

TO WRITE
OR
NOT TO WRITE

SMALL NOTE FOR THOSE
WHO SUFFER FROM WRITING

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Often, when we organize workshops on philosophical writing, we notice that most people enroll in this activity with the expectation of some technical improvements in their skill, or hoping to discover some gimmicks in order to stimulate an inhibited or frustrated desire. But often they did not really reflect on their reasons to write, they are not clear on their motivations, or those end up being rather superficial. Thus an important part of our work is to clarify the nature of the writing activity. In particular, to unveil its ontological or existential dimension. Writing is first and foremost, whatever the topic, before any literary production, a work on oneself, on the clarity and authenticity of being.

I

RILKE

As a good way to address this reductionist or pragmatic focus on writing, we can start with some ideas from *Letters to a Young Poet*, by Rainer Maria Rilke, an early 20th century poet and novelist, a collection of ten letters sent to a young aspiring poet asking for advice to a famous author, about poetry and as well about his life as a writer. Rilke responded with thoughtful and profound reflections on creativity, solitude, love, and the inner life of an artist, offering some wisdom and encouragement for anyone pursuing a creative path. Let us examine some of the main points of those letters.

Rilke first of all outlines that one should write only if they feel an inner compulsion to do so, through an internal necessity, rather than seeking success or external approval. He emphasizes the importance of writing as a deeply personal and authentic expression of one's innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences. For him, writing offers a means of self-exploration and self-discovery. Through the act of writing, individuals can delve into the depths of their own psyche, confront their fears and uncertainties, and gain insight into the complexity of human existence. Therefore he stresses the importance of honesty and authenticity in writing, authors should be true to themselves, they should write from the heart, avoiding artifice or pretense and easy approval.

Writing should be a genuine expression of one's inner truth. Paradoxically, this inner truth can foster a profound sense of connection

with others. Through their authentic writing, individuals can reach out across time and space, touch the lives of others, and create meaningful connections that transcend individual experience. He describes writing as a lifelong journey of artistic growth and mastery, but one has to tackle and embrace the challenges of the creative process, to persist in their craft, through hardship and uncertainties, and to continually strive for excellence and refinement in their work. Then considered as a spiritual practice, writing leads to profound inner transformation and enlightenment, a means of attuning oneself to the mysteries of existence, connecting with the divine, and transcending the limitations of the ego.

Rilke places significant emphasis on the solitude of the writer, viewing it as essential for self-accomplishment. He does not consider it as loneliness or isolation, but as a necessary state for artistic development and inner reflection. One should not fear it, but embrace it as a vital part of the creative process. Only in solitude can one truly engage with their inner self, explore their deepest thoughts and emotions, and develop their unique voice. Being alone allows individuals to confront their fears, desires, and uncertainties, leading to greater self-awareness and authenticity in their work. It enables writers to develop their “world”, fostering a rich inner life that can nourish their artistic expression. It helps writers to avoid external influences and pressures, allowing them to create work that is true to their own experiences and perspectives. One should write from their own reality rather than conforming to external expectations or trends. Rilke acknowledges that solitude can be challenging and sometimes uncomfortable, but one should be patient and persevere in order to appreciate it. He believes that enduring solitude is part of the artist’s journey and essential for achieving deeper insights and artistic maturity. Paradoxically, he suggests that solitude can lead to a profound connection with others. By delving deeply into their own experiences and expressing them authentically, writers can touch universal truths and resonate with readers on a deeper level, creating meaningful connections that transcend individual isolation.

Rilke insists as well on the idea of love and its role in the writing. But it is not mere, romantic love towards a person, although this is not excluded. Romantic love is one of the many ways through which individuals undergo deep emotions, enjoy new experiences and discover new insights. But for him, this concept is multidimensional, it encompasses a broader, more profound understanding of the passion. This comprehensive view of love profoundly influences and enriches the writer's creative process. Here are the other forms of it.

Love for humanity, a universal love which involves empathy, compassion, and understanding towards others. This helps writers to connect with the shared human experience and convey universal truths in their work.

Love for the craft, which signifies a passionate commitment to the art of writing itself. It motivates writers to persevere, strive for excellence, and remain dedicated to their creative journey.

Self-Love, which implies self-understanding and appreciation, which means to joyfully embrace one's own experiences, thoughts, and emotions, a crucial condition for authentic and truthful artistic expression.

Spiritual love, where love serves as a means of connecting with the divine, the transcendent dimension of reality and the mysteries of existence. This spiritual love fosters a sense of inner peace and fulfillment, enriching the writer's inner life and creative output.

Love has different functions in the writing process. It is a source of inspiration. In its various forms, it fuels deep emotions and thoughts, providing rich material for creative expression. It helps writers to gain deeper insights into the human condition and emotions. It fosters empathy and connection, allowing them to create work that resonates emotionally with readers. It is a catalyst for self-discovery, leading to personal growth enriching the creative output. Love for the craft of writing itself, an art which is its own purpose, motivates our commitment and strengthens our persistence. It helps us to take up the challenge of difficulties, to maintain a continuous pursuit of excellence. And according

to Rilke, writing about love brings spiritual and emotional fulfillment, making the creative journey more pleasant and meaningful.

To summarize Rilke's perspective on writing, he emphasizes its profound significance as a means of self-expression, self-discovery, connection with others, artistic growth, passionate life and spiritual enrichment, not merely as a skill or a profession, but as a deeply meaningful and transformative vocation.

II

NATURE OF WRITING

Let us prolong or develop those ideas with some added thoughts. Writing provides a unique outlet for self-expression, allowing individuals to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a deeply personal way. By putting words to paper, individuals can explore their inner world, gain clarity about their emotions, and develop a stronger sense of self-awareness and identity. It encourages introspection and reflection. Through the act of writing, individuals can delve into their own experiences, analyze their beliefs and values, and gain insights into their motivations and aspirations, leading to personal growth and self-discovery. Writing is a great opportunity to allow ourselves to be truthful, trying to identify diverse elements of bad faith that cripple our existence, attempting to deconstruct the self-delusion we generally do not dare confront. The blank sheet can be a friendly, welcoming and forgiving witness of our numerous vilenies and trivialities, our many vices and trivial pursuits, our various sins and minor follies.

Although some people do not trust the blank sheet, which frightens them instead of inspiring them, in reality they do not trust themselves. They are totally blocked because they are haunted by the ghost of the “not good enough”, the feeling of worthlessness. Unconsciously, it is a heteronomous concept, it is determined by the outside, from the outside, through the judgment of others, or produced through an arbitrary comparison to others. This outside might be real, substantiated, but it

is often imaginary, it lacks any real grounding. Or it is rather arbitrary, since the subject chooses unconsciously some object of comparison persons that will confirm his presupposition, rather than others, even though his chosen sample might be a minority. They do not realize that their judgment, a pure emotional product, is produced through a specific prism that is taken as an exclusive and absolute criterion, but this whimsical conviction is sufficient and strong enough to stop them from writing, in spite of their determination, although they are probably faint hearted.

To write freely, to draft authentically, it is necessary to reconcile with the negative, a challenge that poses serious problems for some people. When we write, we are no longer performing, and our only audience is ourselves. Though we can always create myths, given the human mind's plasticity, over time, through weakness and fatigue, our ability to self-deceive weakens, cracks, and dissolves. Something within us seeks to express what we forbid ourselves to say or even think. This is the power of the blank page – a kind of allure of the void, a call of the infinite, an intimate mirror, a form of inner transcendence, urging us to say what we do not want to say. Confronted with this void, we claim, "I have nothing to say," "I have no ideas," "Inspiration does not come," "My mind is empty," and so on. According to Spinoza, awareness of our determinations and our limits is the primary form of freedom. But we do not want this kind of freedom; we only want positive things, ideas that make us feel good, words that make us look beautiful. Yet, because we do not truly believe in them, we prefer not to write, even if we want to write. And if we start writing, we erase, cross out, or endlessly restart without continuity, until we abandon the effort. Our habit of projecting pretty images to please others, to seduce others, to present a good appearance before others betrays us. We do not dare to write.

If we are courageous enough, writing helps to clarify and organize thoughts. By translating nebulous ideas into coherent sentences and paragraphs, individuals can refine their thinking, articulate complex concepts more effectively, and develop a deeper understanding of them-

selves and the world around them. It serves as well as a therapeutic tool for emotional processing and healing. Whether through journaling, poetry, or creative writing, individuals can identify, explore and process difficult emotions, confront unresolved issues, and find catharsis and closure through the written word. Writing stimulates creativity and imagination. By engaging in imaginative storytelling, world-building, or creative exploration, individuals can tap into their innate creativity, expand their horizons, and cultivate a sense of wonder and possibility.

Some people rather write what they already know, what they already thought about. Other writers “think with their pen”, as was said in times past. They will create and clarify their thinking through the sentences they articulate, through the writing itself. Thus they will know the end of their story by discovering what they write. They need to commit their thoughts to paper in order to navigate through them; they write in order to mine for insights, to harvest ideas. They need to convoke words in order to untangle their intuitions and finally piece together the puzzle.

But developing a writing practice requires discipline and commitment. By regularly setting aside time for writing, individuals cultivate self-regulation, perseverance, and resilience. Over time, this habit of consistent effort becomes a “second nature”, therefore generating skill development and a sense of achievement. Although we should not be looking as such for some stunning accomplishment, a common source of discouragement, hiding a desire for absolute, genius or immediate perfection. A sobering thought we recommend is to keep in mind that “All has been already told”, so there’s no need to try writing something totally unheard of. Although this perspective would be rather depressing for the ecstasy seekers. When confronted with the fear of their own banality, the orgasmic writer either stops writing and gets depressed, engages in an absurd escalation of meaningless words, or pretentiously tries to reinvent the wheel without noticing it.

To write is to trust, to trust in oneself, to trust others, inseparably. It implies being able to think about our own finiteness, our own nothing-

ness, and to hear the feedback of others, their impressions and observations, real or imaginary, diverse and contradictory. To understand and appreciate those echos for what they are. A natural dialogue between ourselves and the world, in which we receive and accept, without necessarily agreeing. A diversity that feeds our composition, our momentum, our drive to expose ourselves through the crudeness of words.

But overall, in spite of our doubts and anguishes, more than anything else, we should focus on the regularity of the practice, enjoying the daily activity and its challenge, a practice which by itself will generally strengthen itself and improve. And we will notice that developing writing skills facilitates relations and exchanges with others. Through written communication, individuals can share their ideas, experiences, and perspectives with a wider audience, fostering empathy, understanding, and connection with their fellow humans. Although, paradoxically, one has to accept as well the fundamental solitude of the creative activity.

The writer is a kind of demiurge, a creator, a craftsman of the universe. He can be a benevolent figure, wishing to engender a universe as perfect and luminous as possible, or a malevolent being, creating an imperfect world, dark and fictitious. A powerful being, who creates a world at the mercy of his moods and whims, genuine or deceptive. Be that as it may, according to myth, he is a special being, a being above others, arguably above himself. But such a posture has a cost, it has demands, it is not without consequences.

