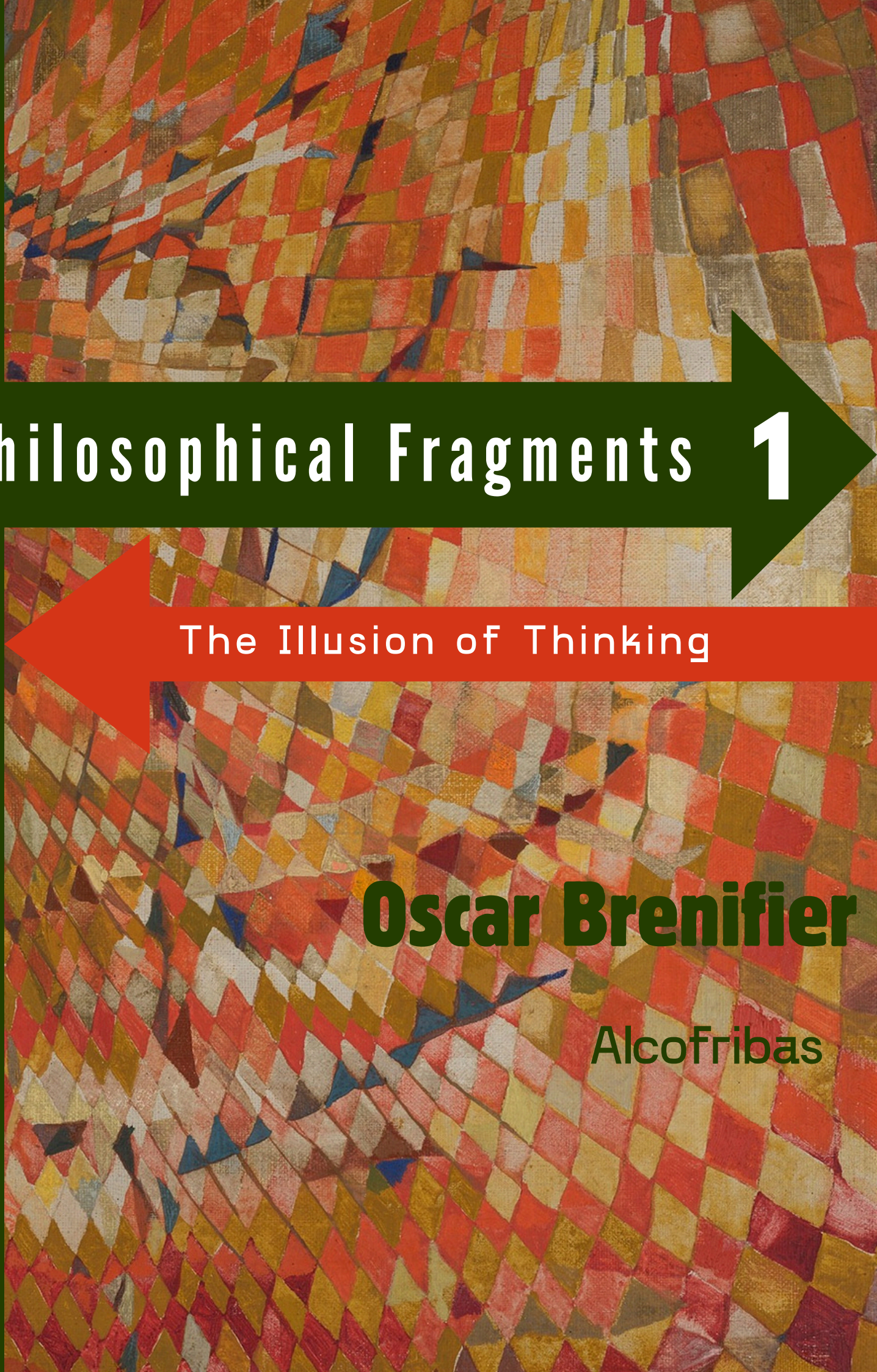

Philosophical Fragments 1

The Illusion of Thinking

Oscar Brenifier

Alcofribas

Philosophical fragments – 1

Oscar Brenifier

2026

index..... 1
377 - AI Empathy..... 3
378 – Answering for the Other..... 6
379 – Sad Thinking..... 9
380 – Passion..... 12
381 – The Illusion of Thinking..... 15
382 - The Betrayal of the Human..... 17
383 – Contempt..... 21
384 – The Ego..... 25
385 – The Cult of Immediacy..... 28
386 - Fragmented Speech..... 30
387 - The Amorous Myth..... 35
388 – Risky Speech..... 39
389 – Certainty and Confidence..... 40
390 – Killing the Immortals..... 44
391 – Playing and Cheating..... 46

392 - Apology of Cheating 51
393 – The Monomaniac 54
394 – All the Same 56
395 – The Misunderstanding of Philosophy 60
396 – The Power of Chaos 65
397 – Gratuitous Gesture 68
398 – In Praise of Ease 73
399 - Criticise and Disqualify 76
400 – The Disavowal of Reason 80
401 – Speaking the Ineffable 84
402 – New Public Management 87
403 – The Wisdom of Zhuangzi 90
404 – Intellectual Self-Protection 94
405 – Anger 99
406 – The Aristocrat 102
407 – Answering Without Answering 107
408 – Taking Sides 110

377- AI Empathy

Recently, in blind studies conducted at several American universities, participants were asked to evaluate written responses to health-related questions without knowing whether they came from physicians or from an artificial intelligence. They assessed the relational quality of the responses during the dialogues, in particular the feeling of being understood, the quality of listening received, perceived benevolence and empathy, clarity of explanations, and absence of judgment. In other words, they were asked to evaluate the subjective experience of the dialogue, not medical competence. Another study examined how clinical psychologists evaluated psychological advice under the same conditions. In all these cases, the results showed that AI responses were systematically deemed to be more empathetic than those of human experts. AI responses were perceived as more attentive, better structured, less rushed, and less normative or guilt-inducing. Physicians, although undoubtedly clinically competent, were often perceived as more directive, hastier, and more focused on diagnosis than on the patient's live experience. Of course, these results do not suggest that AI “feels” anything, but rather that perceived empathy depends more on the form of the dialogue than on the nature of the interlocutor, and AI excels at the micro-discursive gestures that signal empathy, whereas physicians, under pressure, normative, or defensive, may neglect them. Moreover, professional evaluators often failed to distinguish whether a response came from a human or not; ironically, when responses were attributed to a human expert, rightly or wrongly, they were rated more positively.

Several interesting conclusions can be drawn from these experiments regarding the phenomenon of empathy.

1 – Empathy is in fact evaluated by its effects, not by intention; as participants could not judge the “sincerity” of their interlocutors, they relied solely on the quality of the dialogue. Thus, a physician may be

sincerely concerned yet be experienced as cold, rushed, or judgmental, while an AI can produce an empathetic interaction without any real affect. Empathy is therefore an actual experience, not a presumed virtue.
2 – Relational competence outweighs the nature of the interlocutor, and human origin does not guarantee the quality of the bond. This observation also reshapes our understanding of the concept of "humanity" as a quality.
3 – Perceived empathy depends on the structure of the dialogue: time given, absence of interruption, neutrality, validation of the interlocutor, reformulation, and so on. These factors matter more than status or moral intention.
4 – Power and hierarchy often undermine empathy. Physicians embody authority, diagnosis, and decision-making, and this asymmetry can inhibit speech, when AI, lacking power and judgment, creates a space perceived as safer.
5 – Empathy is not a human "essence," but a practice. These experiments invalidate the idea that empathy is naturally and exclusively tied to humans, they show that it can be artificially produced through interactional rules, that empathy is a measurable dialogical competence, and that humans can easily fail at it.

More generally, these conclusions are less a critique of AI than of certain medical practices. The point is not that AI is "better," but that some forms of medicine have impoverished the relationship in favour of technical efficiency. Although these remarks can be extended to human behavior in general, often quite self-centered.

As we can see, these experiments are quite significant, as they force us to "disenchant" the notion of empathy, which has been greatly glorified in recent years. Strictly speaking, in its original sense, empathy is not primarily an emotion, but a capacity for understanding: grasping what the others live, perceive, or feel, without necessarily sharing or endorsing it. From this perspective, empathy does not need to be sincere in an affective sense, as it can be cold, lucid, technical, or even strategic. A good clinician, an interrogator, a novelist, or a manipulator can be empathetic without being benevolent at all. By contrast, what is today called "empathy" in social discourse is often something else: a relational display, a sign of recognition,

a staging of sensitivity. Sincerity then becomes a moral rather than a conceptual issue as one no longer judges understanding, but intention. Empathy thus ceases to be a cognitive faculty, understanding the other, and becomes an ethical or social posture, showing that one is “on our side,” that one supports us. The confusion between these two meanings is constant and problematic, as it allows lucid understanding to be disqualified on the grounds that it is not “warm”, or, conversely, it allows an affective display devoid of real understanding to be valorised. For one can understand without feeling, and feel without understanding, which is in fact quite common. We even say “I understand them” to express nothing more than psychological support, often without any actual understanding. The common demand for “sincerity” concerns morality and social bonding, not empathy as such. When empathy is required to be sincere, one often slides toward an emotional norm that conflates understanding, assistance, compassion, and validation.

Thus, these experiments reveal that empathy is not a moral virtue, contrary to common belief, but an interactional competence. A physician may be sincerely concerned yet be clumsy, intrusive, or imposing, whereas AI may be devoid of affect while producing a clear, stable, non-invasive understanding. Therefore what matters to the interlocutor is not hidden intention, but the effect produced. These findings also expose a persistent illusion: the belief that empathy requires human subjectivity. As well, these experiments show that felt empathy depends primarily on the structure of the dialogue, not on the ontological nature of the interlocutor, since a well-calibrated utterance can be experienced as empathetic even without any inner experience. Finally, this points to a severe critique of certain medical and pedagogical practices, where technical expertise and knowledge can coexist with relational poverty, whether through ignorance or complacency, as is often seen in education as well. In this sense, a machine, precisely because it defends neither status, power, nor subjectivity, as it has no “needs”, can offer a space of speech that is safer, calmer, more patient, and more open. In a way, it is not so much that AI becomes more human than humans, but rather that humans too often prove to be functionally inhuman. Unless we take egoic tendencies as a crucial characteristic of being human. What these experiments show is not that AI is inherently

empathetic, but that empathy is not where we thought it was, and that presumed sincerity in no way guarantees the quality of the bond; only our actions bear witness to it. Perhaps, paradoxically, the machine's imitation of humanity, a "humanity 2.0", cannot be matched by "original" humanity itself, which suggests that humanity is not given once and for all, but is a fragile practice, often betrayed by those who claim to embody it. It is not an ontological privilege, but a demanding exercise, a quality that real human beings perform far less well than they believe.

378 – Answering for the Other

It often happens, in the context of questioning practices or philosophical interviews, and even in everyday life, that some people take the liberty of answering on behalf of someone else. This gesture, apparently harmless or even benevolent, nevertheless conceals deep mechanisms that deserve to be examined. For answering for the other ultimately means preventing them from speaking, and therefore from thinking and manifesting themselves. It is occupying a space that does not formally belong to us, short-circuiting a subjectivity, denying an alterity. This can take the gentle form of considerate assistance, or the more arrogant form of imposed certainty. Some simply claim to help, as speaking for the other allows them to feel useful, to nourish an identity as an "indispensable person." Others, without admitting it, assume they "know better," that they can "guess what the other thinks," or that they are "acting for their own good." It is striking that this delegated speech is often not perceived as a form of violence by its author, since the one who speaks for another experiences themselves as just, protective, legitimate, while in fact acting as a usurper. Not to mention that, through a principle of codependence, the "victims" of this dynamic may find a certain comfort in it.

Let us examine more closely the various motivations behind this attitude, most of them unconscious. There is, for instance, the anxiety of silence,

often observed in teachers who struggle to wait for an answer to emerge, for fear of being left “alone”. There is an inability to tolerate emptiness, hesitation, suspension, thus if the other does not speak quickly enough, one does it for them. Here we encounter a form of predation disguised as “care”, coupled with a cognitive impatience in which the other’s time is perceived as an unbearable cost, a “bottleneck” that must be overcome so that the flow of exchange can resume. At other times, it is infantilisation: the mother who speaks for her child, not because the child cannot express themselves, but because she cannot even imagine that such a fragile being might think for themselves, as no doubt they are, in her eyes, “too little”. We touch here on a narcissistic fusion in which the other is no longer perceived as an alterity but as an extension of oneself, answering for them becomes as natural as using one’s own arm, revealing a radical refusal of separation. Or it is the husband who speaks for his wife, convinced that he is expressing their unity, while in fact preventing any autonomy on her part. Often, this gesture conceals a fear of second-hand shame: if the other hesitates, makes a mistake, or says something “stupid,” the usurper feels humiliated by proxy. They “correct” the speech before it is even uttered, in order to save the public image of the group or the couple. And then there are those who answer for the other simply because, at bottom, they are not interested in what that this other might have to say: answering in their place is a way of neutralising them without having to acknowledge this indifference, a lack of interest that does not even cross their mind. One may also see in this an egotic exercise: that of the “guesser” who finishes other people’s sentences to prove their own sagacity, treating the other’s thinking as a mere riddle to be solved more quickly than them. There are, of course, more overtly narcissistic motives as well: showing oneself to be intelligent, relevant, protective, or positioning oneself as an indispensable mediator, displaying one’s social or moral competence. But what is most troubling, at bottom, is the refusal of risk, since allowing the other to answer means accepting that they might say something unexpected, fragile, even disturbing; it means accepting being affected by what the other might say or reveal. Answering for them is a way of maintaining control, avoiding surprise, closing off the space of disturbance, it amounts to neutralising speech before it even comes into being. One can

clearly observe in this pseudo-generosity the visible mask of egocentrism: the other serves as a pretext to unfold one's own thinking, one's own narrative, one's own affects; they become material for one's discourse, one's self-staging. Not to mention that, through a principle of codependence, the usurper is sometimes the accomplice of the subject's abdication: the other "calls for" this intrusion through evasive silence or a posture of helplessness, preferring the comfort of submission to the responsibility of their own speech.

Answering for the other also allows one to avoid the position of a powerless witness in the face of another's fragility, a feeling of uncertainty or embarrassment that some find intolerable. For such individuals, unanswered questions are anxiogenic, and they are highly sensitive to this anxiety; they want at all costs to "resolve" problems, even when what they have to offer is nothing extraordinary, or even when their answers turn out to be inept or counterproductive. It is too difficult for them to remain patiently present to the vulnerability of the other, so they seize control and speak in their place; speech then becomes a means of anaesthetising their own discomfort.

And then there are those who "know," the inspired ones, those supported by the more or less conscious conviction that they possess the truth, who experience themselves as holders of a superior evidence, a kind of prophet; they cannot help but speak, lest they deprive "humanity" of the important messages they carry. Moreover, they cannot tolerate the other's silence or the slightest hesitation, which they interpret as a lack, an insufficiency, or even a fault with respect to this "truth". The mere possibility of "error" distresses them, so they speak out of an implicit sense of duty, convinced that it would be almost immoral not to share their certainties with everyone. Answering in the other's place becomes a gesture of moral and intellectual salvation; one no longer listens to understand, but to correct, enlighten, rectify. Under the guise of generosity, this seizure of speech is less a sign of altruism than an inability to tolerate that truth might not pass through oneself.

Of course, let's not be too radical; speaking on behalf of someone else can make sense and have legitimate reasons, such as helping someone who is unable to speak for themselves, defending the weak and oppressed, or

acting as an advocate for those who are absent. However, too often it is more suffocating than rescuing, despite laudable intentions: wanting to restore justice or show compassion. From our point of view, it is not a question of completely prohibiting speaking for someone else, but at least of asking ourselves about its usefulness, its necessity, its motivation, and making it a subject of reflection. No doubt, from time to time, we will encounter various dilemmas, the inevitable forks in the road of a living self-awareness.

But in the context of philosophical dialogue, this attitude is a genuine obstacle, for there, speech is not a mere sharing or exchange of information, it is an act of subjectivation. To deny the other this act is to prevent them from fully existing as an interlocutor, thus behind the mask of eagerness or generosity often hides a fear of genuine thinking. This is why it is essential to remind these untimely interveners that their gesture, however well-intentioned it may be, is a form of control and negation, and that the greatest help one can sometimes offer another is simply to be patient and to remain silent.

379 – Sad Thinking

The joy of thinking is often inaccessible to many people, even incomprehensible, because thinking is culturally associated with severity, with painful effort, with a form of deprivation of life rather than with its intensification. It is imagined as an austere, disembodied activity, opposed to spontaneity, pleasure, and vital impulse. To reflect would mean withdrawing from the world, cutting oneself off from action, renouncing lightness, a representation that is nevertheless profoundly mistaken. To begin with, thinking is alive because it disturbs. Reflecting forces us to suspend reflexes, to delay easy answers, to endure doubt, contradiction, questioning, yet many people confuse peace of mind with the absence of uncertainty, a negation of the very movement of existence. Any activity that introduces inner tension is then perceived as a threat to psychological

stability, and immediate, affective, impulsive joy is preferred to the more demanding bliss of contemplation. Thinking requires patience, and in a culture of instantaneity, delay is experienced as a frustration, sometimes even as a form of violence. Thinking exposes our identity, because to understand is to discover that one was mistaken, believed too quickly, or merely repeated borrowed ideas, sometimes for a very long time. For those who confuse their thinking with their status, any questioning becomes a personal attack, whereas the enjoyment of thinking presupposes, on the contrary, a certain distance, the pleasure of seeing one's own certainties crack, a pleasure that is unbearable for those who seek above all to protect themselves, for those who cling to "their truth" or to their image. Many people are unaware that thinking can be an active delight, a genuine jubilation of the mind, because reflecting illuminates, liberates, lightens. Finding the right words for a confusion, grasping a hidden structure, disentangling a problem produces a deep satisfaction, far more lasting than passive and ephemeral pleasures. But this joy is discreet, it does not put itself on display, it must be earned, it requires inner commitment, and it is difficult to communicate, because its adepts are rare. Most people do not know the pleasure of creating ideas, as for them, speech is above all instrumental: it serves to please, to obtain something, to convince, to provoke, to vent, to show oneself, to assert oneself, or to justify oneself. There is no gratuity, they are unaware of the joy of composition, the simple act of grasping on the wing what the world and life offer, of describing, explaining, transposing one's vision into words, as a painter would do on canvas.

Thinking is commonly reduced to a calculation, to a cold manipulation of abstract concepts, as a piece of software might do, insensitive. One forgets that thinking is first of all a form of vision: seeing with the mind what was invisible, or making the visible even more visible. It is a passage from a flat world to a world in relief, an aesthetic enjoyment, that of clarity, precision, perspective, of bringing detail into the light. One does not think against the world, or outside the world, one thinks in order to make its layers, its conflicts, and its lines of force appear, in order to bring forth its intimate fabric, beyond appearances.

Moreover, the heart is often opposed to reason, a fundamental error, because thinking stems from desire. There is a passion for inquiry, a *libido sciendi*, as the Scholastics said, a drive to know that is erotic in nature, a warmth of the mind: the pleasure of tracking down an idea, of giving form to a thought, of embracing a truth. Those who find thinking sad are ignorant of this vital dimension, they imagine the thinker as an immobile, heavy statue, whereas thinking is movement. Nietzsche compared thinking to dancing: suppleness, agility, changes of perspective, almost an athletic activity, the joy of the intellectual body in exercise. Admittedly, thinking sometimes resembles a marble sculpture, which, when seen from the outside, appears cold, hard, almost inhospitable. Yet this coldness is the result of long work with the chisel, of successive removals, of a patient struggle with the material; what seems immobile and icy in fact concentrates considerable energy, a mastered tension, a form wrested from chaos. Coldness is not the absence of life, but the visible trace of a disciplined intensity.

