as an existential model, does not necessarily invite us to escape the world, although such a retreat may be momentarily beneficial or appropriate, but to take a leisurely stroll in the world, that is to say not to try fleeing from reality, but escaping it while inhabiting it, being distant while close to it. It is above all a matter of reconciliation, accompanied by an adequate perception of the world in its deeper reality, without allowing oneself to be disturbed by circumstances and details. This can be seen as a criticism of those who practice withdrawal, in order to meditate or pacify their minds, artificially, since when they find themselves in the world, they get carried away by the chaos and the flow of worldly events. In such a schizophrenic schema, withdrawal can be considered a form of complacency, since it does not know how to put itself to the test of exteriority, and therefore also of its own interiority. It does not participate in the power of being, at best it is a simple compensatory rest. From such a perspective, the return to the world is painful, it is suffering and drudgery. That is the essence of non-reflexive detachment.

One of the strong arguments of the promoters of meditation in its popular and current form, is both to go beyond thought, and to think better, which could be a tad contradictory insofar as one improves in an exercise when it is practiced. And this meditation certainly does not invite to think since it advocates a "beyond the mental". In fact, the problem is based on a confusion: a kind of equivalence is established between "thinking" and "worrying", which makes sense because what most people call thinking is in fact only worry, and they do not know how to distinguish between the two. In order to clarify, let us make the following distinctions. Thinking is a conscious, structured, controlled, free, creative and joyful exercise. Worry is a compulsive,

semi-conscious, uncontrolled, chaotic, repetitive, nagging, sad and agonizing phenomenon. Worry is a necessary part of the mind, keeping it lively, but one can indeed worry too much, or worry inappropriately. But to think too much makes no sense, it would be like painting too much for a painter. As soon as there is excess, it is no longer a matter of thought in a rigorous sense, since measure is a characteristic of reason. Admittedly, the line of demarcation between the two is not entirely clear and sharp, because a certain chaos is constitutive of thought as well. But for most people, thinking in the strict sense of the term remains the smallest part of their mental activity. So they suffer from it, they are anxious, and the promise of a "beyond thought" seems promising, pleasant and useful to them. They indeed have the impression of thinking better because they somewhat calm down their internal chaos, but their "thinking better" is quite limited. Moreover, they will be reluctant to practice a real thinking exercise, because their anxiety will then take over. They also throw the baby out with the bathwater and often refrain from thinking, whereas a real exercise in reflection, with its diligence and constraint, would on the contrary help them to better control their psychic and existential functioning. But we can understand that they appreciate meditation, which in fact is above all a therapeutic instrument. Unless they practice conceptual meditation, a trend that we encounter in all the traditions of meditation, but which remains the prerogative of a limited minority in view of the difficulty and the requirement that it represents. For example, in Buddhism, the simplicity of the Dalai Lama is much more popular than the writings of Nagarjuna, the great Buddhist philosopher of the third century, which are real provocations for the mind. Thus the consolation of mundane meditation, when examined closely, turns out to be a somewhat fragile compensa-

tion for existential difficulties, even if it has real utility. But its limits are not easy to perceive, insofar as it would be necessary to seriously practice the art of thinking in order to achieve it.

One of the contemporary popular recipes for achieving happiness is the principle of “accepting yourself”. It is true that being at war with oneself, even though it may be a motivation to act, to find meaning in our daily life, to improve oneself or any another existential purpose, in spite of its necessity and usefulness remains a cause of suffering and anxiety, contrary to the principle of satisfaction. But we observe that this “self-acceptance” can go in two different directions. If it is not taken as an end in itself but as a simple means, a possible attitude, it can indeed pave the way for a kind of balance, wisdom, peace of mind. It presents a condition, a state of mind which allows the emergence of values, the formulation of an existential project, a serene and clear conscience which allows us to apprehend the world and ourselves, to actualize its power of being. But if this “self-acceptance” is an end in itself, if it implies a state of complete satisfaction, however fictitious or impossible such a concept may be, it then conveys a connotation of stagnation. And such a state or principle is foreign to life, and therefore over time it will necessarily generate discomfort, dissatisfaction, tensions in the relationship to the world and to oneself. Because if this “self-acceptance” is its own goal, it implies a withdrawal into oneself in order to protect oneself from any solicitation, from any challenge. From then on, the being is deprived of its natural inclination, of the legitimate need to deploy itself in the world, with all the work on oneself that this implies. Just like life, being is above all a dynamic entity, so any attempt to paralyze or fossilize it, even if in a quest for comfort or stability, will lead to negative consequences, to