III

INSPIRATION

One of the reasons periodically invoked as an alibi for not writing is the lack of inspiration. But those who speak this way have a magical vision of inspiration, as if it arrives by itself, as if it were an accidental state of mind or engendered by external forces. Certainly, some cultures and traditions have considered inspiration as a gift from the gods or particular spirits, as in Greek mythology, where the Muses were goddesses who inspired the arts and sciences. Thus, poets, artists, and writers were sometimes seen as passive receivers of divine inspiration. Or they conceive it as a moment of sudden illumination, almost magical, an "epiphany," that instant when a new and brilliant idea spontaneously arises. A good example is "Eureka!" the famous cry of Archimedes when he had a revelation in his bath: the principle of buoyancy. Some writers and artists indeed speak of inspiration in mystical or transcendental terms, as a feeling of connection with something greater than themselves, with the sensation that inspiration comes from mysterious and unfathomable sources. Or the concept of "flow," the mental state where a person, completely immersed in an activity, feels fluid and works effortlessly, when ideas surge naturally and without constraint. The fact that inspiration comes from intuition or the unconscious reinforces its mysterious aspect, like immediate and direct knowledge without logical reasoning or reflection, when ideas emerge from the subconscious, perceived as magical because unexpected and sudden. Certainly, we all know "mo-

ments of grace," when words or images seem to flow on their own. Ideas also appear in dreams or visions, perceived as messages from another world. However, this magical vision of inspiration has its limits, and many writers emphasize that inspiration must be supported by hard work and regular discipline. The romantic vision of inspiration can ignore the technical and laborious aspects of artistic creation. So let's try to define more realistically and ordinarily what inspiration might constitute. Inspiration can be defined as a creative impulse or a sudden urge that drives a person to create something. In the context of writing, this translates into ideas, images, words, or phrases that come to mind and serve as the foundation for a literary work. In a common way, inspiration can come from various sources. Firstly, personal experiences, such as memories, emotions, and lived events. We all have such experiences every day. Observing the world, whether landscapes, human interactions, different cultures, encounters, all of which shape our daily lives. Works of art, books, movies, music, painting, which simply need to be sought. And the recourse to our imagination, which often works on its own, even without us wanting it to, so various ideas arise from the mind without direct link to observed reality, or provoked by it. Observation of nature, the beauty of landscapes, plants and animals, changes of seasons, contemplation of the sky, etc. And of course, for those who are attentive to them, dreams can sometimes provide unique images and scenarios.

But inspiration is not simply a sudden flash, a powerful surge of the mind. The process of inspiration can vary from person to person, but it often involves different stages. First, the awakening of the idea, the moment when a situation triggers an image, a form, a simple impression or intuition, unless this phenomenon is triggered by itself, without an external, identifiable, or conscious cause. Then comes the elaboration, when the initial impression or intuition is explored, formulated, specified or fleshed out. And finally, incorporation, when this somewhat developed idea is integrated into a more extended text, already written or in progress, whether it is a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire work.

Intuitions abound on a daily basis. But very often, if we lack rigor and timeliness, if we are not attentive, if we don't know how to grasp our intuitions on the fly, they fade away and go unheeded.

Inspiration plays a crucial role in writing, and it has various functions. It motivates us, it gives the writer the desire to start working. It fuels the imagination and allows the production of a text. It can also guide the direction a text takes. And as it always involves an emotional dimension, it adds passion and depth to the writing. Although too often we believe that inspiration is a spontaneous, uncontrolled process, there are various ways to cultivate it. Firstly, a regular practice of reading, as frequenting other authors generally stimulates thought and imagination. Attentive observation of daily life, taking the time to scrutinize the details of daily life, to bring this daily life out of its usual and routine banality, giving value and meaning to everything that happens, around us, far away, or in society in general. Regular writing practice, so that the act of writing becomes a natural process, a second nature, which helps to bring forth ideas frequently. Maintaining a "writing attitude" makes us available and sensitive to the production of ideas. Since routine is an important obstacle to writing, boredom being an inhibitor of thought, changing the environment, through walks, travels, or visits, meeting new people, even if only momentarily, can foster inspiration and generate new ideas. And of course, dialogue, discussing with other writers, with friends, or simply with people met by chance, can provoke new perspectives. Provided, of course, that it is not a matter of exchanging clichés about the weather or other common rituals, which are not very inspiring, but of having a real dialogue. It can be about what interests us or what interests others, to discover new perspectives, to talk about our writing work, directly or indirectly, to investigate our subject of reflection, to question others to obtain interesting ideas that we can use. Working on the art of dialogue is a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, a common mistake of many people who start writing is to want to keep it secret, often out of a sort of shame, a lack of confidence in themselves and their work. This option is not prohibitive, it is indeed

the initial choice of some writers, but in general, it is not the best strategy. As we emotionally overload our writing work, instead of making it something simple and natural.

The writer's inspiration, their passion for writing, can take very different forms, come from various sources, which depend on a particular personality, a specific interest. For inspiration is closely linked to the specific passion of the writer, to their motivation, to what drives their writing activity. Self-expression is one of the most common. For writing allows individuals to express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. It is a form of personal communication that allows one to clarify and explore their own emotions and experiences. Creativity, because writing is a way to give free rein to one's imagination. It is an opportunity to create worlds, characters, and stories that do not exist in reality, thus the writer creates their own world. Sharing, insofar as the writer mainly wants to communicate their ideas, perspectives, stories, knowledge with others. They want to express important ideas, personal experiences, or fictional stories that can touch and inspire readers. Reflection, because writing helps to think and understand complex experiences and concepts. It is a way to structure thought, solve problems, and achieve a deeper understanding of oneself and the world. Escape, because for some, writing is a way to escape from reality, considered banal, painful, imperfect, or uninteresting. Creating fictional stories or immersing oneself in imaginary tales can be a way to detach from the stressful or difficult aspects of daily life. Similarly, developing concepts can detach us from the concrete everyday life, considered ephemeral, superficial, or illusory. Catharsis, this emotional release that allows one to free repressed or intense emotions. It is an outlet for pain, anger, sadness, or even joy, allowing us to manage and transform these feelings. Some writers use the full range of their feelings and emotions to write, as objects of writing. They describe and analyze all the movements of their soul, capturing all their affects. Influence, because some writers are motivated by the desire to act on society, to have an impact on the world. They want to provoke reflections, social or political changes, or raise awareness through their writings. Lit-

erary composition, because some people are simply passionate about language and literature. The love of words, well-constructed sentences, well-articulated ideas, and captivating stories is a sufficient motivation for them to write and a source of inspiration. Self-fulfillment, because human beings need to take on challenges to fully realize their existence and grow. The simple fact of engaging in a creative process that allows us to explore our ideas, clarify our thoughts, and discover our own voice moves us and inspires us. For inspiration is above all a matter of internal strength, personal energy. The desire to improve, refine one's skills, and master the art of writing can push us to persist, to work regularly. Recognition, because the concern for social success is a pressing need for some people. They will seize any writing opportunity, such as publishing an article, engaging in a debate, or publishing a book, to make themselves known, to receive praise, and to see their texts or ideas circulate. Curiosity, because writers are often curious people, eager to explore new ideas, other cultures, and perspectives. This constant search nourishes their writing, making them discover aspects of life they might not have known otherwise. Writing is for them a tool of exploration, whether this exploration is external or internal. In summary, the motivations behind writing are diverse and deeply rooted in fundamental human needs and desires. Whether to express emotions, share ideas, or simply for the pleasure of creating, writing offers a multitude of motivations and sources of inspiration for those who choose to dedicate themselves to it.

IV

THE LACK OF INSPIRATION

Inspiration, or rather the lack of inspiration, often invoked as an alibi to justify not writing, is frequently mentioned. Such individuals hope for or await inspiration as a magical phenomenon, as we have explained. In reality, they struggle to accept the psychological challenge of the blank page, the call of the void that such a situation represents. The nothingness frightens them, they feel dizzy, they do not dare to start. Thus, they allow themselves to be distracted, they procrastinate, or even abandon the task. The fear of the blank page, often called "writer's block," is a common experience among people who start writing, and even among established writers. This inhibition can be attributed to several psychological and practical reasons that we will try to identify. Perfectionist pressure is undoubtedly the main cause of such a block. When it comes to writing, unlike spoken words that fly away, written words remain, as expressed by the famous Latin proverb *Verba volant, scripta manent*. One may feel an increased sense of responsibility, a possibility of incrimination in the face of our errors and clumsiness, which are more easily forgotten in the ephemeral flow of speech. Moreover, within certain cultural frameworks, writing may be attributed a certain aura of sanctification, in opposition to the more profane or vulgar image of speech, which adds increased pressure on the writer. Thus, the writer,

whether amateur or professional, will fear that what they write is not good enough, preventing them from starting their work, or continuing it. They want their first sentences to be perfect, which is very anxiety-inducing. Such excessive expectations, whether from oneself or others, prove to be paralyzing. Furthermore, often unconsciously, some people cultivate fantasies about their writing, easily confusing their excessive desires with reality. They pretend to write unheard-of, general, extraordinary things, they wish to impress everyone, if not produce a bestseller, even before having written anything. In fact, it is no longer so much the writing that motivates them, but the success, an assured result, an insane hope that psychologically blocks them. For while the fear of failure exists more or less in everyone, it is particularly intense in those who entertain great expectations within themselves, often devoid of reason. Such pressure makes the writing process painful, which further encourages abandoning such an endeavor. Nevertheless, some famous authors explain that they need this stress to write.

Sometimes, the lack of inspiration simply means that our ideas are confused, our intuitions are vague, our direction is not clear. We do not know where to start, we cannot decide. This can take the form of a mental void, or an overload of ideas, causing chaos. We do not know how to start, organize, structure our thoughts, establish priorities. We let ourselves get caught in the uncontrolled flow of associative and disordered thinking, devoid of construction. This can happen right from the beginning, preventing any start, or later, when the process suddenly stalls into "inchoative" writing, a draft that remains stuck in a state of beginning, lacking development, unable to conclude. A sort of eternal stammering. Consequently, we procrastinate, we postpone the deadline, we put off the work until later, either invoking a miraculous future where the problems will be resolved, or without even specifying the time frame in question. Our mind is naturally skilled at performing this kind of "manipulation" to which we easily adhere. Thus, either we never start, we capitulate, or we abandon an unfinished work.

V

DISTRACTIONS

One of the common maneuvers of our mind when it struggles to focus is to create or find distractions. These distractions arise "by themselves," out of fear of the void, to avoid effort, to divert attention and ease our anxiety. They can originate internally or externally.

Internal distractions can be negative or positive. On the negative side, there is doubt, a lack of self-confidence, where one wonders if they are truly capable of creating something valuable. Comparing oneself to more experienced or renowned writers, to already published works, generates a feeling of inferiority. Deadlines or constraints we impose on ourselves can obsess and paralyze us. Various personal or professional problems invade and interfere with our ability to focus on writing. Intrusive thoughts emerge, numerous anxiety-inducing considerations, personal or professional worries occupying the mind. Unresolved problems, concerns about the future, and other preoccupations. The impression of mental fatigue, which may indeed have an objective, real cause, but is often also the product of a discouraged, bored mind, suffering too much from the effort, and thus struggling to concentrate. This is evident when the mind unlocks, as the fatigue suddenly disappears during accomplishment. The obsession with preparation, where one convinces themselves they are not ready for this or that reason, for example, not having read the necessary books – a phenomenon known to those who write a dissertation - often convinced they will be able to write once

they have read "all the books," and in an anxiogenic they always feel they are missing a few. The obsession with planning, though such a preliminary structure is not a necessity, as some people are more the type who "think with their pen," meaning their work develops gradually, freely, and not according to a predetermined plan. Although others indeed need a plan, a clear structure to work. For the perfectionist, a classic form of distraction is the obsession with detail, leading to incessant revisions and slowing down the writing process.