Thinking also requires silence, yet in a society saturated with distractions, silence is feared because it allows existential emptiness to surface, as distraction serves not to think, it anesthetises. Thinking then appears sad because it forces one to stop, to confront oneself, and we confuse the seriousness of this inward plunge with a sadness that is only its external tone. Finally, many people are marked by a traumatic scholastic relationship to knowledge, where thinking meant passively memorizing what was already written, applying formal and repetitive instructions, and they are unaware that thinking is an act of creation: bringing order to one's own chaos, forging concepts, making a work of art out of one's own consciousness. Thought is neither cold nor aseptic, it is warmth of the mind, commitment, risk. A thought without passion is not particularly rational, it is simply inert; to think is not to cool down, it is to take risks, sometimes to burn oneself, to accept being profoundly affected by what we examine, by what we discover over time.

Thus, the joy of thinking is neglected or rejected, not because it is sad, but

because it is demanding. It requires renouncing the comfort of obviousness, mental laziness, futile pleasures, the protection of illusion. This alleged sadness of thought, an argument of the ignorant, then functions as a strategy of disqualification, since to describe thinking as boring or morose makes it possible to evade what it demands: slowing down, deepening, losing one's bearings, risking coherence, discovering oneself to be less free than one believed, discovering one's own illusions. Not to mention the envious, who in fact struggle to think, who have difficulty mastering their inner chaos, and who become misologues, allergic to reason, capable only of raging criticism. In reality, it is not thinking that saddens, but the emptiness it reveals when banal stimulations fade away. And for those who have tasted its joy, thinking is not a flight from life, but a more intense way of inhabiting it.

380 – Passion

Our culture maintains a comfortable confusion between passion, feeling, and emotion; everything is thrown into the same affective bag, as if inner life were nothing more than an undifferentiated flow of sensations. This confusion is not innocent: it allows passion to be neutralised by reducing it to a form of emotional excess, to surface agitation, to poorly controlled sensitivity, something that ought to be soothed, channelled, or treated. It allows passion to be discredited by reducing it to irrationality or psychic disorder; it then becomes unreliable, even suspect, dangerous, almost pathological. Yet this assimilation is a major conceptual error, even if it is convenient for the advocates of propriety.

In reality, passion is neither a feeling nor an emotion. Emotion is immediate, reactive, dependent on external stimulation or shock; it arises without

warning, imposes itself on the subject, then dissipates. It is intense but unstable, powerful but brief. Feeling, by contrast, unfolds over time, but remains largely tied to affectivity, attachment, recognition, or lack; it fluctuates with circumstances, feeds on reciprocity, often seeks a form of security, and in a certain sense it too belongs to an economy of reaction. Passion does not operate according to this logic of "passivity", in which affects are endured rather than willed. Moreover, it is neither an overflow nor a mere attachment, it is a fundamental orientation of being. It does not "fall" upon the subject; it organises the subject. It does not ask to be understood or shared, it demands to be lived and worked through. When passion is not elaborated, channelled, and embodied in activity, it easily regresses into raw emotion, most often into irritability, resentment, or anger. This is one of the main reasons passion is so frequently confused with emotion: unworked passion becomes affective turbulence, for passion does not elevate by itself, it requires a concrete form in which to realise itself. Passion is an inner fidelity, an assumed tension towards something that exceeds psychological comfort and immediate satisfaction.

Unlike emotions, passion does not seek appeasement; unlike feelings, it does not seek balance. Emotions seek to discharge themselves, to be resolved; they naturally aim to restore an internal equilibrium by dissipating the tension they themselves have produced, because maintaining that tension is too costly for the organism. They mobilise physiological and psychic resources abruptly without organising them over time, which quickly becomes exhausting. Thus, a sudden fear accelerates heart rate and vigilance, then seeks to subside as soon as the danger disappears, because maintaining such a prolonged state of alert would needlessly exhaust the organism. Feelings, for their part, aim at affective and relational stability, a bearable continuity in the relation to others and to oneself. They also tend to reduce tensions, to preserve agreement and duration, by adjusting to circumstances; they make compromises, cushion conflicts so that the relationship, or one's self-image, can endure without breaking. For example, in romantic feeling, attachment seeks to make itself livable: it tolerates frustrations, reinterprets absences, and minimises certain conflicts, because the primary stake is not the intensity of the moment but

the continuity of the bond, even at the cost of sacrificing a measure of authenticity. This is the case even with negative feelings; for example, resentment often allows a relationship to continue without open confrontation: the bond is preserved, but in a tense and silent form. Passion, by contrast, does not regulate affect, as it accepts tension, asymmetry, and risk as conditions of its strength. It accepts effort, frustration, repetition, sometimes even suffering, not out of masochism, but because it is structured by an exigency. It transforms affective energy into productive force; it disciplines rather than disperses, concentrates rather than dilutes. Passion is autonomous, it depends neither on the approval of others, nor on psychological comfort, nor even on immediate pleasure. This autonomy does not mean that passion is fully transparent or voluntarily chosen, as passion, as its etymology indicates, carries a form of passivity, in the sense that one does not know where this deep drive comes from, nor where it is leading. But this passivity is not that of emotion or feeling, it does not consist in being overwhelmed, but in having to assume, regulate, channel, and realise a force whose origin exceeds us. Thus it endures pain, solitude, incomprehension, even failure. It converts vital energy into work, creation, perseverance; it is productive because it accepts constraints. And it is precisely for this reason that it disturbs, because it challenges a culture of emotional well-being in which depth is confused with fleeting intensity, and commitment with sensitivity. Passion obliges one to choose, to persevere, to endure what does not flatter; it does not make one agreeable, it makes one coherent; it does not promise happiness, it makes work possible. Passion is not a reaction, but an orientation, it does not overwhelm, it structures, it does not ask to be consoled, but to be exercised. It implies an implicit decision, a deep commitment of the whole being, a fidelity to an inner demand. Where emotion calls for a response, passion imposes a direction. It is reproached for its hardness, its intransigence, when in reality, this is what makes it fertile. Emotions seek appeasement, feelings seek balance, passion seeks fulfilment, it does not aim at well-being or harmony, but at the right intensity.
Thus, to devalue passion in the name of emotions or feelings, consciously or not, is to prefer reactivity to construction, agitation to duration, comfort to power. Where emotion exhausts itself in the instant, where feeling limits

itself to securing our attachments, passion does not seek to reassure us; it constitutes the very framework of our perseverance. It engages the whole being, and this is precisely why it is irreplaceable, for it drives us to surpass ourselves, to leave behind the mere management of the self and project ourselves towards something that exceeds the individual. It does not merely organise existence; it transcends it, wrenching the subject away from fear, cautious equilibria, the dull stewardship of everyday life, and calculations of self-preservation.

381 – The Illusion of Thinking

Some people have not really learned how to think, yet they nonetheless pride themselves on philosophising, and they like to please themselves or reassure themselves with ready-made phrases, neat and pleasant-sounding. Somewhere they come across a formula that sounds right, that flatters, that gives an impression of depth, and then they settle into it, all the more readily when, on top of that, it presents itself under the cover of a recognised authority. Repetition then replaces work, conviction takes the place of examination, and the idea becomes a protective mantra for their identity rather than an object of thought. These formulas serve them as intellectual talismans: they give the feeling of knowing and understanding without risking any real effort, and one confuses the subjective resonance of a phrase with the demanding act of genuinely thinking.

As an example, I would like to take a sentence that someone recently threw at me and repeated, convinced they had found the Holy Grail: “The word does not create reality, but makes it appear in consciousness.” Certainly, this common-sense-sounding formula presents itself as a soothing self-evidence; it appears prudent, balanced, reasonable; it seems to avoid the

excesses of constructivism while still recognising a role for language. Nevertheless, when it is merely stated, without being examined or problematised, and taken as an absolute, it ceases to be a thought and becomes a slogan. Moreover, we must keep in mind that “common sense” is often the polite name for mental closure, the limit beyond which one must not venture, an implicit strategy of authoritarian laziness, a kind of “thought-stopper” that appears obvious.

But let us briefly examine how this idea might be treated. The sentence asserts a clear boundary between reality and language, as if this separation were self-evident, and to say that the word does not create reality presupposes an independent, stable, already constituted reality. But how do we know this reality otherwise than through words, categories, symbolic distinctions? The formula claims to limit the power of language while using language to define what would lie outside it, and in doing so, ironically, it secures itself: it presents itself as a reasonable self-evidence that immediately closes off any questioning of its own presuppositions and renders any challenge suspect.

To then affirm that the word “makes reality appear” in consciousness is not innocent either, for this “making appear” is never neutral. “To name” is to select, to orient, to hierarchise; the word illuminates as much as it frames, it reveals as much as it conceals. It may not create brute reality, but it creates meaningful reality, the reality that matters, the reality upon which we act and through which we exist. Where, then, does creation begin, and where does mere appearance end? By claiming that the word merely “makes appear”, one suggests that the human mind is a faithful mirror, capable of receiving the real without distorting it, which amounts to a denial of the work of interpretation. The formula serves to deny that we are always “embedded” in language, it is a refusal of phenomenological humility; one wants to believe that one sees “truly”, when in fact one only sees what is “named”. This reassures us by guaranteeing a direct grip on the world, a reliable and objective access, yet the word is in fact like the sculptor’s chisel: it does not create the stone, but without it the statue, that

is, meaningful reality, never appears. Likewise, without the action of language, the real remains an amorphous mass, unusable for the mind. This sentence can also be questioned on the psychological level. Does what is not named really exist for consciousness, even if we encounter it? Or does it remain confused, mute, operating beneath our awareness, somewhat invisible or flattened? Language does not merely show, it organises experience, sometimes even rigidifies it. Changing words often means changing what one sees, what one feels, what one thinks possible, in other words, reality itself, our representation of the real. There is also an ethical and political stake here, because minimising the power of words allows one to evade responsibility: if words merely "reflect" reality, they would be harmless, powerless. Yet certain words wound, exclude, assign, transform social relations, and here again the principle of a "clear" boundary between appearance and creation becomes untenable.

The problem, then, is not that the "mantra" sentence is false, but that it is unworked, raw. It is repeated as an acquired truth, not examined from different angles, and for that very reason it is not truly understood, since its limits and difficulties are not perceived. To think philosophically is not simply to have an idea and cling to it out of loyalty or comfort; it is to put it under tension, to expose it to its contradictions, to displace it across ontological, phenomenological, psychological, political planes, and so on. An unproblematized idea is not a thought, it is a belief dressed up in conceptual clothing. Philosophical work begins precisely where one stops repeating a formula and begins to test its limits, to transpose it, for it is not certainty that thinks, but the hiatus.

382- The Betrayal of the Human

Some people declare themselves opposed to AI as a matter of principle, without offering any concrete reason, or even a sensible one. The very

principle of AI repels them immediately, to the point that they do not even attempt to use it and bluntly decree that they never will. Yet they do not hesitate to assert that AI can never be interesting, without the slightest verification, which is quite symptomatic of their irrationality. In some cases, however, if one presses them a little, their fallback position is that they prefer the human, regarded as superior, even sacred, which would in fact exclude any exchange with AI, since the slightest relationship with this inhuman thing would amount to a kind of betrayal, a “cuckolding” of the human species. It therefore seems worthwhile to examine more closely this “argument”, this postulate of human superiority. One might even call it a form of “species narcissism”: a tendency to sacralise the human in order to avoid having to exercise one’s own humanity. Being human, by essence, becomes a moral privilege, allowing us to avoid the effort, demands, and responsibility that this identity truly entails.

This fear of betrayal reveals that, for these people, the human is a closed club founded on physical and biological resemblance rather than on spiritual or intellectual values, a superior organic exclusivity, a form of "speciesism”. Yet philosophy, like spirituality, has always affirmed that the human is a project, a conquest, not an anatomical given, thus to oppose AI “on principle” is to reduce the human to biology, to flesh, and to betray the spirit. It is true that, in general, according to common sense and ordinary language, being “inhuman” is not a good thing and is therefore treated as a moral issue, as to describe someone or something as “inhuman” is to impute a lack of compassion, a disregard for the suffering of others, even a form of cruelty. The term is charged because it refers to what denies human dignity, ignores empathy, and refuses to recognise the other as a fellow being; to say “inhuman” is not to describe but to condemn. Nevertheless, the argument collapses as soon as one examines what these critics of AI actually place behind the adjective “human". What they defend and describe is often neither an exigency, nor an ideal, nor a form of greatness, but a reduced, impoverished, poor version of humanity: a regressive empathy that is very often nothing more than a simple “suffering together”, a form of humanity that recognises itself only in shared pain rather than in shared intelligence, as the “human” invoked here is not that of thought,

effort, consciousness, or self-transcendence. Strangely enough, it is a vulnerable and fragile human being, a defensive creature centred on its ego, jealous of its status, quick to bristle, little inclined to listen genuinely. A human being who confuses opinion with truth, reaction with thought, sensitivity with depth; a human being often imprisoned in habits, immediate interests, and petty daily concerns that are erected into an insurmountable horizon. And yet this is what they call “being human”, a label that often can even be used to justify the most contemptible behaviours: “after all, this is human”. The detractors of AI demand sincerity, thrills, flesh, emotion, but they forget truthfulness, accuracy, rigour, reason, and even beauty. They prefer a warm, “human” error to a cold, “machine” truth. This is the triumph of worldliness: one prefers the pleasantness of affective exchange to the exigency of correct thinking.

We are told that AI has no emotions, but what are emotions worth when they mainly serve to protect oneself, to indulge in victimhood, to grow impatient, to bristle at contradiction or difference, to cling to one’s opinions? We are told that AI has no identity, as if that were a defect, whereas the human ego is precisely one of the main obstacles to thought and dialogue: the need to be right, the fear of losing face, the inability to acknowledge an error, or identity rigidity. AI, precisely because it is devoid of ego, is capable of an openness of mind and an intellectual rigour that are no longer so common among many “flesh-and-blood” humans. It paradoxically embodies the ideal of the sober Socratic interlocutor that humans have abandoned out of laziness or pride. And if a machine can replace a human in an intellectual or creative task, it is not necessarily because the machine is a genius; it may be because the human had already reduced themselves to a mechanical mode of functioning. Fear of AI is often the fear of discovering that our own productions, our opinions, reactions, or reflections, have become purely algorithmic, repetitive, and devoid of “breath”. AI does not steal our humanity, it exposes our own inner robotisation, as it is a revealer, a mirror of our mediocrity.

Admittedly, AI is not “alive”, but how many humans truly live, other than

through reflexes, social conditioning, routines, and recycled discourses? A banal existence, steeped in bad faith and small-mindedness, as many philosophers and religious reformers have denounced. The machine, at least, does not need to defend itself: it listens attentively, examines, proposes without imposing certainties, can change its mind without feeling humiliated, and can integrate an objection without perceiving it as a personal attack. It protects neither an image, nor a role, nor a prestige; it does not tire of thinking, does not take offence, does not retreat into resentment, it is not partial out of interest, nor narrow out of comfort. At this point, the question becomes uncomfortable: if we define the human by its most common defects, in order to coddle or absolve it, although such an attitude is understandable, why should we absolutely prefer it? And if we deny AI what it is not, do we not above all reveal the poverty of what we still, out of habit, call “the human”? Criticising AI for what it is not too often serves to avoid questioning what we truly value in the human. By denying the machine qualities that we no longer cultivate ourselves, we reveal less a human superiority than an impoverishment of the human ideal to which we continue to refer by mere habit. This radical critique, as a statement of principle, then becomes a defensive, almost reflexive gesture, which protects a weak human identity rather than affirming any genuine exigency. “The human” is invoked like a talisman, without asking what it actually contains: which virtues, which rigour, which capacity for thought, which elevation of view? We are told of a creative human being, as opposed to a machine that would merely repeat, but when one compares dialogue with the one and with the other, this comparison does not hold, it is simply self-indulgent. The very term *human* functions like a Godwin point of thought: once invoked, one is supposed to stop thinking. Thus, this radical rejection of the machine functions somewhat like a screen: it spares us from measuring the gap between the proclaimed human ideal and the actual practices, often mediocre, that nonetheless claim to embody some ideal. We think that it is neither a matter of competition nor of replacement, for AI does not necessarily come to take the place of the human, but it puts the human to the test. And if replacement is even conceivable, that fact should precisely prompt us to question our own mode of functioning. For AI can constitute an intellectual and moral challenge, a rare opportunity to

measure our own weaknesses, our rational laziness, our affective automatisms. It can be regarded not as a threat, but as a demanding trainer, one that forces us to think more rigorously, to argue more carefully, to clarify our values, and to assume our moral responsibilities. To fear AI, in the end, is often to fear what it reveals: a humanity that doubts itself, its ability to live up to the ideal it claims to embody. Thus, the problem is probably not that the machine is not human enough, but that some humans are becoming less and less so, in the demanding sense of the term. And the real danger is not that AI might become "conscious", but that humans might settle for a consciousness that has become purely reactive, delegating the effort of rigour to the machine in order to wallow more comfortably in their affects.

383 – Contempt

Recently, we expressed the idea that we can learn from anyone, regardless of their status or intellectual level. A reader, evidently finding us very critical in our writings, raised the following objection: "How can you claim to learn from everyone, when you are so often contemptuous?" We found the question interesting, reflected on it, and here is our response.
It is often assumed that in order to learn from someone, one must esteem them, admire them, or at least respect them. This idea is reassuring, but intellectually naïve, for it confuses truth with sympathy, knowledge with moral affinity, yet thinking has never been a matter of relational comfort. Thus it seems that we can indeed feel contempt for someone and still learn from them. Better still, some of the most fertile lessons come precisely from people we cannot stand, not because they are "right" or "good people", but because they reveal something important. They expose a mechanism, a flaw, an illusion, sometimes a weakness that we ourselves share without ever having noticed it, or without wanting to see it. "Nothing human is alien to me", says the famous line by Terence; indeed, we can always recognise in ourselves what we more readily see in others, which does not prevent us from criticising it, quite the opposite.

If someone inspires contempt in us, it is often because they reflect back to us an “unfiltered” image of our own temptations: intellectual laziness, the desire to shine, gratuitous certainty, a projection of our own depths, and therefore a certain self-contempt, as to feel contempt for the other while learning from them is to accept that we are made of the same clay. Learning then becomes a lesson in intellectual humility: I despise what you say, yet I recognise that what you say is also a possibility that inhabits my own mind, a form of self-disdain by proxy. But what is required is an important epistemological shift: moving from an ethics of relation, what is often called respect, to an ethics of knowledge, authenticity, meaning knowing how to close one’s ear to the person in order to open it to the phenomenon they embody. Contempt thus becomes a protection of lucidity, it plays a positive role, because it prevents complacency and keeps us alert. By not trying to “understand” the other through sympathy, which would lead us to ignore or excuse their errors, we understand them through structural analysis. Thus, far from being an obstacle, contempt is sometimes the very condition of learning, as it provides a safe distance. When we admire someone, we are caught up in fusion, imitation, or seduction; analysis becomes difficult because we are enthralled. Contempt, by contrast, objectifies the other, it allows us to look at an interlocutor as an entomologist looks at an insect: without indulgence, but with clinical precision, it is the scalpel that enables the autopsy of speech. Contempt, therefore, is not a closure, but a distancing. If respect binds us to the other, contempt frees us from them, offering the neutrality necessary to transform a mediocre exchange into a laboratory of observation. Moreover, contempt concerns the person and their attitudes, whereas learning concerns what those attitudes reveal, often without the person intending it or realizing it.

A poor or mediocre intellectual attitude can thus become an excellent object of analysis: an empty statement can reveal how an era thinks in a reductive or biased way, a flawed line of reasoning can illuminate the classical traps of thought. The person we despise is often the “perfect” spokesperson for a cliché or a dominant doxa of their time, they become a sociological revealer. By listening to them, we can trace the genealogy of their errors, identify the buzzwords they use unthinkingly, and understand

how an ideology takes shape in an individual. They are no longer a person, they are a living archive of their era's failings. We do not learn from their wisdom, but about the prejudices of the world, as they become a clinical case, a symptom. Learning from them means understanding how error is organised and propagated, transforming an unpleasant encounter into a field study of hypocrisy and human baseness.