inner corrosion and instability. Moreover, there is an intrinsic fracture of being, or multiple fractures, which one cannot hide or put under a bushel without accentuating the internal burn. The individual needs to articulate, to express, to exteriorize his internal discordances, to let them play their own game and to experience their intrinsic dynamics. Any attempt at formal or artificial pacification cannot last long. In this sense, any attempt at satisfaction is a form of alienation, in the negative sense of the term. Ignoring internal conflicts, pretending that they do not exist or repressing them is the same as ignoring or repressing the need for self-fulfillment, the need for the realization of being. Certainly, we can end up dulling the living forces of the psyche, but the result will be a certain disintegration, a weakening of the self which will generate anger, anxiety or depression. We cannot deny the negativity, even if a certain illusory nostalgia for childish bliss or the hope of spiritual paradises seem to us seductive temptations.

The German philosopher Friedrich Schiller offers us the instinct of play as an ideal of humanization, precisely to reconcile satisfaction and dissatisfaction, to experience the satisfaction of dissatisfaction. Because the game is a dialectical exercise. When we play, we are put to the test, faced with rules, faced with constraints, faced with others, faced with space and time, faced with reality, etc. We are under the effect of a tension, in order to play as well as possible. But at the same time, this tension is joyful, it is a pleasure in itself, it worries us, moves us and pleases us simultaneously. A principle that we can apply to life in general, provided we do not want to win at all costs. Obsessed with winning, we no longer play, we are ready to cheat, because it is the result that counts above all: we no longer enjoy the process, and our anxiety makes us suffer. Moreover, when we are frus-

Satisfaction

trated with ourselves and our results, we no longer play, we are too irritable. In the same way, when we seek satisfaction at all costs, we don't play either, it would be too risky. Friedrich Nietzsche expresses a similar idea by explaining that through the game of creation, the spirit now wants itself, it wants to create the world, and like a child it knows the joys of life and the innocence of ceaseless creation. Or again, as with Zhuangzi, according to which our true self coincides with the Dao, satisfaction can only operate through the dialectical coincidence between self-forgetting and self-care, in a process of flux, of transformation, a satisfaction contrary to any form of complacency.

It seems that a common mistake is to want to satisfy our empirical and immediate being, a dangerous temptation, because this reduced dimension of the self functions like the barrel of the Danaides. These fifty daughters of King Danaos, for killing their husbands, are condemned to Hell and must endlessly fill a perforated barrel, without ever reaching the end of their sentences. Socrates uses this image to show that to give free rein to one's desires is to condemn oneself to eternal frustration, because no sooner are they satisfied that we new ones surge, or that we need new desires. Our capacity to generate concerns and wants is infinite, precisely because we conceive of ourselves in opposition to the world, in opposition to others, in opposition to reason, the inevitable lot of the empirical subject, unlike the transcendent subject. The relative disappearance of the "I", its symbolic death, its *mise en abyme*, makes it possible to envisage a satisfaction worthy of the name, a satisfaction which subsumes dissatisfaction, which does not fall into the tempting trap of stagnation.