Generally speaking, one can assert that the concern for the result, whether its quality, quantity, reader reception, or correspondence to our expectations, can obstruct the writing process, as is often the case, particularly for beginners. The pleasure of writing, the passion for composing, is overshadowed or paralyzed by the concern for the final production, a shift in focus that is rather anxiety-inducing. For the mind worries and speculates about a future it does not control, rather than focusing on the work in progress, instead of concentrating on the effort and the present moment, thus depriving itself of the pleasure of writing. Another cognitive blocker is impostor syndrome, the feeling of not being up to par, accompanied by the fear of being "discovered" as an impostor, which has a paralyzing effect. This phenomenon is generally associated with the grandiose and exaggerated idea of the writer's status, who is not simply someone who writes but an exceptional, genius, and famous being. A variant is the overinvestment in the idea of "gift," which alternately, depending on our moods, we believe we possess or do not possess. We thus think that writing skills are predetermined, that they cannot be improved by the practice itself, which can discourage any effort to start or continue.

On a more positive note, we also encounter distractions that inhibit the writing process. These distractions, though beneficial for well-being and mood, can nevertheless distract us.

Daydreaming is one of the most classic, which can be creative if controlled, but it rarely is. It involves associative thinking, where the mind jumps from one object to another without concern for coherence or

achievement. This can be pleasant, even useful, as long as it is given limited time. Otherwise, the mind slackens, liquefies, and it becomes impossible to get back to work. Moreover, left to itself, the wandering mind can abruptly shift from pleasant contemplation to painful anxiety. Thus, one may envisage inspiring projects, but soon the evocation of numerous obstacles will emerge, an unavoidable psychological reality. Certainly, these pleasant future scenarios, possible or impossible, these virtual successes, can stimulate motivation, but they divert us from the immediate work. The same goes for memories of the past, these reminiscences where one recalls pleasant memories, happy precious moments, which can be comforting but remain distracting. Recalling previous successes can thus boost self-esteem, but nostalgia is often unproductive. Even "positive thinking," making us consider the good sides of our existence, actions, and relationships, can negatively impact our work. We may feel excited about an upcoming pleasant event, like a forthcoming vacation or a meeting with friends, or enjoy the little pleasures of life, like a good meal to come or a planned relaxation moment, but we must not lose sight of the task at hand and realize that these little joys constitute distractions, impediments to the challenge we have set ourselves. We may consider all sorts of new hobbies, activities, challenges, new leisure to undertake, even a different text to write, but we must remain aware that our mind is cunning: it knows how to escape what poses a problem.

External distractions are often related to our various relationships, familial, friendly, professional. Others are an excellent alibi to avoid oneself. In this sense, social networks greatly facilitate our task, as we can always read everyone's news, respond, even if they are not available at the moment. And we all know the compulsive and addictive dimension of these technological tools. The same goes for games, movies and series, watching all these short and striking videos that have a deleterious effect on our ability to concentrate. Surfing the Internet is generally easier and more pleasant than confronting oneself in writing a text, even if this ease, devoid of meaning, is quickly exhausting and draining. The

mind thrives on challenges, both to develop its own power and to realize itself existentially. Generally, when it comes to concentrating, it is better to suspend all possible notifications from the mobile phone, receiving emails, and instant messages. Background noises from television, music, or traffic can also be an obstacle, although some people who find silence traumatic use them to calm down and concentrate better. Moreover, music can create a conducive environment, provided the pieces chosen match our psychological state. Similarly, it is important to choose a suitable workspace; otherwise, physical discomfort can indeed distract us. For some people, the psychological difficulty is filtering external solicitations from family, friends, or colleagues, so they must accept this temporary necessity and not let themselves be overwhelmed by feelings of pity or guilt. This is particularly true for mothers, who tend to overinvest their obligations and responsibilities towards others rather than towards themselves. Thus, it is necessary to learn to distinguish degrees of urgency and to prioritize what is important. The same goes for professional or academic commitments that compete with writing, a more personal necessity. Moreover, some people develop a certain bad faith, using the argument of external constraints, while their main problem is their relationship with themselves, the feeling of emptiness and solitude, the dizziness they feel facing the blank page. Additionally, strangely, when we need to concentrate, we feel hungry, thirsty, need to move, too cold or too hot, would rather be elsewhere, as many seemingly material or physiological needs are in fact psychological. Some extreme cases may even experience physical discomfort, a sudden perception of pain or illness, as indeed our psyche can very well somatize its problems or imagine them.

Nevertheless, intolerance to solitude is undoubtedly one of the main problems aspiring writers or even accomplished writers face. When they must create a mental space to compose, they must isolate themselves and dive into the ocean of inner silence and meet themselves. There, in this desolate place, they may encounter a dreadful solitude, boring, tiresome, unbearable. Especially when they do not know what to write,

when they feel bad about writing, this solitude becomes spectral, making it difficult to calm down. Moreover, like many people, they may not be used to being alone, feeling like strangers to solitude. Every day, they are driven by the little things of "real" life, from the moment they open their eyes until the moment the day "officially" ends, and they anxiously try to fall asleep. They think about all the events that make up and fill their lives, what they have already done, what they have yet to do, the mistakes they have made, future problems. Work, family, social obligations, various commitments, an exhausting routine, an incessant sack race, often devoid of meaning. Thus, solitude becomes the great moment of worry; how could one find joy, freedom, and creativity there? Anyway, solitude is a luxury for many people, some have never really known it. So when these rare moments occur, unaccustomed to silence, yet joyful for this privileged moment, they do not wish to make any effort, they do not want to write, they just want to savor this moment of pure gratuity. They just want to relax, daydream, dawdle, lie on the couch, walk in nature, or go to the beauty salon. Or they console themselves with a moment of self-pity.

VI

OVERCOMING THE EXPERIENCE OF EMPTINESS

Certainly, the prospect of the blank page can generate some anxiety, for various reasons we have listed, often linked to an excessive concern for the result. On a cognitive level, this concern distracts us; on an emotional level, it causes anxiety. Therefore, we defend the idea that writing, as an activity of reflection or artistic composition, remains above all an attitude, a way of being, and not a production action. Facing a blank page or a screen, we adopt a writing position. This can be described as a position of availability, a posture of acceptance, where the writer no longer has a real existence; they are merely the messenger, the intermediary, between what happens in their mind and the place where they wish to project their ideas. But for this to happen, they must want nothing, expect nothing, and let themselves be guided by their own mind. Certainly, over time, they will learn to combine this state of mind with a specific project, with a determined intention. But sometimes, it is first about learning to completely let go, what can be called "brainstorming," "ideas bubbling," "free writing," or even "automatic writing." In this framework, one writes down everything that comes to mind without worrying about content, continuity, structure, meaning, or even

spelling, syntax, or grammar. Such an activity can help unblock ideas and overcome the fear of starting. If nothing comes, if nothing specific comes to mind, it does not matter; one waits patiently while maintaining the position. Inspiration is not something that can be controlled. Inspiration works in flows and ebbs, so one must know how to wait without worrying. But at those moments, one must not get distracted by easy activities, as described earlier. One must stoically accept this uncomfortable situation and face the challenge of a solitary relationship with oneself, with the sense of emptiness it implies. However, one must know that the mind is never truly empty; it is almost impossible. In fact, certain Eastern meditative practices that propose emptying the mind as a spiritual practice know how difficult this exercise is. For constantly, fragments of thought burst forth like shooting stars in the sky, fragments that must be learned to detect, notice, and reproduce in words. Moreover, when we feel that our mind is empty, we can already write "My mind is empty," a simple gesture that can have a triggering effect. For the good reason that if this sentence can be written, if it deserves to be written, then anything can be written, everything deserves to be written. For in reality, relatively unconsciously, our mind functions as the worst censor: it instinctively attacks everything that emerges to prevent its expression. Probably an effect of the Freudian "superego," an inner strict, moralistic, and idealistic judge operating within each of us.

So we must learn to ignore this relentless censor, to transgress its prohibitions and dictates, by writing down everything that comes to mind. Once freed from this heavy psychological burden, we will write more naturally, and in a second phase, we can critically examine what we have written to select or modify our production. Writing is natural, just as speaking is natural. Birds chirp, dogs bark, humans articulate words, produce sentences, express opinions, compose speeches, question, comment, and dialogue with others. The issue, the challenge, is to free this natural action, by censoring the censorship. As the tennis coach advises their hesitant, nervous, or worried student, who thus becomes clumsy: "Trust your arm, let your racket hit the ball."

Thus, for the inhibited or blocked writer, we recommend initially free writing. Write anything, everything that comes to mind to break the initial block. In doing so, one must be attentive to what is happening in their mind and seize the slightest idea that appears on the horizon, however basic or trivial it may be, without worrying about purpose, form, or coherence. This posture and activity should be maintained as long as we do not know what else to write, as long as we cannot set up a more specific project. And above all, one must not worry about the passing time, the result, or any expectation of efficiency. We could compare this exercise to the principle of "practicing scales" on the piano, a very formative exercise for the apprentice musician, which in a sense is not very fascinating, but helps to work on fingering technique and ear, and develop a certain discipline necessary for pianistic training.

In a second phase, or from the beginning if it inspires us, we can set small, unambitious goals to make the task less intimidating. They can be very interesting, however. Here are some examples.

Narration: by telling an incident we have observed or experienced. The goal is to work on the details as much as possible, maximizing and supporting the description of the event as if we were telling it to a close one. Remembering that often it is the narration that can make the incident interesting, so we should not worry about necessarily telling extraordinary things. We can also set a regular task of recounting at least one incident or situation we noticed each day. This way, we will work on the art of narration. We will also develop our observational skills as we will always be on the lookout for a writing subject. And finally, we will find our life more interesting, less routine, as the banal becomes remarkable. Then, if we wish to continue this work on another register, more analytical, we can try to explain how and why this anecdote is interesting, what makes it special, what it shows us about reality and human nature.

Emotions: by describing a particular moment that made us happy or unhappy. The goal is to describe the context where this happened and the process that triggered the emotion in question. We all expe-

rience particular moments that affect us positively or negatively every day. Again, we should not set the bar too high, looking for something very intense or very special. Remember that we always feel some impression, positive or negative, at every moment of the day. We actually have a wide choice. We just need to select what marked us the most. It is important to try to name the emotion and then try to identify precisely what caused it. Again, we can also try to analyze by identifying the causes of what affected us, even critically examining what happened to us. Some emotions are understandable and rational, while others are inappropriate, excessive, or unproductive as they make us unhappy and complicate our relationships with others. Such work is akin to what is called "emotional intelligence," which consists of identifying our emotions, understanding their causes, analyzing them, which allows us to work on them and acquire a certain self-control. We can even speculate by imagining how we could have reacted differently.

Reading: can also be an excellent writing stimulus. But for that, we need to learn to read rigorously. Of course, it is not about reading a simple novel that tells a story, but a book related to thought that makes us think. Such a book will serve as a writing support if we use it as such. But for that, we must already be in a writing mindset, not when the book is finished, but from the beginning, from the first page. Here is what we recommend to make it so. It is not about underlining with a pencil, nor highlighting with a marker, nor writing annotations in the book's margins, which remains limited, but about taking notes and actually writing. We recommend two types of notes to write. First, content notes, where we write down the key elements of the text, the strong ideas, the concepts or issues developed throughout the writing, a synthesis of the exposition. Thus, by rereading these notes, we can recall the essential content. It seems useful or even necessary to do this on each page or double page before moving on. This way, we rethink what has been said, internalizing it more intensely. How many people have read a book but admit they do not really remember what they read. They were more concerned with finishing the book than working on

it, as if reaching the end would suddenly enlighten them. From our perspective, it is better to read a few pages very carefully than to read the entire book diagonally; we will better grasp its essence. Then a second type of notes, more personal, where we dialogue with the author. We express our thoughts on what we have read, write down questions, objections, examples of what is said, connections with our knowledge and experiences, etc. A text must always say something to us, even just the problems it poses, otherwise, it does not make sense to us, and we might as well read something else. Thus we write what it provokes in us, which is why we affirm that true reading involves writing. And this way, we can no longer say that we do not write because our mind is empty.