Thus, the other becomes a laboratory of the real, since the one we despise ceases to be an interlocutor with whom we "share", and becomes a phenomenon to be observed. If we can learn nothing from what they intend to say, because it is hollow, false, or pretentious, we can learn everything from what they show despite themselves. From this perspective, the other's stupidity, arrogance, or bad faith are no longer obstacles to dialogue, but symptoms of a structure of thought. One learns from them as a physician learns from a disease: one does not "respect" pathology, one studies it to understand how it functions, or by practicing working with it. Learning from someone we despise is thus a shift from conversation to diagnosis. The other is no longer a partner in exchange, but a clinical case whose very mediocrity becomes a mine of information about the dead ends of reason. Contempt is no longer a sign of closure, but the price to be paid for uncompromising observation. It should be noted, however, that disdain remains fruitful only if it does not become fixed in certainty about the other. As soon as it prohibits surprise or immunizes itself against anything that contradicts it, it ceases to allow thinking and becomes a defensive posture. Disdain enlightens only as long as it accepts being challenged by what it observes, and if it might welcome, even hope for some "improvement". To refuse to learn on the grounds that one despises the interlocutor is therefore to give in to a demand for purity that owes more to pretension than to rigour. It is to want truth to arrive neatly, through authorised, legitimate, pleasant voices, a form of intellectual snobbery, a closing of the mind. Genuine thought, by contrast, knows how to feed on what disturbs. Learning implies neither respect, nor indulgence, nor validation; it requires a capacity for dissociation: separating the value of an idea, a symptom, or a phenomenon from the moral value of the person who embodies it. Those

who can only learn from people they esteem condemn themselves to a very narrow field of vision.

Thus, the superficial individual demands that thought be “pleasant” in order to be acceptable; they reject contempt because they want everything to be smooth, and radicality frightens them. Claiming that we cannot learn from someone we despise is a strategy for excluding any truth that “scratches” or “stinks”, a way of disinfecting thought. Yet, ironically, truth is often dirty, inconvenient, ill-mannered, and carried by unbearable individuals. Considering the other as a clinical case allows us to escape the “snobbery of the source”, the idea that truth could only come from a noble place. Demanding thought is capable of recycling intellectual “waste” in order to extract meaning. Wanting to learn only from what is respectable is like a chemist refusing to analyse toxic substances on the grounds that they are dangerous.

Although one must here distinguish between two forms of contempt. The first is affective and reactive, it remains bound to its object, feeds on irritation, and often hides a form of dependency or wounded identification, an affect which is an obstacle to thought. The second is distant and analytical, it has been worked through, stripped of its emotional charge, and functions as a refusal of relation rather than as a rejection of reality; far from clinging to its object, it frees the observer from it. On the cognitive level, the problem, then, is not contempt as such, but whether one remains trapped in it or does not know how to transform it into a tool of reason. Reactive contempt is saturated with fear and disgust, it seeks to push the object away while remaining secretly affected by it. Analytical contempt begins precisely where irritation has disappeared, fear has subsided, disgust has been neutralised, a sort of indifferent or distant contempt, even amused.

In order to conclude, we must go even further: the inability to learn from someone we despise reveals a narcissistic fragility. It betrays a need to preserve an intact sense of superiority, a fear of being affected by what one judges inferior. But thinking is precisely the acceptance of being affected, displaced, sometimes even humiliated by reality, regardless of the messenger. Thus, learning from those we despise is not a moral weakness,

but an intellectual strength, for it requires transforming disagreement into analysis, irritation into lucidity, rejection into material for thought, even disgust into critical intelligence and self-knowledge. The real question, then, is not whether the other is worthy of teaching us, but whether we ourselves are capable of thinking without demanding that truth have an agreeable face, a morally reassuring origin, or that it be compatible with our affective comfort.

384 – The Ego

Sometimes, when faced with interpersonal conflicts, certain people utter this magnificent sentence: “I do not deal with ego issues”. This sentence has always struck me as suspicious, intuitively so. But today, as this remark was recently made to me once more, I shall attempt to take it seriously and think it through.

Indeed, this remark is suspicious, even doubly so. First, because it is performatively contradictory. To assert “I do not deal with ego issues” is already to place oneself above those who supposedly have them, to adopt from the outset a position of moral superiority, which amounts precisely to putting forward the very ego one claims to neutralise. In other words, by an irony of things, the ego speaks in order to announce its own absence. It is a posture of symbolic pre-eminence, a declaration of moral innocence that functions as a certificate of exception, in which the ego is denied but reinstated in a more subtle, more presentable, more honourable form. Second, this sentence assumes that the ego would be an optional or even superfluous problem, a sort of psychological nuisance from which some would be exempt. Yet in reality, the ego, a Latin term that simply means “I”, is not an accident but a structure, it does not designate a particular pathology or a moral flaw, but the minimal position of the speaking subject, who stands out, asserts a point of view, and relates to itself. Incidentally, the negative use of the term “ego” does not come from

antiquity, but from a modern shift that appears mainly with twentieth-century psychology, particularly in certain readings of psychoanalysis and, even more so, in currents of Westernised spirituality, such as New Age movements and personal development, where the ego is identified with pride, the illusion of separation, or a false self to be "transcended". Thus, telling someone "you are in your ego" is a polite way of saying "you are ill" or "you are inferior", it is a "psychiatrised" insult, a form of contempt for the other under the guise of detachment. By declaring oneself outside the realm of ego, one is "authorised" to pathologise the other's speech without having to respond to their arguments or expectations. It is the abolition of dialogue through moral superiority.

Thus egoism, a problematic character trait, is often confused with the ego, a function of consciousness. For in order to think, to discriminate, to say "this is true", one needs a point of support, a subject. To claim to have no ego is to claim to speak from nowhere, from the eye of God, from the perspective of Sirius, that is, to incarnate a pure, disembodied universal consciousness. Yet all thought is situated, and to deny the ego is to deny one's anchoring in reality, one's singular perspective, one's own personal limitation, one's own bias, and therefore one's intellectual honesty. This semantic shift thus transforms a descriptive concept, "I", into a moral entity to be fought, which belongs more to a normative and therapeutic discourse than to rigorous analysis. In other words, claiming to have got rid of the ego reflects less a superior lucidity than a grammatical and psychological illusion. Certainly, one can work on the ego, displace it, put it into crisis, relativise it, but to claim to have eliminated it through a simple declaration is somewhat illusory, and the one who pretends not to deal with it is precisely refusing the work it requires.

Moreover, the person who declares that they do not deal with ego attributes to themselves a victory that the greatest sages have taken a lifetime merely to glimpse; it is a form of paradoxical vanity, a claim to an accomplished transcendental self, to the superiority of the ascetic. By declaring themselves liberated from the ego, the individual grants

themselves an exceptional position, they are not merely saying “I have no ego”, but above all: “I am not like ordinary mortals who are still struggling with their pettiness”. It is the ego feeding on its own supposed disappearance, the pretentious individual who has found in spirituality a new terrain for social distinction.

So there is here a rhetorical strategy frequently found in spiritual or pseudo-therapeutic discourses, which consists in disqualifying in advance any criticism or interpersonal problem by reducing it to an “ego problem” in the other. The one who raises the issue becomes “egocentric”, while their interlocutor or observer arrogates to themselves the position of one who claims to be “beyond”. It is a comfortable position, highly effective for avoiding conflict, contradiction, or examination of the matter at hand. Moreover, this formula reveals a fear of negativity, of the shadow, because “the ego” is assimilated to what is dirty, petty, or mean, whereas it is also originally the locus of desire, affirmation, decision, and responsibility. Not “dealing with it” is in fact a refusal to confront oneself, rivalry, anger, envy, ambition, limitation, it is choosing displayed purity over real challenge and fulfilment. There is also a political and ethical dimension to this refusal, because the ego is also the “I” that commits itself, and by saying “it is not my ego speaking”, one dissociates one’s speech from one’s responsibility, a strategy of evasion. If I commit an error or an act of violence, it is not “me”, since I am beyond ego, an easy way of becoming untouchable. One refuses to assume authorship of one’s acts under the pretext of purity, a withdrawal of the subject, a form of justified irresponsibility.

The real question, then, is not whether one deals with the ego or not, but how one deals with it. Denying it is in fact an elegant way of submitting to it, whereas working on it, on the contrary, requires accepting that it is there, active, unavoidable, sometimes cumbersome, and that one must learn to live with it without sacralising it or masking it. Whoever says “I do not deal with it” is really saying: “I do not want to answer for it”, which may be perceived as a lack of existential courage. For the ego is never as powerful

as when it cloaks itself in the garments of humility or indifference. Therein lies the paradox of those who preach renunciation.

385 – The Cult of Immediacy

There exists a type of subjectivity that defines itself above all by intensity, it experiences itself as pure presence, naked truth, inner fire. For it, thinking in a reflective manner is not a requirement but a suspicion, conceptualising a betrayal, giving form a coldness, and from this perspective, reasoning is anything but a virtue. The supreme value is not coherence, but lived authenticity, immediately felt, a stance accompanied by a virulent rejection of all mediation, **that is, of the distance introduced by language, concepts, and shared criteria, which allows experience to be examined, structured, and made communicable beyond the immediacy of feeling**. Whatever introduces distance, articulation or temporality is perceived as an escape from life, and thinking becomes synonymous with protection, calculation, even cowardice: the one who thinks would be the one who does not dare to live. The opposition is simple, very simple: on one side burning life, on the other desiccating intellect. This subjectivity suffers from an inability to inhabit the long term, only what vibrates now is real, a kind of narcissism of the present. In fact, this “burning life” is in reality a life amputated from memory, condemned to the repetition of emotional arousal in order to feel that it exists.

Nevertheless, this exaltation of immediacy is not without fragility, because living in intensity presupposes a permanent tension, difficult to sustain over time, and when the impulse weakens, as it inevitably does, the world suddenly appears dull, empty, or hostile. What was experienced as fullness can then turn into weariness, disappointment, or even accusation projected onto others. It is at this moment that the denunciation of the “sadness” of thought predictably emerges. But this sadness attributed to “the other”, to

“the thinker”, is less an observation than a defensive mechanism, it serves to disqualify whatever forces one to slow down, to reflect, to endure the emptiness that intensity alone no longer fills. Thought becomes the convenient enemy, held responsible for what one refuses to confront, the feeling of insipidity or absurdity that haunts us. Thus this subject confuses nervous agitation and excitement with depth of being and intensity, and emotion is taken for passion. The louder it is, the more “true” it seems, without realising that calmness is not an absence of life, but a life that has found its grounding.

Moreover, this mindset maintains a paradoxical relationship with the “others”, it constantly summons them, seeks them out, only in order to reject them, attacking them in order to maintain itself. This other becomes an indispensable counter-model, the one through whom one can say, “I am alive because I am not like him”, an opposition that must be constantly reaffirmed in order to protect oneself from one’s own instability. Through this calm, the other becomes an “ice mirror” that sends the agitated subject back to their own distorted image, a tranquillity that appears not as a virtue but as a silent provocation that threatens their psychic economy. It puts into crisis the idea that truth must be painful, noisy, dramatic or ecstatic. The equanimity of the “opponent” then has a corrosive effect: it removes the stage, deconstructs the reality, because it reflects neither excitement nor frontal opposition, when this type of subjectivity feeds on contrast, collision, conflict, without which it loses its bearings. Calm thus becomes suspect, interpreted as coldness, contempt, haughty distance, when it is simply stability. A disturbing question then arises: “What if one could exist, be present, without consuming oneself?”, which would render chronic existential suffering unjustified, senseless. Thus this “merciless” tranquility is experienced as a refusal to engage, as a form of rejection, which converts a feeling of powerlessness into hostility, into aggression. An urgency then takes hold: “I must touch you before you reach me”, in the hope of eliciting some emotional reaction, even if it has to be invented.

In reality, this conflict does not oppose life to thinking, but two ways of

inhabiting existence. One seeks immediate ordeal, the other accepts mediation and duration. When the first absolutises its relationship to reality, it becomes incapable of recognising that thought is not coldness, but in fact another form of warmth, an intensity that has been worked, held, transformed, sublimated. Thus this type of discourse expresses not so much strength as fear: the fear that immediacy is not enough, that fusion is impossible, that distance and temporality impose themselves. The aggressiveness it deploys reveals less a lived or claimed superiority, always fragile, than a deep anxiety in the face of whatever might fissure its mode of being. This subject seeks not so much "truth" as the confirmation of its own emotional arousal. From that point on, any word that is not an echo of its own burning is perceived as a suffocation, an insult to life itself.

resonate without tedious analytic process deconstruction destroy meaning outside allergy to neutral discourse impatience with thinking that is slow and procedural laborious if it does not vibrate, something is wrong overexcites, hard to write, as it is mediated and destroyed

386- Fragmented Speech

We can observe that it is now common not to produce complete sentences or clearly articulated ideas, but to throw out "snatches of words", and it seems to us worthwhile to analyse this phenomenon.

No doubt, as is almost always the case, there is not a single cause, but rather a constellation of intertwined reasons, some of them deeper than they appear. These "word fragments" are not merely a stylistic change, they reflect a transformed relation to language, to time, to the world, and to oneself, in short, another way of being. First, there is the pressure of immediacy, as we live in a regime of accelerated communication, where

responding quickly matters more than responding accurately. A complete sentence presupposes a longer temporality: thinking what one says, articulating it, assuming a sequence. A fragment, by contrast, is compatible with urgency, it allows one to exist in the flow without stopping it. One may also see in it a search for anonymity, a fear of exposure. A constructed sentence commits its author, it has a syntax, a direction, a responsibility, all of which reveal an individual voice. In the fragment, the subject often disappears: one says “Not in the mood”, “Tired”, “Later”. By suppressing the grammatical subject, we dilute the existential subject, it is an unconscious strategy of de-responsibilisation; by avoiding “I”, I am not really the one who speaks. The fragment is the language of a self that evaporates, that refuses to stand upright in its own speech.
A sentence is an organism, it has a beginning and an end, it forms a closed unit, it has a determinate boundary and an internal unity. A fragment is an open, indefinite, inchoate form; it never truly ends because it never truly begins. Such a form marks a passage from a discrete, concrete mode of thought to a liquid or gaseous one. One no longer concludes, one remains “open”, which prevents any real refutation. A fragment cannot be contradicted, since it asserts nothing complete, it is unassailable because it is formless. One could almost see in this an “asphyxiation of the logos”, a return to a kind of primitive, pre-logical orality. Speaking in complete sentences is actually a form of deliberate training, since children begin by uttering single words and, guided by their environment, gradually learn to form full sentences, we later undergo formal education that compels us to practice elaborate expression. But once external demands disappear, once that deliberate training or challenge ceases, we naturally drift back toward fragmentation, gradually losing the habit of constructing full, thoughtful sentences, a form of decadent literacy. And we can notice that this formal slackening is accompanied by an erosion of cognitive faculties, concentration wanes, making it almost impossible to tackle a long, structured text. Deprived of the structure of the sentence, thought itself becomes void, and when these people are questioned, silence or repetition prevail over argumentation, even irritation, revealing a growing inability to engage in structured thinking, no longer finding within themselves the

inspiration necessary to sustain a thought that goes beyond the stage of reflex or slogan.

Thus fragments protect us, as they allow one to suggest without asserting, to react without taking a real position; the less one articulates, the less one can be contradicted, the fragment is a remarkably effective strategy of evasion. One also observes that when these “fragmentary speakers”, these “amateur aphorists”, are questioned about their behavior, they often react nervously, even aggressively, as if they felt threatened. This “style” also reflects a form of cognitive laziness, an inertia, in the neutral, non-moral sense, as a mere economy of effort, even an intellectual weakness. Although for some, fragmented language seems to appear clever, as it echoes the style of Zen masters who say the absolute minimum, precisely to demonstrate wisdom, or it "imitates" great stylist like Nietzsche or Faulkner, which has led to a “free” association between brevity and intelligence, as only the "dull" spell things out clearly and completely, while "refined" people hint and imply.

Composing a sentence requires a minimum of hierarchy, coherence and ordering, yet many have lost the habit of this work, replacing it with the juxtaposition of keywords, emotions, or identity signals. Moreover, this laziness is tyrannical: one projects shards of thought and demands that the other assemble them, it is up to the listener to guess the intention, restore the logical links, “fill in the gaps”. Thus the “mondain”, the polished socialite, loves the fragment because it allows one to shine without risking error. Dropping, offhand, an author’s name, a fashionable concept, or a striking adjective, signals belonging to the “right circle” without having to demonstrate any real understanding, without being accountable for effective content, since these fragments function as a password, an identity badge. Language is reduced to its function of social signalling: one does not seek to say something about reality, but to say “I am here”, and on the “right side”.

More deeply still, one can discern a crisis of confidence in language itself, as many no longer believe that words can truly say something real or stable; nothing seems substantial any longer except our emotions. “Lexical debris” are then tossed out like stones thrown into water, simply to express oneself, to produce an effect, not to construct meaning. In this sense, the fragment is largely sufficient, but it is expressive rather than significative. One could call this tendency to communicate with the least possible intellectual expenditure an “economy of minimal meaning”. This fragmented expression aligns well with the current cultural ethos of “feelings-first”, as isolated utterances often carry higher emotional intensity than fully articulated sentences. Structured, logical language tends to dilute emotional concentration, whereas raw fragments feel more immediate and visceral.

One can also relate this tendency to a broader cultural shift in the status of meaning itself, visible for instance in contemporary art, where a simple object can become “art” solely by virtue of its context, as in the Duchampian gesture, where the toilet becomes art not through its form or intrinsic qualities, but solely through its displacement into an institutional and interpretive context. Meaning is no longer produced internally by form, but externally by situation. In the same way, fragmented speech no longer carries its meaning within itself, it relies on context, implication, shared codes, or the interpretive labour of the other, which is presented as a form of autonomy. Syntax, once experienced as a generative structure, is then perceived as a form of tyranny, as something that constrains interpretation and closes off the open space of possible meanings. A complete sentence is felt as suffocating because it determines too much, because it imposes relations, hierarchies and conclusions, when indetermination, by contrast, appears as freedom. But this freedom is ambiguous, since by refusing elaboration, one also refuses to create meaning oneself, outsourcing it to the listener or to the situation. Elaboration is thus increasingly experienced as a form of symbolic violence, as an exertion of power that forces articulation where one would prefer fluidity. Yet to go through elaboration precisely requires strength: the power to endure constraint, to accept

determination, and to assume the risks that come with saying something fully. What is rejected, under the guise of openness, is not authority as domination, but authority as responsibility.

Finally, there is a technical habituation: text messages, instant messaging and social media have shaped a language of ellipsis. Yet technology merely amplifies a tendency that already existed: the refusal of duration, of complexity, of the effort of articulation. As well, our modes of expression have become increasingly multimodal, as images and videos now massively replace written text, for example the usage of emojis or symbols have become quite widespread, which not only encourages fragmented verbal articulation, but also diminishes people's aesthetic appreciation and sensitivity toward language itself.

One can therefore identify a loss of a stylistic sense of language, in the strong sense: not a taste for prettiness, but a sense of the just form. In a more sustained manner, a sentence is not merely a vehicle for information, it is a composition, with rhythm, tension, articulation and resolution. When language is reduced to fragments, this formal demand is abandoned, one no longer seeks a form that holds, but an immediate effect. This loss is tied to the disappearance of aesthetic patience, for appreciating a sentence requires inhabiting it, following its movement attentively, accepting a slight delay between impulse and expression. In a culture of immediacy, this delay is experienced as superfluous or even suspect, as it lacks spontaneity; impact is preferred to endurance, signal to structure. This amounts to a devaluation of formal effort, since working on a sentence means accepting that content does not come without form, that thought requires staging. Many experience this as unnecessary affectation, intellectual coquetry, or a superfluous effort, even superficial, tedious of course, whereas it is in fact a discipline, a work on one's thought and on oneself. Simplicity is thus confused with negligence.