Also, when we make well-being or happiness an ultimate goal, whether physical, material or spiritual, as is commonly

seen today, we easily fall into the trap of the infernal couple of stagnation and dissatisfaction. This unsurpassable value, which we admire, considered as the alpha and omega of existence, advocated at length in magazines, books, television programs or others, for which we find coaches and gurus, can certainly have a certain utility, one can find there some receipts facilitating life, even certain light auto-therapies. We encounter as well a certain hygienism, a fascination with the body and illness, a fear of old age and death, a desire for immortality, a phenomenon which manifests our difficulty with the principle of the finitude of being, a particular expression of this same principle of dissatisfaction. Traditional religions had at least the advantage of making us work on ourselves, by inviting us to become aware of our limits and by challenging them, by putting aside or attenuating usual, banal and complacent concerns of daily life. The simple fact of the perspective of an absolute as an opening on infinity can in this sense play an interesting role for the psyche, in opposition to a glorification of one's person, considered as an absolute, impossible to satisfy.

The fatality of need

Often, satisfaction is expressed through the action of complying with needs, our own needs, fulfilling them, and we now wish to examine the importance of this concept of "need" in the dynamic of satisfaction. To designate "need", the ancient Greek language had an interesting concept: *ananke*. It is rather untranslatable in a rigorous way because of its polysemy. As often with loaded concepts, any translation is really a betrayal of meaning, since the words that will be proposed as equivalents in some other language often lack some dimension of signification, miss some spe-

cific aspects; any translation will necessarily operate a kind of reduction of the term and limit the scope of its significance. Each language and culture constructs some semiotic field around given terms, produced through semantic associations and metaphoric slidings, rather specific and idiosyncratic. Those meanings can sometimes seem disconnected and accidental, but it is always interesting to examine the coherency of their content, as a worthy conceptual exercise.

Let us first establish the different meanings of the term *ananke*, we will then try to see how they can be related to the idea of “need”. This study will provide some interesting insights in Greek thinking, and reason in general, since any particular case always indicates some universal implications. The most general sense of *ananke* would probably be the idea of “necessity”, as a fundamental law of nature. From there, it entails other metaphysical meanings such as “fatality”, “fate” or “destiny”, or more anthropological ones such as “physical or moral necessity”. Another coherent derivative will then be “violence”, “force”, or “coercion”, since necessity indeed does not leave us any choice and we are constrained and impelled by its rules. Immediately, this will have consequences on our general state, and this unpleasant forcing will produce “pain” and “misery”. Further in this direction of forcing and pain, we find the idea of “violent means”, “torture”, “imprisonment”, “chains”, “fetters”. Less aggressive but still compelling, from an intellectual standpoint there is “rational argument” or “demonstration”, from a more moral or physical standpoint, there are “family or blood ties”.

Thus we must not be surprised that the term *ananke* refers in a general manner to “needs”, be they moral, psychological, physical, intellectual or other, and that is the point that we find interesting and speaking in the present context. We wish to bring this perspective closer to a common request

and paradigm encountered today, where people flaunt their needs as an expression of their personality and their freedom. They are proud of having very particular needs that nobody has, or to claim the importance or the strength of their needs. They project needs in every aspect of their life, and they articulate their freedom within the context of these needs: expressing them and satisfying them.

Before we enter the study of “artificial” needs, we should say a few words about “natural” needs, or “organic” needs, since the attentive reader will object that they cannot be by-passed, that they cannot be neglected or ignored. In a way, we cannot ignore the value of such an objection, and so it is with basic physical needs such as eating, drinking, resting, breathing, urinating, or more psychological needs such as socializing, loving, engaging in an activity in order not to remain idle, etc. But it seems to us that even with those unavoidable needs related to our nature as human beings, be they psychological or physical, there still remains a dimension of function of our freewill, a share of deliberate self-determination. This characteristic manifests itself in the way we relate to those needs, through the significance we grant them, through the time and energy invested in those needs, through the symbolic or psychological value we grant to their satisfaction. For example, eating is a basic animal need, but some people give much more importance to it than others, either in the efforts and the care displayed in the preparation of the food, or in the obsession with eating. Another example is reproduction, and if numerous people engender children, they will identify with the engendering and the rearing of those children to various degrees, ranging between a relative indifference to an extreme fusional attachment. In both examples, the degree of satisfaction - and dis-

satisfaction - will be proportional to the importance granted to those needs.