VII

REGULARITY

An important point that we must address is the regularity in writing, a regularity that is valid for writing as well as for any form of demanding exercise or practice. At first, this regularity takes the form of a difficult constraint. Both to stop the usual chaos, the routine of obligations – work, family, or otherwise – and the routine of easy compensatory pleasures, that is, to settle down. But also to take action, to break out of our inertia, to get moving. For working on inertia functions in two ways. On the one hand, interrupting compulsive movement, suspending the constant flow to calm down. On the other hand, moving a fixed object, getting into motion, shaking what is immobile. Any modification, any transformation of reality involves resistance, a resistance called inertia.

Regular runners say that the hardest part of going for a run is putting on their shoes, because after that, the rest happens naturally. In other words, the initial moment is decisive, what follows is a decision, the inaugural gesture of the work, the sign of confrontation with oneself. Similarly, for writing, the hardest part is facing the blank page or the text in progress.

So, it is about making this gesture natural, common, even banal, because it is repeated regularly. Some people say, "I will write when I have enough time in front of me." But in reality, either this miraculous time of all possibilities will remain mythical and will never arrive, or it will remain very rare, and all the more difficult. When people have a writ-

ing obligation, for example in case of academic reasons, they postpone the deadline until the last minute, or even abandon it, but in any case, they suffer from such a situation, and their writing is likely to be sloppy, rushed, poorly thought out, unsatisfactory because it then becomes a chore. But again, there are always those who function exclusively in this way, they need to feel under pressure to act. They work only under an external constraint. It is said that the famous and prolific writer Honoré de Balzac wrote only when his publisher locked him up to force him. Those people condemn themselves to heteronomy, but for them, writing will always be synonymous with suffering. Moreover, this is suitable only for those who indeed suffer such external pressure, not for those who wish to engage in the free exercise of writing and reflection, who will be under no real external constraint.

Therefore, we recommend, rather than waiting for the famous "opportune moment", hoping for those "wonderful circumstances," the only ones conducive to writing, without which nothing is possible, to work a little every day, so that this practice becomes a habit, a normal activity, integrated into daily life. In other words, it becomes second nature. We propose half an hour a day as a minimum duration, which in general is quite possible for most people. And if half an hour is impossible, a quarter of an hour, even five minutes, is better than nothing, because it is the gesture that counts. Somewhat similar to the parable of Christ about the "workers of the last hour," who receive the same salary as those who have worked all day. Because, as we have explained, it is not the production of words that counts, but the writing attitude, putting oneself in an adequate disposition, which then normalizes rather than remains extraordinary. The one who practices in this way will notice that the process then starts by itself, and in general, they will stay in position longer than expected. If not today, then tomorrow or the day after. Thus, getting into the habit of the writing position, forcing oneself to do it regularly at first, will make the gesture familiar, mundane, and even pleasant.

Otherwise, another common mistake makes the exercise more difficult. Waiting for the "favorable moment," which often means at the end of the day, as an ultimate gesture when "we have done everything," "when there is nothing left to do." A very revealing attitude of our mind-set, showing the reduced and secondary importance we give to reflection and the production of ideas.

Two important problems arise here. The first is that this moment may never come because there is always "something to do," including going to bed because it is late and we have to get up the next morning. The second is that at the end of the day, we are generally tired and not inclined to concentrate on writing, making the task even more difficult and more burdensome. Certainly, some people manage to work late at night, these are even their favorite hours, but it remains an exception. Therefore, it is important to determine in advance, preferably the day before, what time this work will be done. This appointment with oneself must be considered as important, if not more so, than any other appointment of the day. Morning, in the first instance, is a privileged moment because the mind is still fresh and ready. Moreover, by focusing in the morning on something that interests us, it will positively affect the rest of the day because our mind will be awakened and feel freer, more satisfied with itself. But for this to happen, one must avoid falling into the trap of internet communication, which unfortunately is an automatism for many people today, a reactivity that engenders mental chaos. And avoid falling into the trap of tasks, chores, and other routine obligations that obsess and guilt-trip us. One can marvel at all the trappings that can cover the infamous bog of procrastination, viscous and powerful, shapeless and polymorphous.

Another recommendation, just as we will determine the time of our "appointment" the night before, we will also determine what we will write about. On the one hand, this will prevent a moment of harmful anxiety once in place, and on the other hand, our mind will already start to work to advance ideas, produce intuitions, including during sleep. By practicing in this way, we will often wake up with some work

leads, which must be noted immediately, otherwise, they will quickly disappear from our mind.

One can think of regularity as pure formality or relate it to a concern for production, which remains relatively negotiable, a non-essential aspect of the work. Such an apprehension is somewhat reductionist. In reality, this regularity also affects the quality of our work. Because by rubbing against rigor and self-discipline, which regularity requires, we also acquire and establish the rigor of content, because in both cases, this type of learning involves above all work on oneself. However, the enemy of writing is, among other things, complacency, excessive indulgence towards oneself, laxity towards our little habits, a void of ideal, a lack of life and energy, a castration of passion.

Thus, regularity affects the quality of our work for two reasons. Firstly, because we strengthen ourselves, as in the repetition of a physical exercise, which is a guarantee of quality. Secondly, because we work on our text more strictly, more attentively, more thoughtfully, as we do not seek simply to get rid of the work, to finish it, to dispatch it, as continuity and perseverance do not pose a problem for us. Writing is simultaneously a work on oneself and a work on our production, two forms of accomplishment that remain inseparable.

VIII

PERSONAL WRITING, ARTISTIC WRITING

We recommend dialogue in the practice of writing. Both to motivate ourselves by being stimulated by exchanges with others, to improve the quality of our work by receiving external feedback, and to be aware of the effect of our texts on the reader. Nevertheless, some people strongly resist such dialogue; they do not wish to show what they write to anyone. This may be due to sensitivity, to protect themselves, to a sense of insecurity, fear of being judged and criticized, fear of being discouraged. Some, strangely concerned with the purity of their work, are afraid of being influenced by others.

However, this can be understood to the extent that such a refusal of external scrutiny corresponds to the true intention of writing. Therefore, it seems useful for the writer to know why they write. To clarify this intention, we propose a conceptual distinction between "personal writing" and "artistic writing."

Personal writing is of two main types.

The first is "therapeutic". The principle is simple: we have anxieties, worries, we feel negative, painful emotions, and writing these various problems on paper has a soothing, tempering effect. It can even be simple scribbling, more or less comprehensible. It is a gesture quite similar to what we make with a therapist, to express our discomfort. By ex-

pressing our difficulties, we perform a kind of purge, we exorcize the "demon" by naming it, we objectify our problems through words, and thus, through this objectification, a distancing and a clarification take place. Our pains are sublimated through our words. The written text, visible on paper or screen, becomes an external witness, akin to the presence of the therapist. The subject's doubling thus produced allows reconciliation with oneself, writing becomes the projection medium that enables self-acceptance. This is, for example, the principle of the diary, a support in which a person regularly writes their personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, and reflections. It is a private space where the author can express themselves freely and confidentially, without worrying about the gaze of others or external judgment. Thus, this "secret garden" is jealously guarded by its owner, who will consider it an unforgivable betrayal for anyone to read it without his authorization. Writing is primarily a place of catharsis, a simple expression of oneself, allowing the release of repressed emotions and clarifying ideas. One can reflect on their actions, decisions, and experiences, helping to better understand oneself, identify behavior patterns or emotional tendencies. It can be an effective way to manage stress, anxiety, and other negative emotions. Writing down worries can make them more manageable and reduce their impact. A diary can even help set personal goals and track progress, promoting personal growth and self-improvement. It is a way to preserve precious memories and revisit them later. Certainly, writing regularly stimulates creativity, and a diary can become a place of artistic exploration, developing ideas, stories, or poems, but then it shifts to another type of writing, artistic. If it becomes a way to dialogue with oneself, to ask questions, to find answers, and to better understand one's motivations and desires, it shifts into a philosophical dimension.

The second type of personal writing can be called "note-taking." Intimacy is no longer its concern; it is no longer about confiding and venting but about noting ideas or observations that seem interesting or useful, which we want to remember. We no longer seek to articulate our thoughts; the words come more randomly. Often, such writing is

not an end in itself; it is a retention of language elements that may be used later, for practical reasons, to write a text, or help with some task, though we may note an idea that simply seems interesting or pleasant. Such notes, taken randomly, will not necessarily be understood by another reader besides ourselves, as they lack continuity or context. So, we are not too concerned about their privacy, as they do not reveal much of our intimacy. However, we are not seeking to be understood either, and sometimes when rereading them, we do not understand ourselves. But ultimately, it does not matter; the mere act of noting them can serve a mnemonic function.

Artistic writing is of an entirely different nature. Briefly, art can be defined as the creative expression of imagination, emotions, and ideas through various mediums such as painting, sculpture, music, literature, and performance, aiming to communicate aesthetic and cultural experiences. Art involves shaping a given material, forms to be invented, using reason and imagination. If it is about writing, the medium, the material worked on, is language, the production, and arrangement of words. It is about creating a work, producing literary forms with various functions.

- Communicating, when it is about transmitting ideas, thoughts, information, and messages to others clearly and effectively.

- Expressing oneself, as it allows the author to articulate their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and worldview in a way that is readable by others.

- Creating, using language creatively to produce literary works, such as novels, essays, poems, plays, and short stories.

- Educating, when it involves teaching, informing, and explaining concepts, facts, and skills, in a broad or in an academic context. This can include recording and preserving events, experiences, and cultures for future generations.

- Entertaining, offering pleasure, relaxation, and entertainment through captivating stories, evocative descriptions, and wordplay.

- Persuading, to influence readers' opinions, attitudes, and behaviors through arguments, speeches, essays, and advertisements.

- Therapeutic, if it helps others in terms of emotional and psychological healing, through the expression and reflection on common personal experiences. Such work promotes self-understanding, inner reflection, and personal development.

- Social and political critique, by commenting, analyzing, and questioning social, political, and cultural structures.

In summary, the art of writing is a versatile tool that serves to communicate, express, create, instruct, entertain, document, persuade, heal, criticize, imagine, and reflect, touching almost every aspect of human experience.

Thus, one sees that the other, the interlocutor, is always present in the art of writing. Without them, this art would have little meaning, so it cannot be ignored. Certainly, as we have seen, the desire to write stems from an intimate necessity, as being an artist is above all a vocation, the expression of an inner "voice," but nevertheless, the other is never far away. They cannot be ignored or rejected. They are the echo of the work, part of its manifestation, its expression, its being. The other is in some way the witness of the work's power, in the sense of an indicator, like a "pilot light." Certainly, great works have waited a long time before being recognized, for example, the death of their author, and others may never be recognized for what they are worth, but even the refusal of a work tells us something about it and the society it "inhabits," if we try to understand the reason for such discordance.

Thus, even if some works of art may seem very personal or introspective, they always fit into a broader social context and interact with it. Art, by its very nature, is deeply connected to the social and cultural dynamics of its time.

Art plays a role in shaping and expressing cultural and communal identity. It can reinforce the sense of belonging to a group, a nation, or a culture, and it can modulate the way of being of that society. Therefore, the artist cannot not want to "speak" with this society.

The artist can certainly temporarily retreat into their niche to protect themselves or their art, but they will always need, will always feel

the necessity, at some point, to show themselves to the world, to risk themselves to others. Let us remember the myth of Plato's Cave, where the one who escapes the realm of shadows because they seek the absolute still ends up returning to their origins, even if they can foresee the fatal outcome. They cannot not face the baseness and contempt of their peers.