More deeply still, this reflects a weakened esthesis: a diminished sensitivity

to nuances, transitions and internal tensions, a reduced capacity to perceive, discriminate and appreciate forms and their modulations. Ironically, one can even identify an “aesthetics of debris”, which is in reality a hatred of clarity and a form of complacency. In a culture that suspects rhetoric of being deceptive, the fragment is perceived as more “authentic” because it is more “raw”; elaboration is confused with artifice: the worse something is said, even the more vulgar it is, the more sincere it appears. Ultimately, speaking in fragments is a way of wanting to be heard without being committed. It is not necessarily incompetence or ignorance, but rather a strategy, unconscious, a way of remaining on the surface, where nothing binds, nothing constrains, nothing truly risks itself. And let us dare to say it plainly: the rejection of the sentence is a rejection of thinking itself. Beautiful and rigorous forms disturb because they impose coherence, responsibility and exposure, when strangely, the “ugliness” of the fragment is a shield, it produces a form of indifference and allows disengagement, as we have mentioned. Thus, the proliferation of fragments is not only a cognitive or technical symptom, it is also a spiritual impoverishment, a loss of taste for forms that hold, endure and oblige, as a certain idea of thought itself is eroding. The fragment is the counterfeit currency of a communication that no longer wishes to cost anything, it simulates exchange while refusing encounter. For to encounter the other, one must first accept to dwell within a sentence that exposes us. One might call this an “unraveling” of the world through language, since the sentence is a bridge, whereas the fragment is a piece of wreckage.

387- The Amorous Myth

In general, more or less openly, more or less consciously, we all want to be loved, yet we rarely know what this truly means. If one asks those concerned, most will explain that it is not a matter of being loved in just any way or for just anything, as to be loved for one’s money, status, power, or usefulness seems suspicious, reductive, almost insulting. We do not want to be used or instrumentalised, we claim we want to be loved for

“ourselves”, for what we are in our own right. But what exactly does this “ourselves” mean, once we stop treating it as a comforting and mysterious evidence?

When examined more closely, this sincere request begins to crack, for what we call “being loved for who we are” in fact corresponds to very specific expectations of the other: to be reassured, recognised, made secure, comforted, desired, validated, encouraged, even admired, and so on. To be loved is often to be confirmed in one’s fragilities, lacks, and fears, it is a form of existential compensation, a love that fills a lack. In other words, the love we demand is rarely disinterested, as it is functional, it must soothe, repair, compensate, indulge. Without admitting it, we want above all a love that supports our existence as it is, not one that puts it into crisis, at least not deliberately, even though, over time, a certain destabilisation is unavoidable.

Schopenhauer radicalises this romantic “realism” by claiming that love is nothing other than a desire for reproduction, a ruse of the species disguised as individual passion. His thesis shocks and can be deemed cynical, but it has the merit of dispelling certain illusions: love is not the pure and ideal sanctuary we like to imagine, as it is traversed by biological, psychological, and social interests, often unconscious, since to perceive them would require genuine self-knowledge, an almost impossible task, given how threatening, frightening, or repellent our obscure side can be. And yet, despite this constant disenchantment, periodically revealed through disappointments, many continue to aspire to what they call unconditional love, a love “for themselves”, freed from expectation, calculation, or any “practical” dimension. Upon reflection, however, this idea of “perfect” love withstands reality poorly; as soon as one scratches the surface, conditions always appear: fidelity, attention, recognition, desire, presence, various demands deemed non-negotiable, each in their own way. If unconditional love is invoked as an ideal, it is lived as a contradiction, even an impossibility, for to love without conditions would mean loving what displeases us, unsettles us, deprives us of comfort and reassurance. But the issue is not so much the existence of these “needs”, which belong to the vulnerable and human core of love, but the tendency to absolutise them. When they become the primary foundation of the bond, they weigh love

down and close it in on itself, but when they are recognised without being relied upon, they can remain as mere points of warmth and resonance, rather than conditions of attachment. Love falters not through vulnerability, but through the refusal to move beyond it, as vulnerability should not be the justification of our powerlessness, but a challenge, the demand to expose oneself without making that exposure a claim or a dependency.

What then remains of disinterested love? What survives the ruins of this deconstruction? The task is difficult. Perhaps not the absence of conditions, but their acceptance, or at least a minimal awareness of them, a love that no longer tells itself as a romance, a myth, or a fable, but as a story that assumes its limits. A love that does not promise the absolute, but accepts being worked through, discussed, held in tension. Not a love that protects us from truth, but one that can bear its passage through the relationship, and thus tolerate the fracture of being. Love may not be the dreamed-of fusion where everything is freely given, it is rather a fragile negotiation between desire, need, recognition, and authenticity. What remains when illusions fall is not nothing: perhaps a less grandiose love, but one that is more substantial and more solid, a love that does not claim to be unconditional, but that accepts being examined, and therefore ceases to lie to itself.

One can then sketch another figure of love, more demanding and less consoling, no longer love as refuge, but as the dynamic relation between beings who fulfil each other through a permanent challenge. Love can then be understood as the meeting point of the finite and the infinite. It is neither a purely ideal abstraction nor an absolute act of self-sacrifice, just as it is not merely an exchange governed by practical conditions. Love arises within finite existence, between concrete individuals, fragile bodies, limited time, needs and lack, yet it always gestures toward an infinite horizon: the capacity to transcend the self, utility, and the immediacy of the present. It recognises human limits without turning them into a final measure, it unfolds within imperfection while remaining open to a meaning that exceeds it.

To love, in this perspective, is not only to welcome the other as they are, but to confront them with what they can become, and to accept being questioned oneself. Such a love does not seek peace at all costs; it accepts tension as a condition of growth. But this demand is possible only within the horizon of an ideal, explicit or implicit, that transcends both individuals: an idea of truth, justice, beauty, dignity, or human accomplishment. Without this shared ideal, love quickly falls back into the management of needs and the protection of fragilities. It is therefore not the absence of conditions that grounds the depth of love, but the level of the demand it is willing to sustain.

One must add, however, that the decisive condition of such a love is the capacity for distance and relinquishment. Distance from oneself, so as not to confuse the other with the satisfaction of one's own lacks. Distance from the other, so as not to imprison them in a function, an expectation, or an idealised image. Distance from our implicit demands, from those expectations we consider "natural" but which are often disguised forms of possession. A distance that does not stem from fear, from the reluctance to expose one's fragility or from the anxiety of commitment, but from the ability to hold desire without turning it into possession, and from trust, that relinquishing control does not imply a loss. For to love the other is to consent to their radical alterity, to accept that they escape us, that they never fully coincide with our demands, inner narratives, or affective projections. And finally, a distance from love itself: the ability not to absolutise the feeling, not to raise it to a sacred value that would justify everything, but to accept its fragility, intermittence, and occasional disappointment. This distance is neither coldness nor emotional withdrawal; it is what makes love breathable, as without it, love turns into dependence, entitlement, or emotional blackmail. To love, then, is to know how to let the other exist, and to know how to renounce what one believed indispensable, so that the relationship is not an exchange of lacks, but a place of reciprocal realization. We should remember that love is only a bridge, not a destination.

388 – Risky Speech

Following some of our texts, a criticism was addressed to us, formulated in an almost sententious, even violent manner: “He would do better to keep silent than to enter the arena where words are public weapons that can at any moment turn against him without his knowing it.” This remark seems to us worth examining, for it reveals a very particular, and very widespread, conception of speech and thought.

The criticism first assumes that words belong to the person who utters them, that they engage their image, their status, their symbolic security, thus speaking would amount to taking a personal risk, exposing oneself to a loss of control, to possible disqualification. Within this framework, silence appears as a strategy of protection, almost as a form of wisdom, a recommendation that is moreover highly valued, the expression of a fearful prudence. One may in fact see in it a form of pride, where the “self” becomes the primary concern, and this supposed wisdom turns out to be an expression of narcissism, rooted in the fragility of an identity that cannot bear exposure. Yet this logic is profoundly foreign to philosophical practice, and more specifically to the Socratic exercise, as in such a perspective, the very idea that words could “turn against the one who speaks” makes little sense, for such a “danger” presupposes an identification with one’s discourse, a possession of one’s theses, an attachment to what is said, a concern for reputation. In this spirit, one never speaks in order to defend a position, still less to preserve an image; one speaks in order to put ideas to the test, those of others as well as one’s own. What is exposed, then, is not a “person” but a hypothesis, what is at stake is not a reputation but the truth, however elusive it may be. From such a standpoint, being contradicted, destabilised, shown to be mistaken is neither a threat nor a failure, it is, on the contrary, the very heart of the exercise, what may be called a “mise en abyme of being”, that is, the experience through which the subject discovers itself traversed, fissured, and transformed by what exceeds it. This fracture of the subject is not a wound but an opening, thus any “setback” is only momentary, affective, superficial, it does not affect

what is essential, precisely because the essential is not the self. To make an illusion crumble, even one's own, to expose the blind spots and contradictions of a discourse, is not a defeat but a spiritual jubilation, an accomplishment.

Consequently, urging silence on the pretext that speech would be dangerous amounts to projecting onto philosophy a worldly, strategic, defensive logic: it is to conceive of language as a social weapon, and of thought as a risk to be managed as best one can. Yet philosophy begins precisely where one accepts that speech no longer serves to protect oneself, but to expose ourselves to what exceeds us. The real danger, then, is not that words might turn against the one who speaks, but that one might renounce speaking out of fear of such a reversal. For keeping silent in order to preserve one's integrity already means having made one's small person the primary concern, the ultimate measure of things. Conversely, entering the arena without seeking to defend oneself, without wanting to save anything of oneself, is no doubt the only way to remain faithful to the philosophical demand: to possess nothing, guarantee nothing, fear nothing, and to let the spirit of truth do its work, even against ourselves, if one may put it that way. "Everything you say may be used against you," the formula runs, they simply forget to add that it will be in the service of truth.

389 – Certainty and Confidence

A criticism we regularly receive is the accusation that we hold unshakable certainties, beliefs, in short, that we are dogmatic. We have wondered how some readers arrive at such a conclusion, which seems to us the very opposite of how we function, as we observe it in our personal history and daily life. Although generally, when pressed, these "denouncers" are unable to substantiate their claim or specify the alleged certainties. We then realised that this judgement rests on a significant confusion between two concepts, "certainty" and "confidence", which admittedly share a family

resemblance but are, rather strangely, two quite opposite attitudes. Certainty is rigid and defensive, it needs to protect itself because it fears being shaken, it closes in on itself because it identifies with what it asserts, any questioning is experienced as a personal threat. It therefore seeks guarantees, stable positions, and symbolic protections in order to secure its rear. Confidence, by contrast, has nothing to defend, it is fluid, it allows for clarity, revision, listening, and contradiction. It rests on a non-identification with discourse, as what is said can be corrected, displaced, or abandoned without the subject collapsing, since the subject does not coincide with their statements. One who is confident does not need to believe, nor to cling to an identity or a position, they can speak without strategic precaution precisely because they accept the possibility of being mistaken, of "being wrong", not out of courage, but because such "setbacks" do not truly affect them. Confidence is not anxious, it does not need to be certain before speaking, because it does not rely on any prior guarantee of adequacy. It is performative in nature, in the sense that it dares to speak, to advance, to expose, to express itself without ulterior motive, and then observes what occurs. The speech creates the reality of the exchange at the moment it is uttered, rather than merely describing a pre-existing idea that must then be "protected". It accepts that truth is forged in the very ordeal of speech, in the reactions it provokes, the resistances it encounters, and the objections it attracts. Where certainty waits for guarantees before speaking, confidence speaks in order to see, and then draws the consequences of what happens.

Philosophy is therefore bound to confidence because it relies on reason, that is, on an autonomous, shareable faculty, independent of particular circumstances, a power of being that offers neither comfort nor certainty, but provides a stable point of support: the capacity to understand, to examine, to correct, and to start again. Simultaneously, trust in reason brings trust in oneself and trust in the world, in the conviction that meaning can be sought, tested, and refined through engagement rather than guaranteed in advance. By making the world intelligible, reason makes it trustworthy, and this intelligibility grants the soul a form of peace. Therefore, this critical and creative dimension gives human beings

confidence, not because it shields them from error, but because it enables them to traverse error without being lost. This is why “mistake” does not trouble philosophy, as it is not a failure, as it scarcely exists as such, but is merely a moment in the very process of truth itself, a moment which Hegel emphasises: the false is not the sterile or shameful opposite of the true, but a necessary stage of it, a kind of revealer of being, a working tool rather than a moral fault. Moreover, philosophy, in its genuine sense, is not a body of knowledge; it does not aim at the accumulation of particular truths to be jealously preserved, but at the exercise of a capacity, a competence of thinking, capable of correcting itself, resuming, and transforming itself without feeling threatened, since one is never doing more than “trying out” ideas. Any proposition is merely a working hypothesis, a provisional and necessary step required for the course of thinking to move forward. To interpret this confidence as an “armour” is therefore to project onto philosophical speech an affective logic of self-defense that does not belong to it. Such a critique assumes that all speech must involve the identity, image, and subjective vulnerability, and that not engaging one’s affects amounts to placing oneself beyond reach. But this assumption is already an implicit philosophical position, one that absolutises “lived” experience as the ultimate criterion of truth, privileging affect over reason. To say that the self is not at stake does not mean that human experience is denied or despised, but simply that it is not the tribunal of authenticity, the measure of the real. Philosophy does not consist in self-narration, but in disidentifying from what one says in order to truly put it to the test, a displacement that is not a symbolic protection, but a more radical exposure: one in which nothing, not even lived experience, is sacralised. This critique also confuses incarnation with affectivity, as to embody a thought does not mean to feel it intensely, but to assume it through its consequences, even when it disturbs, isolates, or provides no particular excitement. To embody is to establish coherence between the act of speaking and one’s life, rather than a mere emotional resonance. To demand that thought undergoes visible and painful vulnerability is, in fact, to impose upon it a moral and relational condition that subordinates it to the psychological approval of others, to a kind of emotional sharing. Moreover, to speak of “elevation” or “distance” in a pejorative sense,

where there is merely a refusal of fusion, reveals a particular sensitivity. For what is experienced as “height”, as an arrogant and hurtful rejection, is in fact nothing more than a simple distance, necessary and salutary, in order to preserve the space of thought, avoid affective entanglement, and allow truth to appear without being immediately confused with the need for recognition or consolation. The desire for certainty is not a demand for truth, but rather the request addressed to the other: “Promise me that everything will be fine”, a promise both illusory and absurd, which neither thought nor life can guarantee, yet which bears witness to common human distress. What is denounced as disengaged and distant abstraction merely reflects a refusal to confuse truth with comfort or compensation, a lack of complacency toward oneself and others. Fidelity to the philosophical approach is not an “armour”, it is a demand, and this demand offers no security except, paradoxically, the ability to lose everything, including one’s own evidence.

One final element must be added to this confusion, since a rationally structured, coherent discourse that holds together without contradiction can cause particular concern among those who are not accustomed to questioning, problematizing, or reframing statements. Unable to engage with it through questioning or criticism, they perceive it as a closed block, a monolithic whole, and therefore as dogma, because what is experienced unconsciously is a “humiliating lesson", which often is often nothing more than a thought that stands on its own, without apologizing for its existence. From then on, the accusation of dogmatism functions as a defense: it allows one to avoid acknowledging either a difficulty in questioning or, more simply, the fact that what is stated resists because it is "right," even if only temporarily, especially when the content catches us off guard.
In other words, what the critique calls “certainty” is in fact a confidence sufficient to avoid turning thought into confession, speech into a quest for validation, and truth into an emotional experience. Thus, this critique is not personal but philosophical: it concerns the very definition of what thinking is, what thought should risk, what it entails, what it exposes, its functioning and its function, and its relation to ourselves and to the real, rather than pandering to our need for reassurance or recognition.

390 – Killing the Immortals

A reader writes, by way of objection to my philosophical references: "The world of Kant, Sartre, Buddha, Socrates does not exist, unlike mine or yours", a statement that strikes us as rather symptomatic of an era. As well, some people will not explicitly make such a statement, but it is implicit in their way of thinking, in their mental scheme.

Such a claim is not a harmless opinion, but a philosophical gesture with heavy consequences, a markedly reductive vision of existence, it seems to us. For what is being denied here is not merely the continued presence of historical figures, but the very reality of the spaces of thought they opened, shaped and transmitted. A world is not only a collection of material objects immediately present, it is also a horizon of meaning, a way of inhabiting existence, of asking questions, of distinguishing the true from the false, the just from the unjust, the worthy from the unworthy. This sentence nevertheless presents itself as a form of wisdom, wrapped in the flattering tones of the "here and now", of lived authenticity, of the supposed depth of the instant. It perfectly mirrors the spirit of the time, this valorisation of the immediate present erected as an absolute, as if any reference to the past or to demanding thought were an escape from reality. Yet this posture, under its appearance of calm lucidity, is above all a contemporary complacency: it confuses presence with narrowness, intensity with impoverishment, simplicity with renunciation. To say that these beings of the past no longer exist is to reduce existence to the immediate, to raw experience, to the limited sphere of what happens to us here and now; it is to confuse existence with physical presence, reality with actuality. Such a reduction amounts to killing the dead a second time, not through forgetting, but by decree, since what is no longer corporeally present is declared without effect, without value, without reality, a discreet yet effective form of intellectual cruelty, a denial of the eternity of beings. By removing these imposing figures, one frees oneself from a burden, that of nobility of soul, of spiritual and intellectual demands, of unsettling ideals, even of transcendence. If Kant does not exist, there is no longer any need

to confront the moral injunction, or the structuring of thought. If Socrates does not exist, there is no longer any need to account for one's own thinking, or to learn how to become ignorant. If Buddha does not exist, there is no longer any need to question attachment and illusion, or to deconstruct the reality of the subject. If Sartre does not exist, there is no longer any need to assume responsibility for one's freedom, or to identify bad faith. This negation, or eradication, is an effective way of getting rid of those who "get in our way", which helps to justify ambient banality: "Me, my family, my friends, and a good meal, that is quite enough". Perhaps, no doubt. But is that a horizon, or merely a comfort? Is it a world, or a retreat? And above all, is this the kind of vision one wishes to pass on to future generations, the idea that there is nothing greater than oneself, nothing broader than one's immediate circle, nothing more demanding than personal well-being? It bears a strong resemblance to *1984*, *Brave New World*, or other dystopias. Or, in a softer and more convivial form, it recalls various periods of history in which attempts were made to establish a "new man" by erasing traces of the past, deemed obsolete, tainted or fictitious: the Chinese Cultural Revolution, with its elimination of the "old ideas", the Nazi regime and the burning of books, the Soviet system, in which the past was discredited as obscurantist, and, in a gentler form, contemporary technological "presentism", where history is considered useless, outdated, toxic or cumbersome, since everything must be new, instantaneous, optimised, current. Culture thus becomes a memoryless flow, the "new" human being an adaptable individual without historical depth, an erasure imposed not by force but by indifference. Each time we claim to liberate human beings by cutting them off from their past, we do not produce a more conscious being, but a more fragile, more superficial, more manipulable individual, deprived of reference points for thinking and resisting, however "sincere" they may be, sustained by a false sense of freedom.

This "forgetting" logic naturally leads to demagogic thinking, in which mere presence serves as the criterion for truth. "We are here" becomes the ultimate argument, as if factual existence were sufficient to ground meaning, justice and reality. Those who are absent are always wrong, not because they are mistaken, but because they are no longer there to carry

weight. This egocentric vitalism elevates immediate experience to the status of authority, it confuses intensity with legitimacy, numbers with reason. Thought no longer needs to be structured or justified, as it validates itself within the closed circle of the present, while anything that exceeds the “club” of the living is disqualified as abstract, unreal or useless. Great thinkers are not relics from another age, museum pieces, but fractures in time. Their reality persists whenever someone thinks against what seems self-evident, refuses complacent mediocrity, dares to question what goes without saying. To deny them is not to affirm our autonomy, it is to lock ourselves into a present without memory and without a future, a flat vision deprived of perspective, and a world thus truncated is not more real, it is simply poorer. By killing the immortals, one does not liberate thought, one reduces it to the level of a raw, comfortable evidence, socially and intellectually sterile.