Let us now examine less basic, more arbitrary or fabricated needs. For example the expression “I need a drink”. Generally it is expressed with some joyous connotation, as the indicator as a liberating moment where one will have fun, preferably with others: this announcement often implies that others are invited to drink as well, since generally we prefer to drink in the company of others. But if we attentively examine this “call”, we often can notice some undertones of stress, sadness, melancholy or even distress. If we analyze it carefully, the implication of this avowal is the following. “The day was hard, I feel tense, this tension is rather unpleasant or painful, therefore I want to relax, but I cannot relax through my own natural means, in consequence I need to drink some alcohol, the indispensable tool for my relaxation, relieving me from this unpleasant tension.” And we all know how for some individuals, this need installs itself and stiffens, becoming a real obligation, an unavoidable necessity. As well, we should admit that this drinking moment, no matter how light it is, often leads to a rather amorphous state, devoid of any dynamism, where one will lackadaisically indulge in his own inertia. Of course, one hesitates to systematically qualify this behavior as alcoholism, since it sometimes constitutes a rather benign form of drinking habit, where one never or rarely gets drunk, but the tendency is there, well established, as a strong feature of a person’s existential modality, which can easily intensify itself.

From this analysis, we can see how the apparently metaphorical statement “I need a drink” can become an actual literal reality. And the fine line between those two states, metaphorical need and actual need, can be quite hard to establish: the sliding remains very slippery and imper-

ceptible. The dependency easily installs itself, depriving the individual of his power and his free will. The mind and being become mushy. The individual, affected in his own strength and ability, his capacity of judgment and decision being undermined, cannot not suffer from it, even though his senses are momentarily numbed by the softening effect of the alcohol. The problem with this type of schemes is that their *modus operandi* is insidious: it takes effect slowly, and when at length we finally notice it, it seems too late, since the need has taken a strong grip on ourselves, becoming a structural necessity. Thus it is with most forms of dependency, including the ones that seem initially pleasant, soft and innocuous, like the addiction to different internet products, such as video games, social networks or virtual entertainments. Those apparently soft behaviors have become the pathologies that are the object of today's psychological therapies, since with time and a growing intensity they reveal themselves as painful and destructive.

We can ask ourselves why those needs are so “acceptable”, why they are so commonly defended and even advocated. And ironically, we observe that for many of those who practice them, they represent an expression of freedom and satisfaction. We can formulate the hypothesis that it is primarily because they provide some type of psychological comfort. In order to compensate for the harshness of human existence, we need some form of consolation, some palliative that will alleviate the pain and anguish of daily life. But let us not forget, as the Greek knew and French philosopher Jacques Derrida underlined, that the term *pharmakon*, which means “remedy” means as well “poison”, or even “scapegoat”. Let us for example examine the popular usage of “series”, classically a TV production being presented in regular episodes, often a weekly periodicity, although to-

day one can watch them in streaming format in a continuous fashion. There again, we can recognize the claim for a need. Life is hard, life is boring, life is heavy, therefore we need something that will distract us from our pain, something easy to do, something light, something entertaining and pleasant, that will make us forget the drudgery of our daily routine and project us in a more exciting world where we can live by proxy. It could constitute a mere temporary and mild distraction, to the extent it does not become a need. But strangely enough, it provides much more satisfaction to the person for whom it is a need than for the person for whom it is just a trivial and playful moment, even though he enjoys it.