Therefore, it is advised for the writer not to isolate themselves in a radical, exclusive manner, unless they truly wish for this isolation, due to a lack of interest in others, contempt for dialogue, or fear of criticism. There are two main reasons to encourage such relationships. The first is psychological, to find moral support, which can often be very useful. Anxiety is frequently the writer's lot, regarding their own abilities, the quality of their work, the reception of their work, even the absurdity of their existence. And while solitude in the face of the blank page is somewhat unavoidable, being surrounded by one or more understanding, supportive people can provide psychological and moral comfort and reassurance. The second is cognitive and artistic, as some people are likely to give substantial and friendly feedback on their work. But for this to happen, the artist must have enough confidence in themselves, their work, and their relationships to endure such feedback. Some writers, very anxious, prefer not to show their work to anyone, for fear of being discouraged at the slightest criticism. This attitude can be understood, but they will likely want some recognition someday, they will decide to show their work, and that day will be terrible for them, a postponed and repulsive event. Unless they hide it forever, which will be no less painful for them, as the quest for recognition, however minimal, is relatively unavoidable for any artist. Recognition serves as validation of their talent and efforts, strengthening their self-confidence and motivating them to continue creating. Not to mention that on a practical, purely material, financial, or other level, this recognition will make life easier, allowing them to continue working without worrying about their own survival, a concern that can be very painful, anxiety-inducing, and time-consuming. Of course, some artists will be skeptical or critical

of the institutions and norms that distribute recognition, preferring to stay outside traditional validation circuits. They may fear that seeking recognition will influence or compromise their artistic vision, preferring to stay true to their own aesthetic, the purity of their message. In absolute terms, the simple joy and pleasure of creating can be sufficient, without the need for external approval or validation, but concretely, total isolation and the complete absence of interlocutors or audience is quite hard to bear.

The importance of showing our texts is twofold. On the existential level, it is about working on self-censorship by daring to expose ourselves, daring to exist, daring to face the world, rather than nervously hiding. On the other hand, dialogue allows us to rethink our writing, to work on it, to improve it. Criticism, comments from others, even if they surprise us, even if we disagree with them, reveal something about ourselves. We do not have to assign absolute value to the comments we receive or obey the recommendations made, but it is better to have the patience to listen to them. It always seems interesting because we discover the reality or evaluate the power of our work by realizing how it affects the reader. The recurring alibi phrase of people who do not dare to show their texts to others, who fear external judgment, is to reply, "I write for myself," "It is a personal work," but in fact, by encouraging discussion with them, we realize that they actually have artistic pretensions and that it is not at all a "personal work" as we described earlier. But the adjective "personal" serves as a psychological refuge to avoid confronting themselves. As soon as there is a quest for beauty, a quest for meaning, a quest for originality, a quest for universality, a quest for truth, it is no longer purely "personal" work as we have defined it, but "artistic" work, meaning something that addresses everyone, that one would like to show, that one hopes will be appreciated, even if the writer tries, in an act of bad faith, to retreat into their private lair.

IX

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE WRITER

There is a way of being, a psychological or existential disposition, an attitude towards the world, that characterizes the writer, though this pattern can be extended to artists in general. We will present certain classic characteristics, knowing that these are only tendencies that do not necessarily apply to all writers, or that apply with varying intensity. The first generalization we can make is that a certain sadness, a certain anxiety, a certain melancholy often inhabits those who engage in writing: the writer does not radiate happiness. Let's explore different reasons that might explain this state of mind.

HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY

The desire to write often involves having heightened sensitivity, psychological, emotional, and perceptual. One of the sources of the desire to write is a sense of observation, a curiosity about the world, possibly due to a certain inclination or gift. As with any desire or aspiration, it requires or implies a specific sensitivity, without which the person is not motivated in this direction. To write and desire to write, the mind must observe the world around it with particular attention to details, nuances, and subtleties. Whether it is nature, individuals, society, or other

characteristics of reality, inspiration can come from anything: a conversation, a scene from daily life, a work of art, etc. Leonardo da Vinci said he was inspired by the cracks in the wall. Such open-mindedness and receptivity require heightened sensitivity to external stimuli.

This ability to perceive and describe human experiences vividly and accurately requires greater acuity than average. Writing about human beings, their motivations, actions, and emotions requires deep understanding and empathy for others. Writers often need to immerse themselves in the feelings and thoughts they describe to make them substantial and credible, which demands developed sensitivity.

Moreover, the desire to write is often driven by the need to understand and express one's emotions and experiences, not just those of others, even if writing transposes them onto others. One cannot truly understand others' experiences and express them if one has not experienced them oneself, even if it is in a different form or with different intensity. Others' experiences interest us because we share something similar with them. Thus, the writer must be receptive to all psychological phenomena to nourish their art, which requires introspection and personal sensitivity. Creating stories, worlds, and characters demands a fertile imagination and the ability to see and think beyond immediate reality. This imagination is often nurtured by sensitivity to human experiences and the human condition. This sensitivity entails a certain vulnerability because writers put part of themselves into their works, risking exposing their own fragility. This vulnerability is a sign of heightened sensitivity, and it requires the courage to open up and share intimate aspects of their being.

In summary, this heightened sensitivity allows writers to capture the subtleties of the world and human emotions, deeply understand them, and express them authentically and touchingly in their writings. This sensitivity is a valuable asset for creating works that resonate with readers and capture the complexity of the human experience. However, it tends to make the writer unstable, overly reactive to the internal and external vicissitudes of reality, causing them suffering and unhappiness.

Although the depth he acquires through his writing can also give him stability and structure, preventing him from getting carried away by his overly sensitive nature.

THE UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS

There is another explanation for the "unhappiness" of the writer. Some operate in a more philosophical, more rational mode. They spend time reflecting on ideas, concepts, and profound themes. This intense reflection requires intellectual sensitivity to understand and express complex ideas nuancedly, to analyze reality, to understand man and the world. This often involves a state Hegel calls "unhappy consciousness." For him, it is a stage in the development of human consciousness towards self-realization and self-understanding. It represents a moment of inner division and conflict in the development of consciousness. The unhappy consciousness is torn between two contradictory poles: the individual self and the absolute, or the infinite. It recognizes a disparity between its finite existence and an ideal, a transcendence, an absolute, conceptualized as a God, a moral ideal, or some idea of perfection. It acknowledges the existence of something greater than itself, a moral perfection, a superior essence, even an "idealized self." By recognizing this disparity, the consciousness feels alienated and separated from this ideal. It feels a deep sense of loss and despair because it perceives it can never fully reach or embody this ideal or absolute. Consequently, it is characterized by constant inner suffering and an incessant quest to overcome this division. This quest can take the form of religious, spiritual, scientific, or philosophical search, serving as a driving force for the writer, constituting their psychic background.

Nevertheless, Hegel explains the positive dimension of this unhappy consciousness. By recognizing the existence of an ideal or absolute beyond itself, the consciousness takes a crucial step towards understanding the real, the "Other," what lies beyond its own self. The consciousness must and wants to overcome this division and alienation, leading

to a higher stage of consciousness where the individual self and the absolute are reconciled in a higher synthesis. It is the aspiration for the "sublime," the desire for creation and truth known to every writer engaged in reflective work. Thus, the suffering and sense of alienation felt drive the consciousness to transcend its finite limitations and evolve towards a more integrated and holistic understanding of itself and the universe. Hence, our sense of finitude, our realization of limits, both ours and others, incites us to this eternal transcendence. It is because we suffer from these limitations that we want to write, to create and transcend.

NEED FOR RECOGNITION

A third reason for the writer's unhappiness is their need for recognition, a constant source of anxiety. The businessperson is confirmed in their success by their performance, a concrete and tangible proof. A scientist is valued for their discoveries, the result of their experiments. An athlete is valued by competition, where the best visibly triumphs over others. But nothing like this exists for the writer, no concrete proof can be provided, everything relies on the subjective appreciation of their readers, whether it is the public's sanction through book sales or the opinions of experts and certified critics who often give contradictory opinions, except for rare works that garner near-unanimous approval. Therefore, the writer seeks by all means to be seen and noticed, as nothing is worse than indifference, a sign of insignificance, in general he generally hopes to be recognised and treated with praise. This constant anxiety, more or less intense depending on the individual, along with the accompanying doubt and nervousness, weighs on the psyche and makes the writer unhappy. It affects their existence and can make their writing work rather difficult.

Writing is an activity that involves deep personal expression, giving of oneself, sometimes in an ungrateful way. Recognition validates the artist's efforts and talent, confirming that their work has value and that

they have successfully communicated something important, but because there is great proximity between the writer and their work, this recognition has existential consequences. Recognition strengthens self-esteem, giving confidence in their abilities and vision, which can be particularly crucial in a field where rejection, jealousy, and criticism are common. This recognition gives energy; it is a source of motivation and inspiration, encouraging them to continue their work, create, and explore new ideas. This validation, by making them more confident, also pushes the artist to take risks and evolve in their work.

ISOLATION

On a social level, the writer, like any individual, seeks to belong to a community or group of peers, providing a sense of acceptance and belonging. This specific form of peer recognition confirms that their message has been received and understood, which is gratifying and encourages them to write and engage with the public. Unfortunately, the writer often seeks to communicate unique ideas, emotions, or perspectives and values the exclusivity of their talent and work. Such a tendency makes them egocentric, even egomaniacal, and they are always in competition with others. One author is always more famous than another, inevitably provoking envy. Celebrated authors always attract criticism from colleagues unconsciously driven by envy and resentment. Thus, when writers discuss their respective work, when they exchange ideas, one easily perceives this dimension of competition beyond the appearance of camaraderie and solidarity among "virtuosos", each convinced or wanting to convince themselves that their work is superior to others. Unless they recognize the genius of another and use it to despise their own work or, at least, doubt themselves. Therefore, the writer often finds themselves alone, dissatisfied with relationships with others, always tinged with doubt and bitterness.

On a more practical and professional level, recognition opens doors; it offers publishing, sales, collaboration, and commission opportunities.

It helps establish the artist's reputation in the cultural and commercial world. This attracts contracts, readers, or grants, ensuring financial support crucial for continuing to write without worrying about financial problems and material survival. But few writers manage to live well from their writing, from their passion. Often, they must engage in a livelihood activity that does not satisfy them as much as their writing work, or they barely get by, which undermines them and makes them unhappy. The uncertainty related to career opportunities and success can be a significant source of stress.

Thus, social recognition is not just superficial validation for the writer. It plays a vital role in their personal, social, and professional development. It provides necessary support and validation to continue creating, exploring, and sharing their unique vision with the world. However, this recognition is difficult to obtain for most writers, who remain anxious, dissatisfied, or bitter.

Of course, like any individual, this need for recognition can be excessive, abusive, and therefore pathological. The writer may fall into the trap of greed and chronic dissatisfaction, where they no longer enjoy their work because they are too obsessed with this external validation. Unless they allow themselves to be corrupted by conforming to current tastes, the whims of the public, betraying themselves to achieve some success, to please, becoming a slave to their time, which will not satisfy them either.

NEUROTICISM

Psychological studies have shown that creativity can be linked to specific personality traits like neuroticism, characterized by a tendency to frequently and intensely experience negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, irritability, guilt, even depression. Neuroticism is associated with greater vulnerability to stress, leading to mood disorders and even mental health problems. Such individuals may struggle to manage conflicts and maintain harmonious relationships. They may react exces-

sively or disproportionately to stressful or negative events in daily life. Their stress tolerance threshold is often lower than that of more stable individuals. These individuals tend to have a pessimistic view of the world and worry excessively about the future. They may be constantly preoccupied with worries and negative thoughts. This acute sensitivity makes the individual more vulnerable to negative emotions and existential pain, often inducing states of melancholy. We see as well how such obsessions can inspire the writer or the artist in general, as they are more sensitive than average to psychological pain, subject to significant mood variations, which can be a motivation and a writing subject.