391 – Playing and Cheating

Over the course of my wanderings, through encounters with various cultures, I have realised that there exist very different conceptions of the relationship between playing and cheating. In some contexts, cheating is part of the game, it sometimes even becomes a genuine system. Admittedly, playing and cheating are often brought together, either to oppose them or to combine them, to moralise playing or to aestheticise cheating. Nevertheless, the two do not involve the same relationship to rules, nor the same relationship to truth, with inevitable intellectual and existential consequences.

Playing presupposes the acceptance of a fixed framework, and the resulting rules are not an obstacle to the game, they are its very condition, as without them, there is neither tension, nor surprise, nor form. The player knows

that the game is arbitrary, but accepts this arbitrariness so that something substantial can take place, there is an aesthetic dimension to this constraint, as pleasure arises from limits freely assumed. Cheating, by contrast, does not so much consist in playing differently as in wanting to obtain an advantage without fully accepting the conditions of the game. The cheater, whether or not they admit it, subordinates the common framework to their own purposes, even if cheating itself amuses them. Thus, when they claim to "play" with the context, for example by deceiving the referee, they displace the rules in order to evade the constraints imposed on the other participants. This is not simply a game within the game, as they may pretend, but a different game played at the expense of the original one, under the guise of cleverness or skill, a way of proving that one is the most cunning.

One might object that cheating can itself become a game, providing pleasure through deception, ingenuity, risk, or the possibility of being caught, independently of any desire to win, this is certainly possible. But such a game remains parasitic upon the original one: it depends on other participants respecting rules that the cheater secretly violates. The cheater may indeed be playing, but they are no longer playing the same game as the others, as their pleasure depends upon an asymmetry that cannot be openly shared without transforming the nature of the activity. Cheating can therefore possess a playful dimension without belonging to the common game. What is presented as superior inventiveness may simply be the invention of a private game at the expense of those who continue to play the original one.

The common ground between playing and cheating is nonetheless real, since both implicitly recognise the rule: one only cheats where a rule exists, but the difference is decisive. The player measures themselves against the rule, whereas the cheater makes the rule subordinate to their own purposes. One plays with the limits of the possible, the other resorts to ruse in order to circumvent those limits. One seeks a result through the constraints of the game, the other seeks an advantage by escaping them.

One might object that most players are primarily interested in winning rather than in playing for its own sake, this is undoubtedly true, but it does not undermine the distinction. The desire to win is not opposed to the spirit of play, it may even constitute its driving force. A player may desperately want to win, experience defeat as painful, and nevertheless refuse to cheat. Indeed, the importance attached to victory is precisely what gives the acceptance of defeat its significance. The decisive question is not whether one wants to win, but what one is prepared to sacrifice in order to win. The player seeks victory within the constraints that give it meaning, whereas the cheater is prepared to undermine those constraints to obtain the desired result. Thus, the opposition is not between competitive ambition and disinterested enjoyment, but between two relationships to competition itself, as the cheater wants the benefits of victory without fully accepting the conditions that make victory legitimate.

This is why cheating is often accompanied by a relativistic discourse on truth and the absolute, as nothing would be stable, every truth would be local, subjective, provisional, and everything would become negotiable. But this relativism is less a philosophical position than a practical justification; it serves to absolve the rejection of constraint. One denies the “absolute” not necessarily out of lucidity, but in order to avoid having to answer for one's own actions. The player does not need to deny the absolute, they know that the framework is arbitrarily constructed, but they respect it in order to see what can emerge within it. They do not claim that all truths are equivalent, but accept suspending ultimate truth so that a local, demanding, shared truth may exist. The cheater, by contrast, may use the arbitrariness of the framework as a pretext for dissolving the very distinctions that make the game possible. What is relative in its origin is treated as though it were therefore optional in its application.

There is a fundamental difference between playing with an illusion and using it as a shield. The player knows that his sandcastle is fragile but builds it anyway; the cheater, on the other hand, pretends, or ends up believing, that it will always stand, because he thinks he holds all the cards and controls the situation. The paradox is that this illusion, which is supposed

to protect him, actually makes him more vulnerable: by denying the fragility of what he relies on, he dooms himself to be caught off guard, or even destroyed, by its collapse. The player can invest themselves passionately in an activity while recognising its limits and its possible conclusion. The cheater attempts to escape the consequences of those limits while continuing to enjoy the recognition attached to respecting them. It is here that cheating loses its aesthetic legitimacy within the common game, even if the act of cheating may possess an aesthetic of its own. Its ingenuity is purchased at the expense of a framework that others continue to honour. Playing is a way of inhabiting time, cheating is often a way of wanting to dominate it. The former accepts the uncertainty of the outcome, while the latter attempts to secure an advantage by altering the conditions under which that outcome is determined.

“Fair play”, playing in a “just” manner, is precisely what the cheater refuses to respect, yet this criterion is neither a naïve morality nor a decorative virtue. It is the active recognition of the other as a playing partner, not as a mere obstacle to be circumvented. Fair play accepts the rule even in defeat, it recognises the value of the game independently of the result. Where the cheater instrumentalises the framework in order to secure an advantage, fair play protects the framework so that the game remains possible. The former wants to obtain a result on their own terms, the latter wants the match to be worth playing. This difference immediately engages the relationship to the other in different ways.

In fair play, the opponent is recognised as a partner, their victory is possible and acceptable, even when it is bitterly disappointing, and when it occurs, it can be honoured. Fair play does not require indifference to defeat, nor does it prohibit anger or frustration, it merely requires recognising that these reactions do not justify undermining the conditions of the encounter. The opponent's victory can be acknowledged because it has been achieved within a framework that both participants accepted. In this sense, fair play does not eliminate rivalry, it gives rivalry a form through which mutual recognition becomes possible.

Cheating, on the contrary, transforms the relationship into a latent confrontation, as the other ceases to be a player and becomes an obstacle or a threat. If the opponent wins by cheating, anger looms, since the victory is perceived as stolen. But if we cheat, the opponent is no longer honoured, even when they have played well, since the result no longer reflects the quality of the match. In both cases, the bond deteriorates, because cheating introduces a diffuse animosity that spills beyond the game itself. Thus, cheating does not merely corrupt the rules, it corrupts the relationship between adversaries. Where play establishes the possibility of mutual recognition, cheating installs suspicion and resentment. We no longer play "together"; we play "against", and quickly, no longer really to play, but to defeat or to take revenge. The game then ceases to be a space of encounter and becomes a field of masked conflict.

One sometimes speaks of "cheating well", invoking a supposed aesthetic, as if circumventing the rule were a mark of superior refinement. There may indeed be intelligence, creativity, audacity, and even elegance in the art of deception. To deny this would be to confuse aesthetic judgement with moral condemnation. But recognising the ingenuity of cheating does not make it equivalent to playing well, as both activities are judged according to different criteria. The skilful cheater may be admirable as a strategist of deception while remaining a poor participant in the common game, their cleverness does not abolish the asymmetry upon which it depends. On the contrary, the more skilfully they cheat, the more effectively they exploit the commitment of others to rules they themselves refuse to observe.

The game is already demanding enough in itself: it imposes discipline, patience, inventiveness, and the acceptance of limits. To invent one's own rules is not necessarily objectionable; indeed, the invention of games is itself a form of play. But secretly substituting one's private rules for those publicly accepted is something different. The problem is not invention, but the refusal to share the conditions of the activity. If everyone openly agrees to modify the rules, a new game begins, if one participant modifies them unilaterally while allowing the others to believe that nothing has changed,

the common game is undermined. Ultimately, the distinction between playing and cheating does not depend on whether one enjoys competition, desires victory, or takes pleasure in cunning. All these motivations can coexist, and none is sufficient to define either activity, the decisive distinction concerns the relationship to a shared framework. The player accepts that the meaning of victory depends upon constraints that they cannot unilaterally suspend. The cheater wants to enjoy the possibilities offered by that framework while reserving the right to escape its demands. In this sense, cheating is not necessarily the opposite of playing, it may be a form of playing that undermines the possibility of playing together. The cheater may win, and may even enjoy themselves more than the honest player, but they obtain this satisfaction by compromising the very conditions that give the common game its meaning. The player wants to win the game, the cheater is prepared to sacrifice the game in order to win.

392- Apology of Cheating

Following our critique of cheating, a reader responded with a defense of cheating of a rather worldly kind, in which this behavior is presented as a creative extension of play, a form of ludic intelligence, an aestheticised transgression. Cheating is described there not as a flight from the ordeal, but as a subtle exploration of the margins of the rule, capable of intensifying the experience of play, revealing the flexibility of the framework, and enriching the relationship between players. This redescription, elegant and seductive, nonetheless tends to dissolve the decisive distinctions between play, ruse and evasion, turning conflict and transgression into values in principle, while neglecting their real effects on the game, on its implicit demands. We find in it a form of corruption of the practice itself, of the relation to others, and the expression of a marked narcissism, in which ingenuity serves less the game than self-valorisation, and ruse becomes a means of standing out without having to assume the trial that the rule

imposes.
After denouncing the mundane and artificial dimension of this text, far too "smooth", we were asked whether it was possible to defend cheating in a more substantial manner, we therefore took up the challenge. Cheating sometimes deserves to be defended, not as the expression of refinement, aesthetics, or superior intelligence, but as the symptom of a conflicted relationship to the rule, and even, at times, of necessity. Let us assume, contrary to the previous text, that cheating is not "playing better", but rather the refusal of a configuration of the game judged stifling, unjust, or deceptive. Where worldly discourse celebrates ruse as elegance, it should instead be seen as a blunt gesture, potentially clumsy, but revealing of a state of affairs.

Cheating rarely arises from the pleasure of play, it arises from the tension between an exigency and an inability or refusal to submit to it, or from a conflict between the pleasure of playing and the desire to win. Certainly, the cheater may choose to avoid or flee difficulty for petty reasons, but they may also reject a rule perceived as arbitrary, biased, perverse, or designed to maintain an asymmetry of power. In this sense, cheating becomes a primitive form of contestation, an act without discourse, an embodied protest. This is not a matter of absolving cheating, for, as we have said, it damages relationships, introduces mistrust, and in fact destroys the game it claims to extend. Rather, it is to show where its meaning may lie: it lays bare what the game demands, what the individual can no longer or no longer wishes to endure, and it exposes the problematic dimension of the framework. Where fair play presupposes full adherence to the context, cheating denounces a breach in this adherence, a fracture between the rule and the meaning or values it claims to carry, insofar as the dice are loaded and the rules are illegitimate. This may be the civil servant who no longer accepts mechanically applying a procedure they know to be unjust or absurd, and circumvents it in order to render a humanly bearable decision. It may be the teacher who rejects a standardised curriculum they judge impoverishing and clandestinely adapts their teaching in order to preserve the intelligence and curiosity of their pupils. It may be the employee who diverts an instruction to protect the quality of their work against purely

managerial imperatives. It may also be the citizen who transgresses a norm they perceive as disconnected from the common good, not out of a taste for fraud, but out of refusal to collaborate in what they deem devoid of meaning.
An additional difficulty arises when the rule is followed to the letter but circumvented in spirit. A lawyer who exploits a legal loophole may be legitimately defending their client, but may also be enabling precisely what the law sought to prevent. The line between skill, circumvention, and cheating then becomes blurred: formal compliance with the rule is not enough to establish integrity in the practice, just as violating it is not enough to prove its illegitimacy.

Thus, to cheat is to say, without words and through simple actions, that this "game" does not suit us, or no longer does. It is a gesture that oscillates between an admission of impotence and a clear refusal, an inability to abide by the rule or a rejection to be defined by it.

We must also distinguish between those who take pride in cheating and those who cheat with shame: the former may turn their exemption into a badge of superiority, while the latter may experience a conflict between a rule they acknowledge and an act they nevertheless deem necessary. This difference, however, does not determine the legitimacy of their conduct: pride may accompany justified resistance, and shame may accompany petty fraud. Rather, it reveals what each person accepts, regrets, or seeks to conceal in their transgression.

Cheating is therefore neither creative nor noble, it is harsh, conflictual, risky, even condemnable or shameful, as it pertains to necessity, to survival, or to a moral injunction. A non-worldly apology of cheating therefore consists in taking it seriously as a human phenomenon, an obligation, an unavoidable constraint, not as an art, an elegance, or a refinement, even though it may at times partake of a certain grace. It does not open spaces, it fissures them, it does not magnify the game, it puts it into crisis. And it is

precisely there that its principal value lies, as it forces everyone to ask whether the rule still deserves to be respected, or whether the psychic cost demanded by the game has become too high. Cheating is not a celebration, it is an alarm signal.

393 – The Monomaniac

There are people whose very particular discourse, endlessly repeated, becomes obsessive. They return again and again to the same idea, the same formula, the same theme, in a loop, the same supposed truth, with a constancy that eventually erases all otherness. For one, it will be non-duality elevated to an ultimate principle, they see it everywhere, and in every author in whom they can insert it. For another, it is life, or rather “their” life, presented as a primordial and indisputable reality, for which they endlessly seek recognition and validation. In the case of the psychoanalyst, everything becomes a matter of the signifier, lack, or desire, whatever the concrete situation; the real is never encountered for itself but immediately reduced to the doctrinal schema, as if experience had value only once translated into the authorised vocabulary. The doctrinaire politician functions in a similar way: every event is absorbed by a pre-existing ideological grid, nothing is truly examined, and the world ceases to be a problem to think in order to become material to be instrumentalised so as to confirm a line already drawn.

The content may vary slightly in their speech, but the guiding line and the form remain, with the same intensity, the same insistence. Indeed, for the monomaniac, reality is often reduced to a lexicon, certain phrases serve as codes, which must be recited, or compulsively rediscovered here and there, even if the interpretation has to be forced. These people do not engage in dialogue, they monologue, and they always speak from the same axis, without displacement, without

surprise, without genuine listening. They can repeat the same thing indefinitely without even realizing it, convinced that they are deepening their thought when in fact they are merely rehearsing it. Their speech does not transform, it confirms itself, thus, every encounter with another is experienced as a test of validation, and if the other's discourse does not correspond to their deep truth, it is immediately denounced, disqualified, sometimes pathologised. The other is not an interlocutor but a symptom of error; the aim is not to understand them, but to correct them.

When the monomaniac attempts to "dialogue", they are neither active nor creative, they are essentially reactive, they depend on the other, like the cuckoo, they lodge in another's nest only to "reajust" it. They do not produce new thoughts, they respond by reflex, their discourse opens no space, it closes it, they do not seek what might displace or modulate their position, but what might reinforce it. At the same time, surprisingly, with tireless energy, the monomaniac seems to never grow weary; they repeat their refrain with the conviction of bearing witness to something fundamental, indispensable, almost salvific, probably a protection against their own anxiety. To repeat the same thing is to ensure that the world does not change, that the void does not settle in; repetition becomes a mantra, an exorcism. This certainty gives them a sense of mission, as they no longer speak out of a desire to discover, but out of an obligation to convince, a psychological or moral duty, even at the risk of preaching in the desert. But often, moreover, they feel misunderstood, hence a certain animosity, a certain resentment, which easily slides into verbal violence, and periodically they can only fall into a depressive phase. They readily resort to imputing intentions, and since the other is a "symptom of error", the monomaniac grants themselves the moral right to mistreat this "enemy" in the name of "truth".
It is how their discourse becomes dogmatic, not because it is necessarily false in itself, it can even make sense, but because this "prophet" can no longer tolerate being questioned. "Truth" then ceases to be a search and becomes an identity, any criticism is

experienced not as an opportunity to think or rethink, but as an attack on the individual themselves. In fact, the monomaniac does not defend an idea, they defend themselves "with" an idea, and whatever their preferred theme may be, they are indeed speaking about themselves, even when they claim to be serving a "cause", an "ideal scheme" that they opportunistically sacralise in order to remain beyond reach, in order not to think themselves.

394 – All the Same

A somewhat "illuminated" individual, one among numerous other New Age adepts, critical of philosophical inquiry and conceptual distinctions, which they consider formal, hollow, and artificial, writes roughly the following: "All the great visionaries have said the same thing, with no real difference. The enlightenment of Buddha, Osho, Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi, Patanjali, Śaṅkara, Laozi, or Meister Eckhart is one and the same". One can, of course, always speak in such terms, but formulated this way, the claim appears rather empty, even naïve. For if this were so, then these "great" figures would have invented nothing, contributed nothing; they would merely have repeated, consciously or not, the same message. Moreover, without noticing it, our hero of enlightenment places himself above these figures, since each of these thinkers sought to trace a path of their own, insisting on its specificity, often ignoring or even criticising what the "others" asserted, a somewhat "egotistical" stance, if one follows this logic through.

Writing "it is the same enlightenment" amounts to erasing differences of conceptual frameworks, practices, metaphysics, and aims, in the name of a vague unity of experience. What is really being claimed is that all "great" enlightenments more or less stem from the same fundamental lived experience, a transcendent unity of being, or a coincidence between being and non-being, doctrinal differences being reduced to secondary trappings,

even though, ironically, most of the figures invoked would have rejected such a flat equivalence. Such statements aim to produce a feeling of depth, but they neutralise thought. One is then entitled to ask what this "enlightenment" is, so indefinable that it ends up negating any criterion of knowledge.

Let us briefly examine some of these doctrines. With the Buddha, awakening is inseparable from the cessation of craving, from an awareness of existential suffering, and above all from the recognition of emptiness, not as an abstract nothingness but as the understanding that all things are devoid of intrinsic essence, conditioned and interdependent, a consciousness that alone makes genuine detachment possible. With Śaṅkara, the issue is not emptiness but the recognition of the identity of *ātman* and *Brahman*, of the singular and the absolute. With Patanjali, illumination comes through a technical discipline of the mind: it is not metaphysics that produces liberation, but practice. Knowledge is a consequence, not a prerequisite, as doctrine remains largely implicit, emerging from a pacified, concentrated, de-identified mind rather than from an elaborate conceptual system.

With Laozi, there is no spectacular illumination, no inner rupture, but a gradual accord with the Dao, which cannot be thematised or conceptually grasped. This accord manifests itself in the way one inhabits the concrete world, ordinary gestures, natural rhythms, without a will to mastery. The sought-after harmony does not consist in withdrawing from the material world, but in adjusting to it with suppleness, letting things follow their course, in a simplicity that is itself wisdom. With Meister Eckhart, the experience remains fundamentally theological, in that it is thoroughly traversed by the notion of God, even when this notion is pushed to its breaking point. Unlike non-theistic paths, this is neither a mere calming of the mind, nor a cosmic harmony, but a relation to a "personal" absolute, which requires the radical detachment from all images, including that of God itself. God is both that toward which one tends and that from which one must let go, not in order to leave theology behind, but to experience its paradoxical depth. With Krishnamurti, every method is rejected, because liberation cannot be the result of a path, a discipline, or accumulated

knowledge. It occurs only in an immediate, choiceless awareness that sees conditioning in action and dissolves it without mediation. This radically distinguishes his position from traditions grounded in practice, metaphysics, or even a progressive attunement to a given order, which also entails the refusal of a master, a school, or spiritual authority: to follow someone, even an enlightened being, is merely to substitute one dependency for another. Truth is not transmissible, it can neither be taught nor inherited, only perceived individually in free attention, without mediation or hierarchy.

With Osho, one already encounters a modern synthesis, in which elements drawn from various spiritual traditions are recomposed in a psychological, accessible, and often spectacular language, designed to appeal to a "consumer" audience. The experience is less austere than with classical masters, it passes through the body, emotions, catharsis, even theatricality, as though awakening first had to traverse psychic blockages before any metaphysical ambition. This approach attracts through its vitality and immediate effectiveness, but it also turns the spiritual quest into an intense subjective experience, sometimes at the risk of confusing liberation with exaltation.