Thus through the dynamic of the need surge fatality, pain and suffering, since for such a person daily life becomes more difficult, heavy and boring, any effort becoming unbearable, from which the addiction to these series becomes natural and easy. Of course, there are numerous types of psychological recourse in the practice and management of this type of activity, and for some persons it does not represent a real problem, even though they binge on it once in a while or regularly. Just like for drinking, some individuals with a strong psyche can manage quite well with a bad habit, but it is not the case for the majority, who easily falls in the trap and gets existentially castrated by such an inclination. Thus it seems that the degree of satisfaction is proportional to the need, although through time the pleasure will slowly diminish as the need will grow, a phenomenon clearly identified in the psychology of drug addicts, which implies an increase of the need and an increase in the consumption sufficient to provide some satisfaction. And as the need and the consumption intensify, we can notice a certain tendency for

a falling rate of profit, just as Marx had identified it in capitalist production.

Let us take another example, of different nature: the conscious or unconscious claim for recognition, the “need” for recognition. Those who have this need are quite pleased when they get signs or expressions of this recognition. Although some of those are lucky fellows that obtain a lot of it, or live some continuous manifestation of this recognition, the majority of people are generally in this domain still in a state of want, and unsatisfied. And actually, even those who could be satisfied, for example because they obtained some significant function or title that guarantees them a perennial “existential annuity”, they are in fact not really satisfied. As we saw with the Danaids’ barrel, satisfaction of need is an eternal task. That is why we are often surprised, when we meet someone who seems to have gained more than enough recognition and seems formally satisfied with himself, but nevertheless is susceptible and sensitive about the way that he is treated or talked about, getting easily offended for example. We realize he has the same necessity, the same fatality, the same chains, the same torture as any wretched creature that is a total social failure. But maybe the former is more anxious and less easily satisfied than the latter, just as in the drug addict phenomenon we described earlier, where the frequency of the dose diminishes the pleasure.

We find an interesting illustration of this phenomenon in social networks. Among different motivations for joining such groups, an important one is the desire to see one-self in a public place and to be seen. So we could think that in itself the satisfaction could be sufficient, since one satisfied the need to “express oneself” in the eyes of everyone. It is true at the beginning, but quickly, the individual wants more: he wants to be appreciated, he wants “likes”, he ex-

pects little hearts, he desires positive comments about his posts, he wants to be “shared” and “tagged”, and he is happy when he gets all this. But of course this happiness is followed by deception when the “positive flux” stops, and even worse if it becomes a “negative flux”, engendering depression and sometimes even suicide. And in reality, even a constant “positive flux” eventually becomes draining, due to its insubstantiality.

In order to come back to the term *ananke*, we can notice in our analysis the different meanings or facets of “need”. A certain law of nature, through psychological or existential principles. The “fatality” or “fate” of the victim of needs, a self-constructed inescapable “destiny” . The “violence” or “force” those needs provoke, the “coercion” the needy person imposes on himself, producing “pain” and “misery”. He unconsciously “tortures” himself, “imprisons” himself, he ties himself in “chains” and “fetters”. And to justify this “need”, he will produce “rational argument” or “demonstrate” its legitimacy and meaningfulness, enforcing even further his self-made dictatorship. Lastly, with “blood ties”, we all know how the concept of family is loaded with the idea of “obligation”, often quite abusive. And ironically, as we underlined earlier, all these claims for needs, these bragging about one’s needs, are expressed under the guise of some so-called freedom. This reminds us of the contemporary expression of “a person with special needs”, which through the effect of political correctness came to replace the term “handicapped”, now considered derogatory. Thus overall, we can conclude on the indissociable or inseparable nature of the opposite terms, “satisfaction” and “dissatisfaction”, eternally and mutually engendering each other, a typical case of *enantiodromia*.

Epilogue - Satisfaction and self-destruction

(This Epilogue is largely inspired by the work of Byung-Chul Han, a contemporary German-Korean philosopher.)