However, this does not mean that all artists are unhappy. There is also research suggesting that engaging in creative activities can improve mental well-being and offer an outlet for stress and negative emotions, an existential and psychological anchoring factor.

SELF-EXCLUSION

Social self-exclusion is a common phenomenon with writers, which is not a problem if it favors intellectual work. An interesting illustration is the Chinese movement of "Hidden Scholars" or "Reclusion," an important tradition in the country's culture since the early centuries of its history, which contributed significantly to art, notably poetry, music, and philosophy. These intellectuals isolated themselves from society, an isolation expressing a protest against corruption, a quest for a more harmonious and spiritually rich life, a search for wisdom and inner peace, and especially the acquisition of intellectual freedom.

The isolation of the writer can be problematic when it engenders resentment, when in fact they are disappointed by society and become hateful or paranoid. For example, feeling misunderstood or unrecognized by society or their peers, as their work is not appreciated as it should be. He thus deprives himself of the intellectual, social and emotional support he needs. Strangely, this can lead to even more sustained self-criticism. Seeing the success of other writers who are more so-

cially integrated, they become jealous, as others, perhaps less talented in their eyes, receive more recognition and success, which can seem unjust. Moreover, isolation can lead to disconnection from the trends and interests of the outside world, making it difficult for the writer to align their work with what the public desires, a mismatch that can generate resentment towards a society perceived as distant from their values or art. Finally, the writer may internalize their isolation as a personal failure, leading to bitterness and resentment.

They isolate themselves, afraid of being judged or ignored, unsure which is worse. Unable to engage in real and substantive dialogue, they end up fleeing the world, hating the world, becoming misanthropic. It is difficult, then, to avoid resentment, the solitary worm of the mind, as Friedrich Nietzsche calls it, illustrating how this emotion can gnaw and destroy the spirit from within. The disappointed writer has difficulty admitting their disillusionment. However, no artist feels sufficiently recognized, appreciated, or understood; something is always missing. So they withdraw, wounded by this fundamental injustice. But perversely, they end up reveling in this resentment. Thus, they cultivate it, protect it. At the same time, this prostration of the isolated, banished, or damned artist is paradoxical: it can both motivate and destroy them or do both in turn. Because something in them, as in every human, loves to wallow, to complain, to suffer. The artist then makes their art even more personal; all distance is reduced or erased; all aesthetic transcendence is forgotten; they can become amorphous, powerless. They may end up capitulating, abandoning art unless they can channel or sublimate this resentment to create. In any case, they savor the perceived injustice, which actually validates them, forges their identity, and inspires them. According to the romantic myth of the damned artist, they glorify rejection just as one can glorify success. They are a “different” person, morally superior, an intellectual, a conscious, creative person, unlike the herd of cattle they despise and scorn. They conclude that happiness is a privilege of fools.

Thus, voluntary exclusion, withdrawal into oneself, is a true privilege, stemming from a dark instinct, a pleasure in unhappiness. They become enamored with their misery, proud of their disappointment, a deprivation that makes them exist or even overexist. Becoming complacent, they no longer want to try anything, they cannot try anything. Broken hope is the first step down a long, gentle slope toward self-annihilation. All that remains is their painful imagination, a powerless fantasy about how things should be, like Oblomov, the hero of Russian writer Ivan Goncharov, an inert and angry idealist who could not leave his bed. Indeed, it is more convenient and comfortable to cultivate complaints rather than face a challenge.

THE FRACTURE OF BEING

Here is another reason the writer may be unhappy or perceived as such: the inner conflict, the fracture of being. The writer, like any artist, lives in a kind of abyss, an intellectual and existential void. Often, they are internally fractured. They feel divided, conflicted with themselves, torn between their aspirations or intellectual visions and material reality. This duality between the aspiration for beauty, the extraordinary, the sublime, some form of transcendence, and the practical realities of daily life, its limits and demands, creates constant tension that can be dramatic. The writer evolves in a world of visions and ideals, creating tension between art and life when faced with the prosaic realities of daily life. The artist feels torn between their rich, promise-filled inner world and the vulgar banality of common routine.

All these elements contribute to the vision of the artist as a tragic figure, desperately seeking to reconcile their need to create with the harsh realities of human existence, material and psychological survival. Unfortunately, this inner struggle is an essential part of the artistic condition, a necessary sacrifice to achieve authenticity and depth in the work of art.

Similarly, this fracture exists between themselves and society. They easily feel isolated and misunderstood by their environment, even when commonly read and commented on, as they will never be "truly" understood. Moreover, they are much more attentive and sensitive to criticism than to compliments. They perceive social norms, prevailing criteria, and common opinion as oppressive and contrary to their ideal of creative freedom. This feeling of isolation, real or fictitious, can lead to a profound sense of loneliness. Their art is so special that the writer becomes "ontologically misunderstood", a banished or damned figure.

The fracture also centers around the experience of limits, the sensation of finitude, leading them to seek perfection that never arrives. They aspire to an impossible perfect form, an idyllic state, unattainable. This incessant quest leads to frustration and a sense of failure, as the completed work never fully satisfies their ideal, their thirst for the absolute.

Subconsciously or consciously, the writer is in search of meaning or truth. This philosophical and spiritual search can be a source of unhappiness when it leads only to unsatisfactory answers or a sense of emptiness, which is often the case due to the constant thirst that drives them.

One could assert that every writer is in search of meaning, even those writing popular fiction or banal serials. They already explore and narrate universal themes such as love, justice, morality, betrayal, and redemption. These themes are fundamental to the human condition and offer a way for the writer to seek and give meaning to the human experience. By creating their own world, inventing stories and characters, the writer gives shape to ideas and emotions. Through their narratives, they examine and inventory existential and societal questions, even if indirectly or under the guise of entertainment. They reflect on society and human relationships. For example, a love story can explore dynamics of power in relationships, existential expectations, and personal aspirations. A detective novel can examine the nature of good and evil, justice and injustice, and complex human motivations. Willingly or unwillingly, consciously or not, writers of all genres seek to share their visions, questions,

and perspectives with their readers. This communication is a quest for meaning, involving reflection on what is important, relevant, and worth telling. Writing becomes a way to understand themselves and the world around them. By developing stories and characters, they project their own questions and explore possible answers. Simply writing is a quest for meaning, a desire for personal fulfillment. In writing, the author finds a way to realize their creative potential and express ideas or emotions of profound significance to them. The hope of influencing readers can also be seen as a quest for meaning, as it touches on transmitting and impacting our thoughts and emotions on others. But in these various aspects, there will always be a form of dissatisfaction or lack, a gap between their intentions, expectations, and actual reality, constantly pushing the author to continue writing.

Strangely, writers are hardly inclined toward happiness, even though writing should make them happy. Only a minority achieve this feat. Furthermore, writers have a great capacity to exacerbate their sense of unhappiness, to dramatize it, which is undoubtedly part of their talent in composing and imagining, but which can be very painful for them and their surroundings. Their sensitivity coupled with their ideal perspective combines well to produce this effect of heightened suffering. Simultaneously, because artists can skillfully and vividly express negative emotions through their art, it can give the false impression that they are often unhappy, which is part of the spectacle. A game of hide-and-seek takes place between the writer and his art, at once complicity and betrayal, revelation and concealment, in which he can lose himself.

X

PHILOSOPHERS AND WRITING

WRITING AS THE POWER OF BEING

Writing can be seen as a potent activity that enhances an individual's capacity to understand, express, and develop themselves, enhancing their "power of being," as coined by the philosopher Benedict Spinoza. His philosophy centers on the idea of *conatus* (Latin term for striving, effort), which is the innate drive of every being to persist in its own existence and enhance its power and capacity for action. Let us examine the different ways in which *conatus* and "writing" correspond.

Writing allows individuals to explore and articulate their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. This deepens self-awareness and understanding, aligning with Spinoza's idea that understanding oneself is a path to greater freedom and power. For Spinoza, freedom is grounded in the capacity to be conscious of one's own determinations, therefore self-consciousness.

Through writing, individuals can process and express their subjectivity, leading to emotional clarity and therefore psychological relief. This emotional management enhances one's overall well-being and capacity to act effectively.

Writing enables individuals to communicate their ideas and experiences to others, fostering connection and empathy. This shared understanding and social interaction can enhance one's social power and influence.

Engaging in writing stimulates creativity and intellectual development. This growth expands one's capabilities and potential, enhancing one's power of being in the intellectual and creative domains.

Therefore, writing can be seen as a powerful activity that enhances an individual's capacity to understand, express, and develop themselves, to understand society and act upon the world, resonating with Spinoza's concept of enhancing the power of being.

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

Michel de Montaigne, the 16th-century French philosopher and writer, spoke extensively about writing in his famous work, *Essays*.

Montaigne used writing as a means of exploring his own thoughts and experiences. He believed that writing helped him understand himself better and delve into the depths of his own mind, to focus on himself. "I have only myself to deal with; I continually examine and explore myself. I have my affairs and my subject matter at hand." He seeks to represent himself as he is, with his contradictions and doubts. He wants to be transparent and true to himself.

Montaigne saw writing as a way to communicate his thoughts and ideas to others, bridging the gap between his internal world and the external world. He also acknowledged that writing could grant a form of immortality to the writer, preserving their thoughts and experiences for future generations.

He viewed writing as a therapeutic activity that could help alleviate his anxieties and fears. By articulating his thoughts and worries, he found relief and a sense of clarity. His introspective essays often served as a means for him to process and make sense of his own emotional experiences. He believed that the practice of writing required discipline

and rigor. It was a way to cultivate the mind and improve one's intellectual faculties. Montaigne's reflections on writing are a testament to his belief in its power to shape and illuminate the human experience.

BENEDICT SPINOZA

Spinoza, the 17th-century Dutch philosopher, did not write extensively about the act of writing itself, but still gave some guidance to this exercise.

Spinoza valued clarity and precision in philosophical writing, his main focus. This standard is evident in his most famous work, *Ethics*, written in a rigorous geometric style, aiming to present his ideas with the utmost clarity and logical consistency. In the preface, he emphasizes the importance of clear and distinct ideas, which is a foundational principle for his method of philosophical inquiry and his criterion for truth. For Spinoza, the purpose of writing philosophy was to seek truth and understanding, rather than to persuade or entertain, aligning with his rationalist approach, which prioritizes reason and logical argumentation. One needs rational analysis and clarity to understand religious and philosophical texts properly. As well, he considered clarity important to communicate philosophical ideas adequately and contribute to the enlightenment and rational understanding of his readers. He aimed to make complex philosophical concepts accessible and comprehensible. He argues for the freedom of philosophical inquiry and expression, since open communication of ideas is essential for societal progress and education. Preoccupied with ethics, he considered that the way ideas are presented and discussed should align with the pursuit of truth and the promotion of intellectual and moral development, a fundamental obligation to seek and present the truth.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

The 19th-century German philosopher Nietzsche placed great importance on creativity and individual expression, activities that are essential manifestations of life and humanity. He considered the act of writing as a means for individuals to express their worldview, to shape their ideas and experiences, to create new possibilities of meaning, values, and understanding, to express their unique vision of the world, pushing the limits of their thinking and expression. Thus, writing was not merely a tool for communicating information or practical ideas but rather a manifestation of the individual "will to power," a concept suggesting that life fundamentally strives to grow, strengthen, and surpass itself. Writing becomes an affirmation of oneself and an exploration of existence, a way to transcend the limits of the human condition, a powerful tool for questioning, dismantling inherited beliefs and values, often limiting or hypocritical.