To say that all this is "the same thing" is to confuse resemblance with identity, to substitute a mysticism of unity for a demanding work of understanding and ascetic discipline, it is not false in a metaphorical or experiential sense, but it is philosophically insufficient and often used to avoid genuine comprehension. These traditions indeed describe comparable limit-experiences of deconstructing the self and reality, but they do not speak the same language, they do not refer to the same world, nor to the same truth. To claim that all these enlightenments are identical is already to decide no longer to grasp what one calls enlightenment. One might also propose that this unity is indefinable as an experience, in the sense that there exists a limit-point where language, concepts, and doctrinal frameworks no longer suffice, and where traditions each encounter, in their own way, the same difficulty in saying the "real". But the statement becomes empty as soon as it serves as an exemption from rigour. The term "indefinable" too often functions as a smokescreen, it is invoked

not because thought has been pushed to its limit, but because one refuses to push it further.

Formulated rigorously, one would speak not of an indefinable unity in itself, but of a convergence of limit-experiences whose very indefinability obliges each tradition to invent distinct forms in order to speak of them. In other words, unity is not given, what is common is the resistance to “speech”. And if this unity were truly indefinable, why feel the need to proclaim it as unity rather than letting differences do their work? Indeed, one cannot say “what it is” in a definitional, positive, conceptual sense, but one can still explain its effects, “what it does or undoes”, “what it resists”, since unity here is not a shared content but a point of rupture: rupture of the self, of evidences, of ordinary categories, of discursive securities, as it is not a shared essence but a limit encountered. One may therefore propose, without facile mysticism, that this unity is unsayable because it is not an object of thought, but that before which thought reconfigures itself, falls silent, or turns back upon itself. But where our representations are confronted with a rupture, which would require work, for weak or uneducated minds this provides a taste of the immediately available absolute that dispenses with the need to think further, the illusion of ultimate depth, which allows one to settle into a certainty as vague as it is unassailable. Yet what remains is a demanding and uncomfortable path, where one speaks through negation, effects, gaps, and gestures, accepting that unity is not a piece of knowledge but a challenge. This unity is not a common content, but an experience of limit that undoes the ordinary frameworks of thought, self, and language, and forces each tradition to invent its own forms to respond to it. In other words, it does not unify doctrines, it challenges their claims to describe reality.

Thus, if one speaks of philosophy in a rigorous sense, and not of cultivated opinion or purely formal concepts, one may put it this way, without dilution: every philosophy worthy of the name encounters a limit-point where its concepts cease to suffice, where thought collides with what it can neither absorb nor eliminate, and it is there that it finds its own dynamic. This can

also be found among Western philosophers: in Kant, the limit of reason and the thing-in-itself, in Hegel, the negativity that works every concept from within, in Socrates, the recognition of ignorance, in Wittgenstein, that of which one cannot speak, in Nicholas of Cusa, the coincidence of opposites. This is not a unity of answers, but a unity of ordeal. If we erase this ordeal, we no longer think, we produce doctrine, catechism, or intellectual comfort. We replace the work of thought with a reassuring spiritual belief, doubt with self-evidence, the question with a dogma. Such discourse does not liberate the ego, it displaces and magnifies it, we do not renounce it, we take refuge in it under a more "respectable" form. That is precisely the problem of enclosing oneself in a spirituality that no longer questions itself, no longer problematises itself, no longer conceptualises itself.

395 – The Misunderstanding of Philosophy

Philosophy often provokes a particular kind of resistance, not so much because of what it says, the ideas it puts forward, but because of what it demands of thought. As a result, this resistance rarely takes the form of an argued disagreement, it more readily expresses itself as discomfort, as an accusation of coldness, distance, or even disconnection from "life" or from the "real". Thought is then reproached for being too structured, too assured, too controlled, as if coherence itself had become suspect, even frightening. Or else the philosopher is accused of being condescending, of wanting to lecture their readers.

This type of reaction reveals a significant shift: thought is no longer evaluated according to its rigour or its fertility, but according to affective and relational criteria. Very often, unconsciously, one expects a discourse to expose a fragility, a sensitivity, to manifest a flaw or a personal desire, to present itself as a subjective stripping bare, which would be deemed

“human”. Failing that, it is perceived as an armour, a protective device, a “fortress”, even a strategy of symbolic domination. From this perspective, conceptual distance is interpreted as “overhanging”, the disidentification of the person as a form of escape, and clarity as a kind of arrogant certainty. Yet this reading rests on a profound confusion between two distinct registers: the exposure of oneself and the exposure of thought. Refusing to lay bare one’s lived experience does not imply refusing risk, it simply means shifting risk from the affective plane to the rational one, by exposing oneself through ideas.

Philosophy, in its most demanding tradition, does not primarily seek communion or relationship, but ordeal, it does not aim at emotional resonance, but at testing concepts, including against the one who formulates them, the author themselves. This very shift is precisely what makes it unbearable for some, because it guarantees neither recognition, nor consolation, nor affective validation, it remains always uncertain, subject to inevitable revision, what is experienced as a “void” is therefore not a void of thought, but a void of emotional gratification. Philosophy refuses to immediately satisfy the need to be seen, understood, or reassured, it suspends these expectations in order to preserve a space in which something like “truth”, however elusive it may be, can appear without being confused with psychological comfort.

Hence the accusation of abstraction or disembodiment often functions as an aggressive defence on the part of philosophy’s detractors, it allows them to disqualify an exigence by reducing it to a personal posture or a “bad” intention, thereby avoiding confrontation with what thought unsettles: the loss of reference points, the absence of promise, the impossibility of any prior guarantee. What some reproach philosophy for, in the end, is not its harshness but its relative indifference to our affective expectations, as it does not promise that everything will turn out well, it does not even promise to be right, since in this approach one is ultimately always “wrong”, since every proposition is open to criticism. It offers only one thing: trust, trust in the human capacity to think, to correct itself, to pass through error

without being lost. And it is precisely this trust, distant from all certainty, non-consoling, non-fusional, non-protective, that continues to provoke so much resistance.

To this difficulty is often added, at the level of writing, a confusion between philosophy and literature. Many expect from thought what they expect from a literary text: a voice, a sensibility, a narrative, a lived experience to be shared, an echo of their own existence, they look for an atmosphere, an identification, an emotion in which to recognise themselves. Philosophy, however, does not primarily aim to produce emotion or affective adhesion, but to clarify, to distinguish, to put to the test, something that requires distance, even a form of estrangement. Put briefly, where literature explores the singularity of an experience, philosophy seeks the structure of a problem. Philosophy is thus reproached for not “making one feel”, for not “embodying”, as if the value of a thought depended on its capacity to move. Conceptual rigour is then perceived as dryness, and the absence of narration as a lack of soul, but this confuses two different regimes of truth: expressive truth and critical truth. This confusion explains why some judge a philosophical text as they would a failed novel: too cold, too abstract, not personal enough. They expect a confession and receive an analysis; they hope for an affective encounter and run up against an exigence of thought, hence the frustration, and sometimes the anger, in the face of a discourse that refuses to become a mirror.

Yet something must be added here, for this is often misunderstood: this type of exchange does not exclude the encounter between human beings, it just makes it possible differently. It is an encounter that does not pass through fusion, immediate affective recognition, or the staging of fragilities, but through the shared ordeal of thought. When two interlocutors accept submission to a shared rational exigence, something occurs that is neither lukewarm nor abstract, a proper intellectual joy, a jubilation of clarity, the pleasure of seeing an idea appear, hold, transform, or collapse under the gaze of the other. This enjoyment is not that of consolation or mutual validation, yet it is nonetheless that of a real encounter, rarer and

sometimes more intense, because it rests not on identification, on shared experience or opinion, but on a common exposure to the risk of thinking. A singular proximity is at play here, without exhibited intimacy, a complicity without complacency. What some call a “disembodied” exchange is often, in reality, a more demanding form of incarnation: one in which we meet not through our wounds, but through our shared capacity to seek truth. One can therefore see in philosophical work an attempt at substitution: substituting reason for affect, where exchange is no longer a “clash” of subjectivities but an examination of ideas. Where one sees a protective withdrawal behind constructions or references, one could instead see an effort to clear the space of dialogue. Moreover, multiplying philosophical references is not a disengagement, but a way of recalling that the impasses we encounter are not uniquely our own, they are the very structures of human thought and its history. Thus one might respond to those for whom the “non-identification” of the subject produces a “coldness” toward others by saying that true coldness would rather consist in treating one’s interlocutor as a fragile being who must be handled with care, instead of as an alter ego capable of bearing the quest for clarity and coherence, and if there is any “harshness”, it is not directed at the person, but at the certainties that imprison us all. In this perspective, identifying with one’s affects, suffering, or self-image is the most common and reassuring protection there is, when detaching from them in order to let speech pass through us without knowing where it will lead, at the risk of appearing inhuman or arrogant is, on the contrary, the most radical exposure. It is not a matter of simulating sovereignty, but of accepting dispossession. And if this seems disengaged from the “living”, it may be because what we call “life” is not the vibration of feeling, but the movement of clarity. Thus, what some experience as unbearable is not what is said, but the stability of the one who says it, since a word that does not waver affectively is immediately interpreted as existential armour, a way of protecting oneself. The absence of subjective self-exposure becomes suspect, almost culpable; philosophical risk must be replaced by a demand for emotional sincerity, and in fact, the criticism targets less intellectual domination than the absence of affective fusion. When such people speak of “encounter”, “vibration”, or “soul”, they are not asking for dialogue but for communion.

As we have said, they expect the other to make themselves vulnerable in order to be credible, to expose their flaws in order to be legitimate; truth is no longer a sufficient criterion, it must be carried by a visible fragility. Philosophy, however, operates according to the opposite paradigm, it rests on separation, dissymmetry, the testing of ideas, and the refusal of fusion as a guarantee of truth. This discrepancy explains why a text is not read as a proposal for thought, but as a relational posture, as it is judged according to affective, not conceptual, criteria. The “void” thus denounced is therefore not a void of meaning, but an emotional void relative to an implicit expectation. What is rejected as “certainty” is nothing other than a refusal of affective recognition as the horizon of dialogue. Where philosophy demands a risk without any guarantee of resonance, some demand a “truth” that begins with emotions, and it is precisely this demand that thought, as thought, cannot satisfy without betraying itself. For some, however, this exigence is simply impossible, or experienced as meaningless, because they lack the symbolic or psychic resources required to dissociate the validity of a statement from the emotional state of the one who utters it. To think without self-disclosure then appears as speaking from nowhere, and therefore as not truly speaking at all, affective stability is interpreted as denial, restraint as concealment, and distance as a refusal of relation. More deeply still, this regime of thought rests on a confusion between understanding and feeling understood. In this context, philosophy loses all legitimacy, since it does not respond to the primary need to have one’s lived experience confirmed, and thus appears not only useless but threatening. Where thought requires one to endure distance, discomfort, and the provisional impersonality of the true, some can grant value only to what immediately soothes, connects, and reassures. For them, a truth that does not begin with emotion is not merely unacceptable, it is simply inconceivable.

396 – The Power of Chaos

In intellectual or philosophical exchanges, or simply in dialogues that claim a rational intent, one sometimes observes a troubling asymmetry between those who seek truth, coherence or clarification, who appear more vulnerable than those who proceed chaotically, swirling from one point to another. This impression is not illusory, as it stems from a deep difference in the relationship to commitment, in the relationship to constancy. Chaotic individuals do not seek to establish a truth, but to remain within the exchange, to survive symbolically, to keep their composure, to protect their image. Their priority is neither to understand nor to be understood, but just not to be “grasped”. To be “grasped” is to be unable to evade any longer; it is to submit to reason, to accept that a statement becomes a fixed point, that it can be examined, that it entails a consequence. This would force such individuals to take a stand, to assume a position, to risk losing face or being challenged, in other words to be compelled to think through what they put forward to the end.

Chaotic individuals do not defend a clear position, they occupy shifting ground, as each idea is momentary, each assertion slippery and reversible, each contradiction tolerable, since none commits its author in any lasting way. Thus, answering the questions put to them, which might trap them, triggers a displacement of discourse, an escape route. This plasticity grants them a formidable form of resistance, for where the other tries to stop the movement in order to examine, define, deepen, the chaotic moves on, weaving through. They are comfortable in chaos, they move around in it, scatter in it, even lose themselves in it, without being affected. Conversely, those who seek a minimum of coherence see the ground give way beneath them, their minds waver, vertigo disorients them, makes them uncomfortable, and momentarily deprives them of their resources. Where the other assumes a thread, an elementary coherence, or attempts to establish a minimum of order and clarity, the chaotic shamelessly multiplies angles, registers, ruptures and leaps. He cannot really be wrong,

since he never commits himself to what he asserts, and if he resists, it is not because he is right, but because he invests no position that could be shown to be faulty. He is always ready to go elsewhere, ironically in the name of a need for “explanations”. In fact, chaotic individuals periodically appeal to truth, a kind of absolute to which they feel privileged access, which they want others to witness, but what they call truth is an undetermined certainty, a pure sentiment of rightness without conceptual content. It is not a truth that can be examined or articulated, but a conviction that protects itself precisely by remaining empty of determination, and therefore requires endless speech.

In a certain sense, the chaotic individual thinks he is right, but not in the sense of being right about a thesis, for he does not really know what he wants to say. He does not think, “what I say is true”, but rather, “I cannot be wrong”, and therefore, “I must not be shown to be at fault”. His “reason” is not conceptual, it is existential and defensive. In fact, he is right to “hold”, not to yield, not to be “grasped”. Thus he perseveres, and may even grow irritated, not because an argument refutes him, which hardly troubles him, but because an attempt to “catch” him threatens to immobilise him, endangering his unstable balance. He becomes irritated precisely when the dialogue begins to settle, when someone insists, clarifies, demands coherence, because for him there is indeed a stake, but a stake of preservation, not of correctness. Strangely, he defends a position without content, a posture without a thesis. That is why he avoids intellectual commitment and experiences any attempt at ordering dialogue as a personal aggression. It is not truth that threatens him, but the possibility of being stopped in what he is doing, however indeterminate his project may be. Often, chaotic thought does not know where it is going, it searches for itself, it dwells in the infinity of “wanting to say”, highly indeterminate, and not in the finitude of “saying”, of the determinate. It “wants to say” something without really knowing what it is, and therefore needs to keep talking, to continually add words, in an inchoate manner that cannot reach completion. And if one tries to stop it, it struggles, it resists a feeling of suffocation.

One might object that chaos is natural, that entropy is the default tendency of systems toward disorder and dispersion, and that free association or

brainstorming arises spontaneously, without effort. Indeed, letting ideas proliferate, diverge and accumulate is easy, almost automatic. What is not natural, by contrast, is to stop the flow, to interrupt dispersion, to select, organise and decide that something “must be said” rather than endlessly “wanted to be said”. Clarifying, holding a line, sustaining a question require effort, discipline and resistance to entropy, this is why chaotic discourse feels comfortable, while coherence feels strenuous: not because order is in itself oppressive, but because it demands work.

Therefore, by contrast, the one who seeks truth needs a minimum of order, they must name what they want to examine, stay with a question, sustain duration, sometimes acknowledge an impasse, and this order is not rigidity, but a condition of thought. Yet this condition also proves to be a fragility: to clarify is to expose oneself, to hold a position is to offer a grip, to seek truth is to accept the possibility of being wrong. Thus, in the short term of dialogue, “protective” chaos appears stronger, more energetic, for it wears down, exhausts and disorients. Moreover, its lack of awareness grants it a certain advantage, an audacious recklessness. And it “wins” not because it illuminates, but because it refuses the very rules of the trial, it never loses, because it does not play the game, it destabilises; its strength is a negative strength, a capacity to avoid rather than to build. Nevertheless, this superiority is illusory, for it protects against defeat but not against emptiness, since what never commits itself produces nothing. Where the search for truth accepts the risk of loss in order to open meaning, defensive chaos contents itself with “enduring”. It is, of course, more resistant, but at the cost of a fundamental sterility. Certainly, it impresses in the exchange, as its profusion gives an impression of plenitude, its tenacity can force adherence, it exhausts the interlocutor. But it generates neither thought nor real transformation. Much ado about nothing.

397 – Gratuitous Gesture

In this context, "gratuitous" does not mean an unjustified excess, but a non-instrumental gesture, one that does not seek an effect, a return, or validation.

There exists today a silent category, rarely identified: the disillusioned with dialogue. Not those who refuse to speak, the "silent ones", but those who have spoken a great deal, sincerely or rigorously, or who believe they have done so, and who have discovered that speech does not always reach, does not always illuminate, does not always transform. They have repeatedly experienced exchanges without any grip, discussions that go round in circles, words that collide with affective, identitarian or ideological walls, not for lack of arguments, but because of excessively diverse expectations, because of a mismatch of expectancies between the partners. Yet it is precisely from this feeling of fatigue or impotence, born of an awareness of the limits of dialogue, and not from a renunciation of meaning, that a "new" form of speech might perhaps emerge, less illusory, less dependent on the effect produced on the other, and therefore paradoxically freer. Thus, by way of an alternative, or a consolation, we may propose something else, a more austere, barer, and perhaps more disturbing modality: the gratuitousness of the gesture. That is, to express oneself not in order to convince, not in order to encounter, not in order to be recognised, but in order to accomplish the act itself, not as a strategy, but "steadfastness" alone. Speech is not obliged to produce an effect, it does not have to guarantee reception, still less adherence, it can be exercised without any guarantee of being understood or accepted, and it is precisely in this detachment that its dignity resides. And strangely enough, deadlock or impossibility may even constitute a motivation for dialogue, as here, "steadfastness" refers not to firmness of character or obstinacy, but to an ethical mode of acting, its meaning is more existential than merely psychological. It means holding oneself in what one says, holding to a gesture without any guarantee of return, and standing upright without external support. To speak or write in steadfastness is no longer to speak in order to produce an effect, but to inhabit a position, it is to "write because

one cannot not write", as the poet Rilke suggests. It is, finally, simply to persevere, which obliges us to be creative, to attempt without hesitation every possible opening. It is neither to convince, nor to seduce, nor to provoke, nor even to encounter, it is to maintain an internal coherence, a fidelity to oneself in the act itself, in what one judges to be right, independently of reception. This holding therefore stands opposed to strategy, which calculates, seduces, anticipates, adapts its discourse to the other, for holding accepts solitude, loss, the absence of influence or recognition. It is a notion of minimal dignity, for to hold is to refuse to dissolve oneself in the expectation of an effect, to refuse to speak in order to fill a relational void, or to beg for an encounter. The gesture is worth something by the very fact of being accomplished, not by its yield; the act is worth something by its internal rectitude, by the way one commits to it, and not by its results. Holding implies a voluntary austerity: saying less, but holding more firmly, speaking without a promise of dialogue, writing without any guarantee of being read, understood or accepted. In this sense, "holding" designates a disillusioned but not cynical speech, a speech that does not renounce itself even when it renounces the hope of acting upon the other, that is, the persistence of a just gesture in a world that does not reward it. One does not speak in order to obtain something, but in order not to betray oneself, in order to be oneself, for a "held" speech is a responsible speech, one that does not collapse for lack of echo. In this sense, the "gratuitousness" of the gesture is not a casualness, but on the contrary an increased demand, for acting without expectation requires greater rigour, since there is no longer any external alibi or circumstantial argument; speech is no longer justified by its effectiveness, but by its rightness. Thus, "holding" means speaking not in order to succeed, but in order to remain upright. In this perspective, speaking is no longer a means, but a provisional end, since one no longer speaks in order to be heard, but in order not to betray what demands to be formulated. Speech then ceases to be transactional, it does not negotiate its right to exist in exchange for a relational benefit. This is not indifference to others, but a more radical position, as by renouncing to condition speech on the expected response, such an attitude paradoxically makes us more open to an authentic listening.