The fascination with one's needs and one's satisfaction can as well be explained with another concept gaining some interest today: "algophobia", the fear of pain, the incapacity to endure pain, a noticeable phenomenon in our society of comfort. Thus, what could be simple desires becomes needs, because the difficulty with accepting frustration transforms mere desires into needs that absolutely have to be satisfied. Weirdly enough, a society of satisfaction becomes a society of dissatisfaction, although both terms are indissociable, as we have already outlined. One cannot know satisfaction without an ability to peacefully accept dissatisfaction. But although never has any society provided so much comfort and security to its members, never have there been heard, it seems, so many complaints and demands, in particular for safety, as if our very life should be "insured". Although one can argue that technical progress and democratization of communication devices have rather facilitated the expression of pain and complaint. Unless this expression has become a major factor in the development of algophobia, since hearing each other's complaints can naturally reinforce our own, making it more legitimate since it is a common endeavor.

We can claim that one's relation to pain is quite revealing about his personality, about his level of maturity. And the logical consequence of this phobia is a general state of anesthesia, the new regulatory ideal, what Nietzsche calls the "last man", in opposition to the "overman", who is always challenging himself. An American expert on pain, David B. Morris, remarked some time ago: "Americans today prob-

ably belong to the first generation on earth that looks at a pain-free life as something like a constitutional right. Pain is a scandal.” Therefore we all expect to be satisfied, dissatisfaction is intolerable. This allergy to pain can explain why we can observe the spreading of a high degree of sensitivity, a very subjective mental state. An example of this is the common argument “this makes me uncomfortable”, considered quite substantial and legitimate, when uncomfortability could be viewed as the key to any stimulating challenge. This creates strange contradictions, where people at the same time want the freedom to express themselves publicly, displaying their self and their desires, and want to protect information about themselves. Of course, this desire for contentment and happiness leads to a rather egocentric worldview, since otherness is always uncomfortable. Social networks management understand this expectation very well, who tend to provide us with information that reinforce our feelings and beliefs. The fascination with health, physical or psychological, and “positivity” are good examples of this trend.

According to neurologists, when our environment causes us less and less pain, the part of our nervous system that registers pain seems to become increasingly sensitive. Thus algophobia makes us extremely sensitive to pain, it can even induce pain. The person who regularly copes with pain is less sensitive. If we fear pain, we listen obsessively to our little self, body and mind, we become narcissistic. From this comes this insistence on positivity, for example the fear of criticism. But paradoxically, or out of enantiodromia, this excessive positivity engenders itself a strong criticism, even a strong self-criticism, where the individual inhibits and castrates himself, prohibiting truth and his own power to exist.

Satisfaction

There is a sort of war against oneself, just like there is a war against the outside, which becomes dark and dangerous.

Ironically, we want to protect our dearly acquired anesthesia, as illusory as it is, even though we suffer from it. And it is only through the painful shock of the reality that strikes us that we are able to emerge from it and come to life, but we want to ward ourselves off this reality. It is through pain that the mind reaches new insights, higher forms of knowledge and consciousness. As Hegel wrote, the mind is characterized by a capacity to preserve itself within contradiction and therefore in pain. It develops through this contradiction with itself. It divides itself, it is pained by this division, but this pain ensures that the mind keeps on forming itself. The formation of being presupposes the negativity of pain. The mind overcomes the painful contradiction by developing into a higher form. Pain is the motor of the dialectical formation of the mind. It transforms the mind.

Transformations are thus tied to pain. Without pain, the mind remains identical with itself, it cannot envisage its own death, the dying to itself. But death and pain are not trendy, they do not belong to the digital order. They represent disturbances to the immediate satisfaction, they imply a painful distance. Today, everything must be ready at hand, quickly, as Heidegger denounced it. And unconsciously, the “other” has to fit me, to make me satisfied, he is therefore objectified, just as I am objectified. Our strong desire for satisfaction engenders the deepest dissatisfaction, the rejection of the world and our very self.