Nietzsche saw writing as a way to create new values and perspectives because he believed that to live authentically, one must create one's own values rather than adhere to those imposed by society. It involves appreciating life by pushing oneself to articulate a vision of existence that reflects one's deepest intuitions and aspirations, hence the importance of writing as a vital practice of transformation and self-affirmation. Writing was thus an essential means for the individual to realize their full potential and find their place in the world, to confront their own weaknesses, doubts, and preconceived ideas, giving this act an ontological value and fundamental importance.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

In his major work *Being and Time*, the contemporary German philosopher Heidegger explores the nature of human existence and the role of language in our understanding of the world. He argues that language is not merely a means of communication but the very foundation of our experience and understanding of being. Consequently, the act of writ-

ing is not merely a practical or utilitarian activity but the manifestation of our ability to express our existence and give meaning to our world, an essential way for human beings to reveal themselves to themselves and discover the deeper significance of their being.

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Contemporary French philosopher Foucault explored the idea of writing as a “technology of the self”. He discussed how writing practices can be used for self-examination and self-care. He elaborated on how ancient philosophers, such as Plato, Epicurus, Epictetus, Seneca, or Marcus Aurelius, used writing as a means of self-development. For him, writing is a means of self-examination, self-regulation, and self-transformation, an important tool by which people shape their own identities and conduct, which he calls “care of the self.”

Overall, he described “technologies of the self” as the methods and practices through which individuals act upon themselves to transform their bodies, thoughts, and conduct, to attain a certain desired state of being or identity. It involves various practices, including meditation, self-reflection, confession, and writing. Thus, writing is not merely a tool for communication or recording information but a crucial practice for self-knowledge and self-transformation. This could include keeping a journal, recording daily events, reflecting on one’s actions, or writing letters to friends and mentors for advice. These written exercises were seen as ways to monitor and improve one’s existential and moral conduct. Through writing, individuals can interrogate their own thoughts and behaviors, making writing a means of understanding and sometimes resisting societal norms and power structures. It enables individuals to create a narrative of themselves, helping them to construct their identity and ethical stance. This process involves an ongoing dialogue with oneself, fostering a deeper understanding of one’s desires, intentions, and actions. These practices allow individuals to engage in self-

reflection, articulate their experiences, and potentially transform their understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

Kierkegaard, a 19th-century Danish philosopher, placed significant emphasis on the process of self-reflection and self-discovery through writing. His works often explore the complexities of personal existence, the nature of selfhood, and the journey toward authentic living.

He often employed pseudonyms and fictional characters in his writings to explore different viewpoints and existential conditions. This method, known as indirect communication, allows readers to engage in a deeper, more personal reflection, as they must actively interpret and internalize the existential dilemmas presented through the diversity of perspectives. Such an exercise encourages readers to undertake their own journey of self-discovery, rather than passively receiving philosophical doctrines. Kierkegaard himself used journals and diaries extensively. These personal writings were a crucial part of his self-exploration, where he could freely express his thoughts, emotions, and philosophical insights, clarifying his ideas and understanding his own existential condition more deeply, exploring his own existential progression and struggles. Kierkegaard's concept of the self is deeply tied to the idea of becoming an authentic individual. This involves a continuous process of self-examination and personal choice. By engaging in this internal conversation, individuals can examine their inner lives, confront their anxieties and contradictions, and discover deeper truths about their existence. This introspective process helps individuals to understand their motivations, fears, and aspirations, leading to greater self-awareness and personal growth.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Thoreau, the 19th-century American writer and philosopher, believed deeply in the power of writing as a means to cultivate one's inner life, self-discovery and personal growth, and to connect more profoundly with oneself and the world.

By writing regularly, particularly through keeping a journal, he engaged in a process of continual self-examination and reflection. This practice allowed him to explore his thoughts, emotions, and experiences in depth, clarify his beliefs, articulate his values, and gain insights into his own nature, understanding, and developing his inner life. Thus, he emphasizes the importance of solitude and contemplative life, since writing provides a structured way to reflect on his own experiences, allowing him to deeply engage with his surroundings, with nature, with his own thoughts, therefore finding a profound sense of connection and meaning. He meticulously recorded his encounters with nature to cultivate a heightened awareness and appreciation of the environment, fostering a deeper spiritual and existential connection with it. Writing was also a way for Thoreau to engage with his transcendentalist ideals: the inherent goodness of people and nature, the value of individual intuition and insight, and the pursuit of truth through personal experience. It allowed him to formulate and communicate his ethical beliefs and advocate for social change. This reflective process was integral to his sense of integrity and commitment to living according to his principles. It was also a form of artistic expression. He approached writing with a sense of craft, striving for clarity, beauty, and precision in his language. This artistic endeavor was a way to engage deeply with his inner life and to express his unique perspective on the world, to channel his creativity and to produce works that resonate with emotional and intellectual depth.

HAN YU

Han Yu was a prominent Chinese writer, poet, and philosopher during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), a cultural golden age in China. He wrote several influential essays and pieces that discuss the nature, purpose, and style of writing.

His focus was primarily on the moral and educational purposes of writing rather than on writing for oneself in a modern, introspective sense. However, he did touch upon aspects that indirectly relate to the personal benefits of writing, as a crucial tool for self-cultivation and moral development. By engaging with classical texts and composing their own writings, individuals could refine their virtues and align themselves more closely with the Dao (the Way). By articulating fundamental Confucianist values in their writing, individuals could better understand and embody them. Although Han Yu did not explicitly emphasize writing for personal self-expression in the way Western writers might, his works often reflected his thoughts, critiques, and philosophical stances. This suggests that writing served as a medium for Han Yu to express his own beliefs and insights. He valued writing as a means of intellectual engagement and discourse. He believed that through writing, one could confront the thoughts of others, critique them, and advance one's understanding and refine one's thinking. By documenting his thoughts and critiques, he aimed to influence both his contemporaries and those who would come after him.

KAHLIL GIBRAN

Kahlil Gibran, the renowned modern Lebanese poet, philosopher, and artist, wrote extensively about the nature and significance of writing. His reflections on writing are deeply intertwined with his broader spiritual and philosophical views.

Gibran believed that true writing comes from the depths of one's soul. Writing should be an authentic expression of one's innermost thoughts and feelings, an authenticity that grants its power and beauty.

For him, writing is a spiritual journey, a means of exploring and articulating the profound truths of existence, allowing individuals to connect with their inner selves and with the divine. It is a path to self-discovery and personal growth. By putting thoughts and feelings into words, writers can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. He also saw writing as a means of healing and catharsis. The act of writing can help individuals process their emotions and experiences, leading to greater clarity and inner peace.

Writing is a form of art that requires creativity and a deep appreciation for beauty; it should elevate the human spirit and inspire readers by capturing and communicating timeless wisdom. Through writing, one can connect with the broader human experience, and by addressing universal themes and emotions, writers can create works that resonate with readers across different cultures and eras. Gibran viewed the writer as an inspired messenger, imparting wisdom and guidance. Although he also emphasized the responsibility that comes with writing, writers should strive for integrity and honesty in their work, as they have the power to influence and inspire others.

XI

BEGINNER WRITER'S

GUIDE

Those who have difficulty writing will look for techniques, algorithms, recipes, and indeed such schemes exist that can help, but above all, it is about working on oneself, persevering, practicing, and thus learning autonomously. Moreover, writing cannot be taught to someone else; one can only help them learn by themselves. It is mainly in the practice of writing that one learns to write.

Understanding the various causes of blockage can help find strategies to overcome the fear of the blank page and start the writing process more easily. But we must also impose various procedures on ourselves to overcome these obstacles. So, to summarize, we propose a kind of vade-mecum that can help the anxious or paralyzed writer. It is not a fixed method or a recipe, but a toolbox: each person, according to their way of being and their moods, will find what may be useful to them.

Delegate, postpone, or eliminate non-essential tasks to free up time for writing, establishing this exercise as a priority. The allotted time can be minimal; the important thing is to get started. Half an hour daily is a good base.

Find a conducive environment, comfortable, quiet, and free from distractions, to better concentrate. Isolate yourself from anything that could disturb or attract you, such as social media, various work and

friend messages, by turning off notifications or disconnecting from the Internet. You can also play music if it helps create a suitable atmosphere, stimulate or relax you, or choose a noisy place if it psychologically reassures you, such as a café. It could also be a place where others are working, like a library.

To be in a good mental disposition, use techniques to clear the mind, practice meditation or do small physical exercises, either before starting or when you begin to tire.

Establish a regular writing schedule and stick to it, or determine each day the writing appointment for the next day. Try to work for a short moment, even ten minutes, the extension will take place naturally. Don't impose yourself with great expectatives, which have a paralyzing effect.

Find the time that suits you best for writing. Maybe early in the morning, during the day or late at night. If possible, it is better to write early in the morning because our brain is generally more alert after a night's rest. Also, early in the morning, there are fewer risks of being disturbed by distractions.

Determine the topic of your next writing session in advance. You can also make a list of tasks to be accomplished to stay focused on the objectives. If you don't feel inspired by anything, still remain in a writing position, patiently; some idea will always come.

If you don't know what to write about, you can practice free writing, where you transcribe everything that comes to mind without any censorship. It could start by writing that you don't know what to write about, to break the ice, trying to write without interruption, without worrying about grammar, spelling, style, or content. Or you can write about what you have recently experienced, various memories, your emotions, people around you, what you have seen or heard, or what you are reading. You can also use phrases, images, words, or themes that come to mind as triggers to inspire writing. Or start from a given book, reading a page or two and then commenting on them, establishing a kind of dialogue with the author.

At the start, accept imperfection, allowing yourself to write an unsatisfactory first draft that can always be revised later, but not at the moment, otherwise, we will not progress. Support the principle that the first version of a text is never perfect. Every initial writing is a draft that is meant to be revised and improved, to be sacrificed. So you must forget your extraordinary expectations.

You can work in pairs or groups if it helps. Either to have a moment of working together and feel less alone in the commitment. This can be done in physical presence or virtually, via the Internet. The simple presence of others may suffice, but you can also discuss the work in progress, either intermittently, in fragments, or by systematically reading and commenting on the partner(s)' work.

Or write together, if the partners have a common project. Otherwise, you can also practice by writing a free text where each person writes a sentence in turn to stimulate creativity.

You can revise a text to improve the quality of the writing, but only when a significant first draft has been completed. You can reread the text and revise it, focusing in turn on specific aspects such as structure, style, coherence, dialogues, etc.

As we have already said, these techniques can be adapted and combined according to the writer's personal goals, needs, and difficulties.

XII

STRUCTURES OF PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS

To help those who wish to engage in philosophical writing, here are two different ways to structure an essay in order to create a rigorous piece of work.

NOTIONAL OR ANALYTICAL STRUCTURE

The notional structure focuses on the key concepts of the topic to be addressed. This method allows the reflection to be structured around fundamental concepts and explored in depth. Here is how one can structure a notional essay.

INTRODUCTION

HOOK: a sentence or two to capture the reader's interest.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: presentation of the philosophical question to be addressed, introducing the key concepts.

OUTLINE OF THE PLAN: indication of the main concepts that will be analyzed.

DEVELOPMENT

FIRST PART:

Analysis of the First Concept

DEFINITION: Explain the first key concept in detail.

CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE: discuss its historical context and philosophical significance.

APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: explore how this concept applies to the issue at hand and what its implications are.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: mention philosophers or theories that have addressed this concept.