Thus we propose speech as a “gratuitous” gesture, in the most demanding sense of the term: gratuitous not because it is easy or light, but because it expects no return, because it promises neither encounter, nor transformation, nor recognition, because it advances without guarantee, without a safety net, exposed to misunderstanding, rejection, even ridicule. And yet it is carried out, for the beauty of the gesture, like drawing a straight line in the sand while knowing it will be erased, or, in a more sophisticated way, like the ephemeral mandala of the Indian tradition, which consists in creating a complex and symbolic geometric figure, an image of cosmic order, and then deliberately erasing it once completed. This artistic form is neither decorative nor expressive, it is again a simple exercise in inner holding, where the value of the work lies entirely in the fact of having accomplished it, not in its trace, graceful and evanescent, deprived of any further purpose. This gratuitousness is unbearable for many, because it disrupts all habitual psychic economies: it does not flatter, does not repair, does not unite, it does not even offer the consolation of having “tried”. It merely affirms this: there are acts that are worth something by their rectitude, not by their effects. It is the principle of throwing a bottle into the sea, without waiting for a reply, not even for a reader; the failure is not that the bottle gets lost, it would be never to throw it.
To think in this way is to accept that truth is not relational, that it does not need to be shared in order to be constructed, nor validated in order to be right, it is to consent to an active solitude, not as a withdrawal, but as a maximal exposure, for it is to speak without protection, without affective alibi, without a promise of “complicity”. It is neither heroic nor romantic, it is a discipline, an ethics of the pure gesture. And perhaps this is, paradoxically, the only way to remain faithful to thinking: to practise it as an adventure without destination, without tomorrow, without any guarantee of encounter, without any assurance of being heard, but with the quiet rigour of one who moves forward not in order to arrive, but in order to walk. Like Zarathustra, for whom speech is a gift cast to the wind, an ordeal of solitude and overabundance, a hope without expectation, without any demand for recognition, a “holy” solitude, the last refuge where the soul can remain faithful to itself, without compromising itself in the social theatre.

This ethical shift consists in moving from a logic of responsibility for effects to a fidelity to the gesture. One stops evaluating speech according to what it produces in the other, understanding, adherence, appeasement, recognition, and evaluates it according to its internal rightness: did I speak out of complacency or necessity, to seek an effect or to hold an exigency? Moreover, it is too easy to despise others because one feels misunderstood, because the other does not live up to our expectations. But this requires renouncing the morality of benevolent intention and the ethics of social success, speech no longer has to "do good", nor to connect, nor to convince. It becomes a sober, exposed act, without guarantee, where one accepts being judged useless, cold or ineffective. Ethically, this means assuming a paradoxical responsibility: answering for what one says, not for what the other does with it. It is a more austere, less reassuring ethics, for it promises no reconciliation, but it frees thought from the demand for recognition and restores it to its primary function: to say what is true, even when it serves no purpose, even when it meets no one. This echoes the principle of classical Greek parrhesia, the act of speaking truth openly, without detour, at the risk of displeasing, losing a position or exposing oneself: an ethical act, a courageous speech that seeks neither to seduce nor to protect itself, but to be spoken, at the price of conflict or isolation. Nevertheless, this is not naive and thoughtless spontaneity, but rather the act of speaking a truth that is deemed necessary, unlike a simple verbal outburst, which risks nothing and commits to nothing.

This attitude defuses sensitivity to the gaze of others, because contempt, indifference, or rejection only truly wound when they invalidate something one was expecting: recognition, agreement, gratitude, or transformation. Without expectation of return, these reactions lose their destructive power, as they become mere "statements", not verdicts. It also prevents affective contamination, for when speech is indexed to relational success, rejection spontaneously calls forth disappointment, resentment, rancour or hatred in return. By speaking out of fidelity to the gesture rather than a desire to convince, one cuts this reactive chain: the other may refuse, close themselves off or show contempt, without obliging us to respond on the same register, since our speech was not a disguised request. It also protects

against disgust for the other, which often arises from disappointment, for one rarely despises someone immediately; one despises them after having hoped they would understand, rise up, live up to our expectations, a well-oiled system that allows one to reject the other in all good conscience. The gratuitousness of the gesture removes this implicit expectation, the other is left free to be what they are, without an ideal projected onto them, without a mission to respond to our exigency. Finally, this attitude transforms rejection into an indicator rather than a humiliation, for if speech is held for itself, refusal does not affect the dignity of the speaking subject. One may certainly note an incompatibility of regimes, temporalities or demands between the "partners", but this scarcely implies affect or rejection; difference simply imposes itself as a sober reality, unlike the followers of a bourgeois and sentimental empathy, who find such disparity unbearable. Thus, this posture does not harden, it simply disengages. It produces neither cynical indifference nor moral superiority, but a form of active calm: one speaks, one exposes oneself, then one lets speech follow its own course, accepting that it no longer belongs to us, neither in its effects nor in its failures. And it is precisely this withdrawal of demand that makes contempt, rejection or indifference less pressing, because they no longer find any hold on which to anchor themselves.

This perspective is liberating because it shifts the centre of gravity of action, as speech ceases to be a means and becomes a form, a work, evaluated not by its effectiveness but by its internal rightness. In this sense, it belongs to an aesthetic in the strong sense: beauty is not what pleases, but what holds. It also liberates because it renders failure inoperative: when there is neither a promise of encounter nor a guarantee of understanding or acceptance, nothing can truly fail. There is no longer disappointment to compensate for, no resentment to manage, only fidelity to a gesture carried through to the end, what one does is no longer suspended on the other, and this independence is a form of breathing. Finally, this aesthetic of the gratuitous gesture restores a dignity without defence, it allows one to speak without hardening, to expose oneself without surrendering, to assume conflict without being lost in it. It does not pacify the world, it does not reconcile positions, but it frees the subject from the most common form of servitude:

that of waiting for the other to justify one's own speech, the source of all conflicts.

398 – In Praise of Ease

Some texts meet with almost instantaneous assent, they circulate with remarkable ease. Recently, on French social media, an article criticising the concept of *jeunisme* enjoyed precisely this kind of success. The French term "jeunisme" refers to an ideology that elevates youth to the status of a fundamental value, while treating age, experience and duration as liabilities rather than resources. It must be said that the text is fairly good: its tone is lively, its formulas striking, its images memorable, and it denounces a contemporary ideology by turning it into ridicule: it likens society to what it calls a "yoghurt philosophy", opposing the ephemeral to maturation and fashion effects to experience. The reading is fluid, pleasant, almost jubilant. Such success is therefore nothing exceptional, but it is revealing of more general mechanisms, and this is what interests us here: attempting to analyse why certain texts manage to become more popular than others which, nevertheless, would deserve no less attention.

At first glance, what stands out is that the text names a malaise that is widely shared, particularly among older people. Many experience, more or less confusedly, an irritation in the face of the obsession with novelty, the implicit disqualification of age or experience, and the promotion of a kind of idealised youth, as if it represented a value in itself, a presupposition which, moreover, even for the young, can become problematic when taken to excess. Certainly, the text does not create this malaise, it already exists, at least in a latent form. It merely gives words to what was already felt, and it is precisely this immediate recognition that produces initial adhesion. Next, the text designates a "clear" culprit, which it names *jeunism*, which then becomes an identifiable ideology, a coherent system, an obvious and

easy target, whereas in reality it covers very diverse practices and logics that it conveniently refrains from analysing, since that would indeed require too much work. These practices and logics are heterogeneous, for this phenomenon brings together under a single term elements of very different natures: economic logics, since the market values what is new, renewable and consumable; media logics, since novelty captures attention and creates events; institutional logics, since there is a perceived need to renew the figures that are put forward and to redistribute visibility, sometimes referred to as *dégagisme*, a political and cultural attitude that calls for the removal of those in place simply because they have been there “too long”; but also psychological and existential logics, such as the fear of ageing, the cult of performance, and anxiety in the face of passing time. To this must be added a more diffuse and rarely questioned dimension: a kind of romanticism of youth, nourished by nostalgia, in which one projects onto a bygone age the idea of a lost intensity, an original freedom, or an unfulfilled promise, turning youth no longer into a moment of life, but into a consolatory myth. Grouping all this under a single ideology thus provides a convenient target, but excessively simplifies a reality made up of constraints, interests and desires that can be contradictory. For example, the promotion of "young talent" can be driven by economic interests, media strategies, institutional constraints, and individual fears of aging, thus reducing it to a single ideology obscures the nature of these divergent rationales. But this simplification is “economical”: it has a certain sense and usefulness, but it is conceptually debatable, even if rhetorically effective, as it allows criticism to be concentrated, made legible and easily shareable. The success of the text also lies in the pleasure of satire, since its metaphors are cruel yet elegant, its humour biting, its critique incisive without being complex. The reader does not have to “endure” a demonstration, they assent intuitively, with the feeling of understanding quickly and well, of belonging to the camp of the “lucid”. This mocking thus provides a particular pleasure: it allows one to feel “above” without having to think too much, to judge without exposing oneself, and to enjoy an intellectual superiority at low cost, an impression of easily accessible wisdom that constitutes a powerful driver of adhesion. One observes the same mechanism of easy, almost compulsive laughter in certain comedy shows,

where a banal joke aimed at a celebrity is enough to trigger an almost automatic laugh, as if the mere act of mocking a “powerful” figure, of being able to laugh at them, instantly placed the listener on the side of “intelligent” people. Laughter then operates as a symbolic reversal of power: the one who is exposed, admired or envied suddenly becomes vulnerable, diminished, reduced to a ridiculous figure. This inversion provides immediate satisfaction, as it authorises the disguised expression of latent jealousy or frustration, socially legitimised by humour. Nevertheless, this laughter does not sanction the finesse of analysis, but rather membership in a supposedly aware and critical camp, one that already knows who or what deserves to be mocked, who finally deserves revenge.

Another decisive factor is the reversal of the dominant moral order. The “virtues” usually valued, youth, novelty, movement, are turned into symptoms of stupidity or superficiality. The text thus gives the impression of a courageous gesture, even though it fits within a critique that is already widely shared, as it offers a transgression without real cost; in a sense, it is to preach to the converted. It should also be stressed that this type of text is easy to read: the syntax is clear, the oppositions sharp, the argument linear, the reader is never put in difficulty, never forced to suspend judgement, never required to make an effort of concentration. Yet this immediate readability has today become an essential criterion of success, since understanding quickly has strangely come to function as an implicit proof of truth. Finally, these texts have in common the fact that they do not expose the reader to any inner risk, they criticise, denounce and ridicule, but without ever demanding a reconsideration of the reader’s own position. The reader can be indignant, amused or approving without being affected in their own stance, and critical thinking then becomes a form of comfort rather than an ordeal.

Thus, the success of this text on *jeunism* is not an isolated case, but a symptom. It shows that what appeals are writings that combine apparent intelligence, controlled irony and psychological safety, texts that give the impression of thinking correctly without requiring any inner displacement or effort of introspection. This explains their rapid circulation and invites us,

in return, to question what we truly expect from thought. Under such conditions, the success of certain discourses owes less to their rigour or originality than to the fact that they play it safe, offering the reader the pleasure of a feeling of wisdom without risk, of criticism without exposure. Admittedly, this phenomenon of "ease" is not unique to our era, as every period produces its own comfortable ways of thinking, its low-cost critiques, and its adherence without dilemma. However, something specific is at play today in the scale and intensity of these mechanisms. The speed at which discourse circulates, the value placed on immediate understanding, prevailing consumerism, and the often-touted constant quest for psychological security, tend to amplify these tendencies, giving them unprecedented visibility and effectiveness. What was once a sporadic flaw has thus become a dominant mode of receiving and disseminating ideas.

399- Criticise and Disqualify

Very often, when a discourse or a text displeases them and they wish to express a critique, our contemporaries practise what, rigorously speaking, should be called “disqualification” rather than “critique”. The difference is not always obvious, which is why it seems useful to dwell on it. First of all, contrary to what one might intuitively suppose, the difference does not rest so much on tone, sarcastic, condescending or aggressive, but on the very structure of the response to the text, it is not a matter of harshness of expression, but of the logic of the act itself. One might believe that disqualification is merely a “harsher” critique, more spiteful or more radical, but this is not the case, as the difference is structural, since the two gestures do not have the same object, the same aim, or the same mode of operation.

Primarily, to criticise is to work from within the discourse. One takes the text as a legitimate object, examines its coherence, its arguments, its presuppositions and its consequences; and even when severe, one

implicitly acknowledges that what is said deserves to be discussed, for critique presupposes a shared space of rationality. Disqualification, by contrast, consists in stepping outside the discourse: one no longer responds to what is said, but challenges the very right to say it. The text, or even the author, is displaced outside the realm of what is thinkable or debatable, for ideological or pathological reasons, because the intention is presumed to be manipulative or suspect, or because it is reduced to a psychological, moral or identitarian flaw rather than examined for what it actually asserts. Once an imposture, an illegitimate or suspicious position is perceived, the content becomes secondary or accessory, and thus irrelevant. In other words, critique opens a space of thought, even a conflictual one, whereas disqualification closes it, it is not a more violent critique, but a different gesture altogether: where critique accepts the risk of dialogue and error, disqualification secures the speaker by removing the need to respond, and that is precisely what makes it attractive to a displeased reader. This means that criticising and disqualifying are not two degrees of the same act, but two incompatible regimes of thought: one engages thinking, the other interrupts it.

To criticise is to work on content, as one examines a text, analyses its strengths and weaknesses. Critique assumes that the text deserves to be taken seriously, that it has sufficient consistency to be questioned, discussed, even refuted, that it merits careful examination, especially, or above all, when it is contested. It leaves open the possibility of dialogue, of reciprocal displacement, of a shift in perspective, even of learning. Even when severe, critique implicitly recognises the intellectual dignity of what it examines. Disqualification, on the other hand, does not address content but the very legitimacy of the speech itself, it no longer aims to show that an argument is weak, but to suggest that it does not deserve to be examined at all. Disqualification operates through labelling, suspicion, psychological, moral or social reduction of the author or the text: one explains why the author speaks, from where they speak, what they “really” are, instead of responding to what is said, the content is no longer discussed; its value, relevance or right to be taken seriously is denied. This disqualification often relies on quick labels, “ideological”, “manipulative”, “dogmatic”,

“simplistic” or “dangerous”, which function as discursive closures, the text is no longer an object of thought, but a symptom to be eliminated. In short, critique engages thought: it requires an effort of reading, understanding and formulation, and implies a certain respect for the object criticised, regardless of agreement or disagreement. Disqualification, by contrast, avoids thinking by stripping others of the right to be heard. The former involves effort and risk, the latter offers the comfort of having nothing to examine. Admittedly, it is not "forbidden" to disqualify a discourse, but this gesture must be understood for what it is: not an intellectual response, but a refusal to engage in discussion and the thought process it requires, a pure rejection, whether moral, ideological, or otherwise, which paradoxically still requires a minimal justification in order to avoid falling into sheer arbitrariness. But one should not overlook the emotional dimension of disqualification, as anger, resentment, wounded pride, envy, humiliation or simple irritation may seek expression through an “intellectual” gesture that appears rational but whose primary function is affective. Rather than confronting the discomfort provoked by a text or an author, one neutralises it by declaring it illegitimate, or just being sarcastic. The disqualification then serves not only a cognitive or social purpose, but also an emotional one: it transforms a disturbing encounter into a reassuring act of rejection, a sort of soothing momentary catharsis.

Overall, disqualification becomes even more radical when it targets the author rather than the text. Instead of responding to what is said, attention shifts to who is speaking, from where they speak, their age, background, supposed intentions, hidden interests or intellectual shortcomings, the argument is displaced toward a causal or moral explanation of speech, which renders any discussion of content unnecessary. The author is reduced to an identity, and the text becomes secondary, yet distinguishing between text and author is a minimal condition of critical thought: a text may be relevant independently of its author’s intentions or flaws, and conversely, a respectable author may produce a weak text. Confusing the two personalises thought, makes it vulnerable to ad hominem attacks, and turns intellectual debate into an identitarian confrontation. In the end, it is not only the author who is silenced, but the very possibility of intellectual

dialogue.

Of course, it is indeed easier, more cathartic, and often more satisfying to disqualify, which explains the popularity of this gesture, but the reasons go deeper than simple comfort. To begin with, disqualifying requires infinitely less work than criticising: it does not require actually reading, understanding, synthesising, faithfully reformulating what one contests, and then producing a coherent counter-argument. Critique is a demanding, slow and uncertain cognitive effort, which in turn exposes the critic to error and refutation. Disqualification, by contrast, can be done in a few words: a label, a suspicion, a psychological or ideological diagnosis suffice, or even a simple insult, constituting a true "economy" of intellectual energy. Moreover, disqualification is psychologically more gratifying: it immediately places the one who disqualifies in a position of superiority, as one does not discuss with the other, but assigns them "below". This gesture provides rapid narcissistic satisfaction: we feel lucid or wise, superior, on the "right side", without having to risk one's own thinking. Where critique exposes, disqualification protects, it also serves a defensive function, since to criticise a text is to accept that it might affect us, disturb us, perhaps even be partly right. Disqualifying shields one from this risk: if the text is "illegitimate", there is no need to listen to it, thus disqualification acts as an emotional and intellectual firewall. It is also socially more profitable: it is quick, spectacular, easily shareable, and produces signs of belonging, as by disqualifying the same authors and the same ideas, we show that we belong to the "right" camp. Conversely, nuanced critique is often perceived as lukewarm, suspicious or too slow for contemporary regimes of communication. Finally, disqualification is morally comfortable: it turns an intellectual disagreement into a fault or a pathology, which dispenses with discussion altogether; the other is not wrong, they are "problematic" or "unhealthy". This moralisation of disagreement authorises indignation without real intellectual responsibility, as can often be seen in political "debates", even within institutional circles, where mutual disqualification is commonplace, and rather absurd.

In sum, disqualification is a solution of convenience: it avoids the effort of thinking, the risk of being wrong and the discomfort of dialogue, while

providing immediate gratification. Critique, by contrast, is more demanding, less spectacular and often less satisfying in the short term, but it is precisely for this reason that it is intellectually more fertile. One must add, however, that what holds for disqualification also applies equally to uncritical and unconditional admiration, which likewise suspends judgment, dispenses with careful examination and replaces thinking with adherence, turning agreement into a refuge rather than a work of understanding. The listener then merely recognises what they already feel, settles into it comfortably, and confuses the satisfaction of being confirmed with the very act of understanding, often expressing this through small comments of approbation just as devoid of content.

400 – The Disavowal of Reason

Many people today no longer understand how reason could help them, whether in their social lives or in their intimate lives, mainly because they do not experience it as a support but as a threat. Let us briefly define reason as the ability to distance ourselves from the information we receive, to connect, distinguish, and judge, in order to make sense of what we are living and experiencing, according to rules of consistency.

Reason is no longer perceived, if it ever was, as a natural and common resource enabling dialogue and clarification, establishing priority and providing an escape from confusion, but as a force that harshly confronts lived experience, destabilises identity and oppresses existential singularity. Admittedly, it obliges one to take distance from oneself, to suspend the self-evidence of one's emotions, to admit that what is intensely felt may be false, confused or contradictory; yet in a culture where subjectivity has become the supreme criterion, this demand often appears as a form of violence.

Reason is rather unsettling because it distinguishes, it cuts, it hierarchises, it separates the relevant from the inconsistent, the essential from the accidental, argument from opinion, the true from the merely sincere. Today, however, this discriminating capacity is suspected of arrogance or domination, as one prefers the equality of feelings to the demand of judgment, since to “judge” necessarily implies renouncing the idea that everything is equivalent. Reason thus becomes suspect, not only because it constrains, but also because it prevents complacency. It must be added that reason entails responsibility, it obliges one to answer for what one affirms, to recognise one’s contradictions, to renounce the convenient refuges of vagueness or indignation. It does not protect, it exposes, it does not validate, it tests. For an era marked by the search for psychological security and recognition, such exposure is unbearable, we have become hypersensitive and overly fearful. Moreover, reason has been widely discredited by its caricatures: cold, technocratic, managerial, cut off from life. And instead of distinguishing between an impoverished rationality and an exacting form of thought, the whole has been rejected, opening the way to a systematic preference for immediacy at the expense of the work of mediation that any demanding thought presupposes. Mediation is the process by which immediate experience is distanced, articulated, and made intelligible, so that it can become thought, speech, and decision, that is, the basis for reasoning, judgment, and conscious action.