FOLLOWING PARTS:

repeat the same procedure with other concepts.

SYNTHESIS OF CONCEPTS

Compare and contrast the studied concepts.

Discuss how they interact and influence each other.

Propose a synthesis of the implications of these concepts in relation to the initial problem.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY of the main points addressed concerning each concept.

ANSWER to the initial problem in light of the analyses of the concepts.

OPENING: propose further reflection or additional questions arising from the analysis.

EXAMPLE OF A NOTIONAL OR ANALYTICAL STRUCTURE

Suppose we are dealing with the question of freedom.

INTRODUCTION

HOOK: "Freedom is a fundamental value, but what does it really mean in our lives?"

PROBLEM STATEMENT: "How do the concepts of negative freedom, positive freedom, and determinism interact to define our understanding of freedom?"

OUTLINE OF THE PLAN: "We will analyze these three concepts to understand their influence on our comprehension of freedom."

DEVELOPMENT

FIRST PART:

Negative Freedom

DEFINITION: absence of external constraints.

IMPORTANCE: essential in classical liberal theories.

APPLICATIONS: individual rights and limits of authority.

REFERENCES: John Locke, Isaiah Berlin.

SECOND PART:

Positive Freedom

DEFINITION: the capacity to act according to one's own will.

IMPORTANCE: crucial in theories of autonomy and emancipation.

APPLICATIONS: personal development and autonomy.

REFERENCES: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Taylor.

THIRD PART:

Determinism Positive Freedom

DEFINITION: the idea that all actions are caused by prior conditions.

IMPORTANCE: challenges the notion of absolute freedom.

APPLICATIONS: moral responsibility and free will.

REFERENCES: Spinoza, David Hume.

SYNTHESIS OF CONCEPTS

Explain the interaction between negative and positive freedom.

Show the impact of determinism on the conception of freedom.

Propose a nuanced understanding of freedom, defining what authorizes, conditions and limits its implementation.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY: importance of the three concepts for understanding freedom.

ANSWER: freedom is a complex interaction between absence of constraints, autonomy, and deterministic conditions.

OPENING: "how do these concepts influence contemporary debates on freedom in modern societies?"

DIALECTICAL STRUCTURE

The dialectical structure is a method of organizing the essay that allows the reflection to be structured around the examination of opposing theses to arrive at a synthesis. This method is particularly useful for dealing with complex philosophical subjects where different perspectives must be considered and reconciled. Here is how one can structure a dialectical essay.

INTRODUCTION

HOOK: engaging sentence.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: presentation of the question to be addressed.

OUTLINE OF THE PLAN: indication of the stages of dialectical reasoning.

DEVELOPMENT

FIRST PART:

Thesis

EXPOSITION of a first position or argument.

JUSTIFICATION and examples.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: mention philosophers or theories that have addressed this notion.

SECOND PART:

Antithesis

EXPOSITION of an opposing position or critique.

JUSTIFICATION and examples.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: mention philosophers or theories that have addressed this notion.

THIRD PART:

Synthesis

RECONCILIATION of the two previous positions.

PROPOSAL of a new integrative perspective.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: mention philosophers or theories that have achieved such a synthesis.

CONCLUSION

RECAPITULATION of the main arguments.

CLEAR ANSWER to the problem statement.

OPENING: towards broader reflection.

EXAMPLE OF A DIALECTICAL STRUCTURE

Suppose we are dealing with the concept of freedom.

INTRODUCTION

HOOK: "Freedom is an ideal humanity aspires to, but its definition and implementation remain controversial."

PROBLEM STATEMENT: "Is freedom primarily about the absence of external constraints (negative freedom) or the ability to act according to one's own will (positive freedom)?"

OUTLINE OF THE PLAN: "We will first analyze the argument in favor of negative freedom, then examine the critiques favoring positive freedom, and finally propose a synthesis that reconciles these two perspectives."

DEVELOPMENT

FIRST PART:

Thesis - Negative Freedom

EXPOSITION: negative freedom is defined as the absence of external constraints preventing the individual from acting according to their will.

JUSTIFICATION AND EXAMPLES: this conception is often associated with the protection of individual rights against state intervention or other actors. For example, freedom of speech and freedom of religion are manifestations of negative freedom.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: John Locke and Isaiah Berlin are two major philosophers who supported this notion. Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Government*, defends the natural rights of the individual, while Berlin, in his essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*, clearly distinguishes between negative and positive freedom.

SECOND PART:

Antithesis - Positive Freedom

EXPOSITION: positive freedom is defined as the ability of the individual to realize their own will and be the master of their actions.

JUSTIFICATION AND EXAMPLES: this conception emphasizes autonomy and personal development. For example, education is seen as a means to increase positive freedom by allowing individuals to develop their abilities and realize their potential.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles Taylor have strongly influenced this notion. Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, argues that true freedom involves active participation in the political community, while Taylor, in *What's Wrong with Negative Liberty*, criticizes the restrictive view of negative freedom.

THIRD PART:

Synthesis

RECONCILIATION OF THE TWO POSITIONS: a synthesis of the conceptions of negative and positive freedom can be found in recognizing that true freedom involves both the absence of external constraints and the ability to realize one's potential. Negative freedom is necessary to protect the individual from coercion, while positive freedom is essential to allow autonomy and personal development.

PROPOSAL OF A NEW INTEGRATIVE PERSPECTIVE: this integrative perspective suggests that public policies should not only protect individual rights but also promote conditions that enable everyone to develop their abilities. For example, ensuring access to education and healthcare while respecting individual freedoms.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFERENCES: Amartya Sen, in his capability approach, proposes a synthesis where freedom is seen as the real capacity of individuals to make meaningful choices, thus combining elements of both conceptions.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ARGUMENTS: we examined negative freedom as the absence of constraints, positive freedom as the ability to realize one's will, and proposed a synthesis combining these two perspectives.

CLEAR ANSWER to the problem statement: true freedom involves both protection against external constraints and the promotion of necessary conditions for personal autonomy.

OPENING: how can contemporary societies effectively balance these two dimensions of freedom in their public policies and social structures?

XIII

WHY WRITE?

To write, so as not to need to write anymore. A strange paradox. To eat, so as not to be hungry. To drink, so as not to be thirsty. To sleep, so as not to be tired. But what do we call the need to write? Or the state of lacking writing? No term exists to express this deficiency. Could it be that this need has no existence of its own, no status in itself? Why then do we write if the need to write doesn't exist by itself? To be, to exist precisely. Nothing else comes to mind.

WHAT ARE WE SEEKING?

What is a human being seeking? Not much, or nothing very original. He wants to be happy. And how does he want to be happy? By being beautiful or strong. By being knowledgeable, wise, or clever. By being good or evil. By being rich or famous. By being unique. By being loved or hated. So many forms – very limited in number – of the fullness that brings us happiness, at least in appearance. But anyway, happiness can only be an appearance. On closer inspection, fullness can only be illusory. A fragile being, subject to illness, suffering, and death, cannot know fullness without telling themselves stories. That is probably why we write: to tell ourselves stories. Stories of all kinds, stories nonetheless. It's the story of a man who became rich, of a woman who became beautiful, of a dog who became wise, clever, or cunning. To write in order to

invent what is not. To write to make appear what does not appear. To write to bring into being what does not exist. What is the difference?

There are other ways to tell ourselves stories. By playing a role, but that amounts to the same thing. By believing in ghosts or specters. By building castles in the air or elsewhere. By waiting for Godot or his cousin. By loving another, the bearer of all hopes, until they disappoint us, until doomsday for the most tenacious. By waiting for scratches or caresses, on the back, on the head, or the pineal gland. By seeking eyes, languid eyes, misty eyes, wide eyes, blissful eyes, downcast eyes, bleary eyes or bulging eyes, winks or fluttering eyelids. Writing, like speaking, loves eyes. It hardly tires of the gaze, its own, that of others. Even criticism is pleasant compared to the absence of a face, known or unknown. As long as there is recognition... To recognize, both an acknowledgment of existence and gratitude. How to thank, except by recognizing the existence of the other. Double meaning of recognition. Words know us better than we know ourselves. They expose us. That is why they are so dangerous, why we love them so much.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

Tell me you care about me. Tell me you know no one else like me. Tell me I'm knowledgeable. Tell me I'm indispensable. Tell me I'm the best. Strangely, a compliment that does not suit us shocks us. Our expectations are so particular. Woe to him who gets it wrong! This is what I want, and nothing else! And it's not up to me to say it: it's up to you to find out. Otherwise, it would be too easy. And even if you tell me, I'll think you are saying it to please me, to manipulate me, to use me, to get me off your back, to calm my fears and anxieties. So tell me again and again, maybe I'll end up believing you. Meanwhile, the mere sound of your voice makes me forget, an ephemeral and fragile moment, so do not stop. Tell me again and again the story of Cinderella, that of Tom Thumb, or the Ugly Duckling. Stories for children, no doubt, but we are children, children who no longer have the right to be children. So

let's disguise ourselves, play at being mom and dad, doctor and teacher, cowboys and Indians, fakir or magician. Let's pretend. Play for butter, beans, or matches, for the moment or for posterity. What's the difference?

Sometimes, between stories, or in the middle of the narration, I wonder, and I get anxious. What if all these stories were just stories? The conclusion is inevitable, merciless. Yes, stories are just stories! So why so many stories for stories? But what are we without stories, without stories and without history? Should we stop? But stories, like bicycles, don't know how to stop without making us fall. Where would we put our feet? Which charming prince will greet us at the end of this long day-dream? The beast became a charming person. They lived happily ever after and had many children. What more could one ask of this sublime horizon? Nevertheless, how much patience, acts of faith, and self-denial are required for us, who still live among witches and frogs. We concentrate very hard to pierce through the warts and the shell and glimpse the true, the beautiful, and the good. But our vision tires, and our glasses break. Nearsighted, farsighted, if not blind, we no longer believe in stories. So let's tell a new one: you never know, maybe or certainly this one will be the right one!

THE TRUE STORY

Why write? Because the only story, the true, the unique one, does not exist, not yet. It remains to come. We are alone in knowing it, but we have such a hard time telling it. It is never finished, never beautiful enough, never true enough. And others, who do not know it, who do not understand it. We end up doubting. This story is not good; it lacks something. It is not credible since others do not believe it. They get tired of hearing it. Oh! It's her again, with her stories! Someone else then? But where is he? I have been waiting for him for so long! He must exist. Otherwise, my story is a madman's tale. It's the story of a madman who thought he was a little grain of wheat...

Why write? As long as I write, hope is there, or rather the forgetting of despair. But this despair makes us exist! Strange creature that man is, who chases and flees himself. Strange ballet, where detour and diversion, twists and turns, subterfuges and evasions are the rules. If he didn't flee himself while chasing himself, where would he go? Where would he take refuge? How would he invent stories? How would he tell stories? How would he listen to stories? A human without stories is a god or a beast, inhuman in either case. Everyone has their own story. A story is only a story for oneself. Without that, they are just words. It does not interest us. We are not involved. What do we care about the stories of others? We want to see ourselves, hear ourselves, comfort ourselves, coddle ourselves, enthuse ourselves. Tell me my story. And don't change a thing! the children exclaim. It's mine. It's my mirror and my life. What do you expect? I don't like being taken for someone else, for what I am not. Or rather, but don't repeat it: I want to be who I want to be. There lies the truth of my being: in my story, and nowhere else.

So, why write? To be sure that others listen to it, the true story. As long as they listen, I am not alone. As long as I write, I am not at risk of dying. Even the odious death remains just a story. The one that can be safely told a thousand times more, just before falling asleep.