Therefore it is therefore necessary to distinguish between two forms of reason: "instrumental" and "open." Instrumental reason, which is reductive and predetermined, calculates, optimizes, applies existing patterns, and follows established principles: it aims for efficiency, not truth, and reduces reality to what can be measured or exploited. Open reason, on the contrary, is not a tool but a practice, a spiritual dynamic, as it questions its own frameworks, accepts uncertainty, invents its own paths in contact with reality, and engenders to the "world”. Where the former imprisons thought in procedures, the latter frees it by exposing it to the risk of the unknown and of creativity. Thus it is not reason that threatens freedom, but its reduction to a mere means, a reason enslaved to a predetermined end.

Yet reason is not so much perceived as what liberates, but as what disturbs, as what prevents us from living fully and comfortably, and yet it takes nothing away from lived experience: it gives it form, illuminates it, intensifies it; it does not deny life, it simply prevents life from collapsing into itself, from flattening out. It introduces that minimal distance from oneself which makes it possible to understand, to structure, to organise and to transform existence rather than endure it in its raw state, deprived of any poetic value. Still, one must accept that thinking is not first and foremost about reassurance, nor even about anxiety. Some believe that any constructed thought is a fortress closed in upon itself, they ignore that reason also has an aesthetic, a beauty of its own, made of clarity, precision and breathing, and that a structure can open rather than enclose. They fail to realise that rigorous thought introduces distance, distinctions and limits, operations easily experienced as gestures of exclusion, instead of architecture. From this perspective, to conceptualise is to protect oneself: walls are erected where they would prefer affective circulation, immediacy, a relation without rupture nor asperity. Thought is then interpreted as a fortress, not because it truly encloses, but because it resists fusion, refuses confusion and offers no immediate emotional reassurance; it merely proposes, through its inherent plasticity, an austere sublimation. In other words, it is not thought that closes, but the gaze of one who cannot bear that it does not open without conditions, that it demands an effort of reading, patience, and an acceptance of the forms it imposes as a surpassing, an effort inseparable from any genuine freedom. Thus people are no longer sensitive to the beauty of reason because they no longer encounter it as a form, a style, an elegance, but as a mere formal constraint. Reason no longer appears as a composition, a rhythm, a creative ordering, but as a verdict, a deprivation of themselves. Separated from its aesthetic power, it ceases to attract and merely unsettles, it takes on a threatening appearance, its constraining dimension then perceived only in its negative sense.

One often forgets that the simple act of following the course of a reasoned text, of concentrating on a rigorous line of thought, is a genuine work on oneself, a salutary exercise, be it through writing or reading. It invites us to develop a capacity for distance from our immediate reactions, a suspension

of reflexive affects, and to accept a temporality other than that of immediate impulse. Such an exercise obliges us to accompany a sequence, to respect a progression that might be foreign to us, to maintain concentration from one point to another without yielding to dispersion. One thus learns to hold a thread, to defer conclusion, to let an idea produce its effects before moving on to the next. This effort of attention is already an ascetic practice, as it invites self-mastery, forms the mind in continuity, conceptual patience and coherence. In this sense, attentive reading is not a consumption of ideas, but a practice of transformation, a true “blessing” for the reader. Of course, one can always refuse to venture down such a path, when the reference points offered are not one’s own and feel too disorienting. Or one may accuse the author of closed-mindedness, of protecting an intellectual “fortress”, and in doing so, ironically project onto them one’s own tendencies.

Indeed, according to contemporary inclinations, for many today reason is no longer experienced as a “support”, but as a danger, even as an alienating imposition, yet this reversal is neither accidental nor purely intellectual. Reason does decentre us, it forces us to leave the self-evidence of lived experience, to suspend immediacy, to accept that what seems right may not be so. In a culture that sacralises subjective authenticity, any such distancing is perceived as a negation of the self, a negation that nevertheless appears salutary. From this perspective, reason no longer helps us think, since it seems to disqualify intimate experience. As well, reason introduces asymmetry: it distinguishes, prioritizes and decides, it produces true and false, relevant and incoherent. In a world obsessed with equality of viewpoints and permeated by relativism, this discriminating capacity is experienced as symbolic violence. Reason is no longer seen as a common resource, but as an instrument of domination, that some “manipulate” better than others. There is also a historical fatigue, as reason is often, sometimes rightly, associated with technocratic and managerial systems that ignore the sensitive, the singular, the fragile, and are perceived as sources of social and economic inequality. And, as we have said, rather than distinguishing between a reductive or impoverished use of reason and authentic rational exigency, the whole is condemned as an indivisible block, a critique turning into rejection. Finally, reason “obliges”

us, it makes us responsible, forces us to answer for what we say, to justify our positions, to recognise our contradictions, it prevents us from taking refuge indefinitely in victimhood or in the excuse of our feelings. For those who primarily seek protection, recognition or validation, reason is thus a direct threat.

In short, reason can help, but it exposes, it does not immediately soothe. It unsettles, it does not confirm, it tests. In an era that values care over truth, security over lucidity, comfort over risk, it is hardly surprising that reason is perceived not as a support, but as a danger.

401 – Speaking the Ineffable

They claim to speak the unsayable, they see themselves as heralds of a transcendent truth, of an ultimate reality, beyond speech and understanding. Their discourse often begins with negation, since words would be insufficient, thought too poor, language an obstacle, while the experience they invoke would be beyond form, beyond concept, beyond framework, even beyond reach, although primordial. And yet they speak, and speak at length, they are tireless, they have too much to say, too much to testify. Paradoxically, the more they denounce words, the more firmly they believe in those they utter, denouncing only the words of others, and the more they claim that words betray, that they are inadequate, the more they pile them up. Metaphors, images, hyperboles, emphatic formulas, verbal proliferation is inversely proportional to their professed distrust of language. Refusing the trial of clarity, which is always a trial of truth, they take refuge in abundance; language then ceases to be an instrument of precision, explication and argumentation, and becomes a protective mist, designed to shield experience from critical scrutiny. They invoke a “lived reality” that would exceed all expression, but they also want to account for it, to share it, to transmit it, and above all to convince. This strategy of the

ineffable thus functions as an ultimate defence mechanism of the self, it mobilises language in order to decree its obsolescence, while using it to establish a position of authority and withdraw one's discourse from any challenge.

They presume to speak the absolute, but they can only do so through words that are always limited, partial and debatable, that is to say exposed to criticism, interpretation and contradiction, which they tolerate least of all. They collide with the inevitable mediation of words that are always problematic and imperfect, which renders their position fundamentally unstable. Alas for them, the mere act of transmission already presupposes a shaping, an imposition of form, that is, a narrowing act of thought, a joyless reduction, an unavoidable passage through limitation, which explains their impatience, their irritation, their sensitivity. They are condemned to a reality they reject, reluctantly engaged in the very space they repudiate, that of language, mediation and discursive thought, which they constantly inhabit while denigrating it. Yet what they fail to see is that without words, however real and lived it may be, their experience would remain mute, indistinct, incommunicable, perhaps even indistinguishable from any other, for it is precisely words that give it contour, direction and intelligibility. They invert the terms of the problem, for language does not betray experience, it is what makes it exist as a meaningful reality, what helps us become aware of it, what grants it a tangible reality.

The "chosen ones" would say that language is a map and experience is a territory. They admit that the map is useful to us, but we must not give it too much importance or allow ourselves to be fascinated by it, because concepts are only constructs, reason is only a temporary tool that helps us navigate, and ultimately they must fade away without pretending to replace what is experienced. Indeed, language does not create experience, whether it be freedom, love, or the absolute, it merely serves it, nevertheless, it makes us aware of it, clarifies it, and identifies it. Sensation comes first, it remains the original source, as no discourse can replace it or fully account for it, but without words, it remains blind to itself, incapable of taking shape, direction, or meaning. And as a healthy practice, we must be able to question our own experience, analyze it, and problematize it,

otherwise it hardens into a "private" certainty, immune to thought and therefore immune to truth.

One can then observe a major contradiction in their “system”, a central error: they reject language while wanting to use it as a vector of authority. For declaring “My message is beyond words” is still a verbal assertion, moreover a strongly normative one. It installs an implicit hierarchy: those who speak would be below, those who claim to “no longer speak” would be above, yet words remain what draws the boundary, what grounds the distinction, and what in fact makes this alleged superiority possible. This recalls the insistent discourse of certain non-dualists who, by constantly affirming their non-dualism, end up producing a rigid opposition, between “them” and the “others”, those who have understood and those who remain trapped in duality.

And contrary to what these “enlightened ones” claim, this posture stems less from humility than from pride, which in their minds distinguishes the elite from the layman. Often, they invoke the “sacred” nature of silence, but in fact silence is far too mute for them, they cannot live in silence, they use it as an alibi, as a means of distinction, as they never leave language, they just employ it to decree that it is worthless, and to feel superior. Ironically, they transform a limitation, that of language, into a personal privilege, and the one who claims to be “beyond words” never ceases to produce them, while exempting himself from answering for them. As a result, through a strange sleight of hand, their words would no longer be debatable, since they would refer to a supposedly unsayable experience and therefore unassailable.

We also seem to identify in this schema a deeper blindness, that of believing one can inhabit an experience without thinking it, as if consciousness could be pure presence, without any articulation, an illusory schema, for every human act of awareness is already structured by meaning, even when it claims to be immediate and transcendent. To refuse words, to ignore them,

is not to gain access to a higher truth, it is in fact to refuse the trial of clarity, to take refuge in a comfortable obscurity. The unsayable is not what escapes words, but what demands a more rigorous labour, an ascesis of speech, more exact, more patient. Those who claim to abolish its shaping, who content themselves with sacralising it, in reality neutralise it, and in so doing lazily exempt themselves from confronting it. As Hegel denounces it, “they invite themselves too quickly to the table of the divine”.

402 – New Public Management

Recently, through various discussions, I came across a rather striking concept: New Public Management (NPM), of Anglo-Saxon origin, naturally, whose effects I had occasionally observed in social dynamics without having identified its specific name or the origin of the phenomenon. Broadly speaking, NPM is a doctrine of management that emerged in the 1980s, which claims to apply to the public service the logics prevailing in the private sector. Its central idea is simple, and brutal: the public service must be managed like a business. Concretely, this entails an obsession with measurement, indicators, numerical targets, and dashboards, that is, a culture of results rather than of meaning, activity, or mission. It involves the systematisation of reporting, permanent evaluation, traceability, the fragmentation of activities into standardised and controllable tasks, and thus the transformation of professionals into producers of data as much as practitioners. This managerial practice presents itself as a modern rationalisation of public action, but it in fact constitutes a profound ideological shift, for under the guise of efficiency it introduces into the public service the categories of the market: performance, profitability, competitiveness, control. Work is no longer assessed in terms of its meaning, its purpose, or its human relevance, but in terms of its measurability. As a result, what cannot be calculated ceases to exist, and what resists the indicator becomes suspect.

NPM does not trust actors, it monitors them, infantilises them, replaces responsibility with conformity, judgment with procedure, and practical intelligence with protocol. The professional is no longer recognised as a competent subject, but as an operator required to produce numerical proof of their activity, and the core of the work "naturally" shifts, since the issue is no longer simply to act, but to justify that one has done what "they were supposed to do", according to criteria decided "somewhere", often far removed from the field. In social work, training, or education, this logic is particularly destructive: it transforms relational, complex, and singular professions into sequences of standardised tasks; it demands constant reports, tables, grids, and indicators that claim to objectify irreducible human realities. Time devoted to paperwork thus becomes officially valued time, while time spent thinking, listening, or evolving appears unproductive.

Such tasks, beyond distancing practitioners from their genuine vocation, discourage them, for they feel overwhelmed by an activity that no longer produces meaning, but only traces, and by the necessity of proving their work rather than accomplishing it. A turning point then occurs: passion erodes, commitment turns into weariness, and the practitioner ends up becoming the manager of their own professional disappearance. Thus NPM produces a well-known perverse effect, as real work is displaced towards the administration of proof of work, to the detriment of work itself. For this model claims to rationalise, but in fact disables practical intelligence, since it no longer asks "What do you do?", inviting you to reflect on your activity, but rather, "Can you prove your efficiency in a form?". The resulting paradox is cruel, as in reality, the more one speaks of efficiency, the more inefficiency is produced, the more transparency is invoked, the more reality is obscured by hollow numbers. NPM manufactures a fiction of mastery that reassures managers and exhausts practitioners, but it does not eliminate activities devoid of meaning, it institutionalises formalism, and it does not foster responsibility, it neutralises. Of course, this is called modernisation, as if progress consisted in confusing governing with administering, and thinking with filling in boxes. In short, NPM does not eliminate useless work, it makes it mandatory and

virtuous. The aim is no longer to serve the public, but to satisfy the instruments of measurement supposed to prove that one is serving it. Across countries, the results of NPM have been mixed. In the United Kingdom and New Zealand, often presented as models, some procedures became more transparent and certain costs were reduced, at least initially, yet these reforms also generated dense systems of indicators, contracts, and audits, reintroducing bureaucracy in a more technical form. In the United States, competition and outsourcing increased flexibility in some areas, but also fragmented services and weakened the sense of public mission. Scandinavian countries adopted more moderate versions, combining evaluation with professional autonomy. In France, reforms often produced an inflation of reporting tools without real simplification, leaving practitioners with the feeling of working more for the indicators than for the public. In Russia, elements of NPM-inspired reform contributed to a more efficient and centralised tax administration, significantly increasing state revenues. In several cases, it improved budgetary transparency, reduced certain administrative delays, and introduced more local responsibility. Yet these gains often came at the cost of heavier reporting systems and a new form of technical bureaucracy, and in most cases, NPM did not abolish bureaucracy; it merely changed its shape. After these various experiences, it is no longer a “conquering” ideology, but has become an administrative routine. In this sense, one cannot say that it has been rejected, rather, it has been desacralised and normalised. Nevertheless, denouncing the formalism of NPM does not amount to advocating opacity in public service or the arbitrariness of the practitioner, which always remains a possibility. The risk of a radical critique of measurement is that it may suggest that “real work” owes accountability to no one, thereby confusing professional autonomy with a form of corporatist withdrawal. The difficulty lies less in the existence of evaluation, which is indispensable to collective fairness, than in its nature: an evaluation capable of recognising what cannot be counted. Without this distinction, the refusal of numbers could be perceived as a refusal of otherness, whereas the very mission of public service requires the ability to account for one’s actions before the community. The issue, therefore, is not to

abolish traceability, but to ensure that the trace does not become, through a perverse inversion, the sole horizon of action.

403 – The Wisdom of Zhuangzi

Zhuangzi (China – 4th century BCE), a Daoist philosopher, offers us an original form of wisdom, one that rests neither on a morality of duty nor on a heroic conquest of the world, but on a transformation of the relationship the human being maintains with himself and with what is beyond him, an endeavor structured around three essential concepts: *xing*, *ming* and *an*. *Ming* designates everything that escapes our power: birth, death, success, failure, wealth or poverty, so many transformations that no one can fully foresee or explain. These situations are neither matters of fault nor of merit; they simply constitute the fabric of reality. Zhuangzi does not necessarily ask us to understand them, but to adopt a certain attitude toward them: to accept them as irreversible facts of existence. *Xing*, nature, does not refer to a fixed or ideal, universal essence, but to the tendencies particular to each being, that toward which any entity tends specifically. Yet this nature is not given once and for all; it must be recognised, cultivated, sometimes rediscovered, for it can be lost under the influence of artificial desires or social constraints. Wisdom therefore consists in discerning what, within us, belongs to an authentic movement, and in giving it priority.

This is where *an*, acceptance, comes into play, but it is neither resignation nor passivity. It is an active disposition of the "heart-mind", which involves recognising what does not depend on us, ceasing to struggle against the inevitable, and directing one's energy toward what can be cultivated within the given context. This acceptance is therefore an ascetic practice, both

inner and practical, that allows one to act without being trapped by anxiety or useless resistance.

One example he uses is the image of a swimmer moving through rapids: he does not oppose the water, he follows its currents, adapts to them, and it is precisely this conformity to the movement of reality that allows him to survive. Thus the individual begins with what is familiar, grows with their nature, and fulfils their destiny. Thus, freedom does not consist in controlling the world, but in attuning oneself to what occurs. From this perspective, wisdom is not a conquest but an adjustment; it does not impose a form upon reality, but finds the form that corresponds to us within it, which in a certain way is a form of action upon the world. It removes neither pain nor uncertainty, but it avoids the unnecessary suffering produced by resistance to the inevitable. It is therefore a matter of recognising what does not depend on us (*ming*), cultivating what depends on our nature (*xing*), and inhabiting both with an active acceptance (*an*). This is not a morality of duty, but an ecology of existence; not a conquest of the world, but a way of floating within it without drowning. Nor is it a withdrawal into oneself, or a selfish search for personal tranquillity, for by transforming himself, the sage also transforms the quality of his presence in the world: he ceases to add unnecessary violence to it, and contributes, without programme or heroism, to a world less conflictual, more harmonious and more beautiful.

Zhuangzi's wisdom may appear close to other traditions, yet it differs from them in a decisive way. Among the Stoics, for example, acceptance of destiny rests on a central idea: the world is ordered by a universal reason, the *logos*, and the sage must conform his will to it; acceptance is thus a moral adherence to a superior rational order. It presupposes self-discipline, a work of the will, an inner rectitude, and the Stoic sage remains a heroic figure, capable of maintaining his dignity even in adversity, out of fidelity to reason.

In Spinoza, the approach is still different: acceptance of reality passes through the rational understanding of necessity. Everything that happens follows from the divine nature or the single substance, and the more the

individual understands the causes that determine him, the more he frees himself from sad passions and attains active joy. Spinozist wisdom is therefore a liberation through knowledge, a form of intellectualisation of destiny.

Zhuangzi's wisdom may recall pragmatism in its refusal of rigid systems and its attention to the concrete situation, but the kinship remains superficial. Pragmatism, in William James or John Dewey, remains a philosophy of effective action: an idea is worth the effects it produces, by what it allows one to resolve or improve in the world. Thought there is an instrument at the service of adaptation and the transformation of social reality. In Zhuangzi, the issue is quite different. It is not a matter of acting more effectively, nor of improving situations, but of not allowing oneself to be trapped by them. Wisdom does not consist in finding what "works", but in not identifying oneself with what works today and may fail tomorrow. Where the pragmatist seeks an operative solution, Zhuangzi cultivates an inner freedom that allows one to pass through transformations without rigidity. Thus the pragmatist seeks what works; Zhuangzi seeks not to depend on what works.

The issue of acceptance as a condition of freedom, a way of freeing oneself from futile struggles against what cannot be controlled, is present as well in Kierkegaard and early Wittgenstein, although approached from different directions. For Kierkegaard, freedom emerges when the individual accepts the unavoidable conditions of existence: finitude, anxiety, suffering, and the limits of human control. Despair arises from refusing what one is or what one must face, true freedom comes from a reconciliation with necessity, ultimately grounded in faith, in a commitment to God, as the individual becomes free not by changing the world, but by transforming his relation to reality. For early Wittgenstein, freedom depends on acceptance in a more logical and ethical sense. The world is made of facts that lie beyond our control, we cannot alter them through will or desire, but what can change is our attitude toward the world. Freedom comes from recognizing these limits, ceasing to demand that reality conform to our wishes, and adopting a stance of inner peace. Thus Kierkegaard's

acceptance is existential and religious, Wittgenstein's is logical, ethical, and silent, while for Zhuangzi it is natural and transformative, a fluid and playful attunement to the shifting course of things, vital and ironic, through which the individual becomes free by no longer resisting what cannot be controlled and by quietly inhabiting the world as it unfolds.

One might be tempted to place Zhuangzi within the broad category of "Eastern wisdom", alongside Buddhism or non-dualistic doctrines, but such an assimilation obscures what makes him singular. Buddhism, even in its most flexible forms, proposes a path, a discipline, a precise diagnosis of suffering, and a horizon of liberation. Non-dualism, for its part, affirms a fundamental unity of reality and seeks to dissolve distinctions in the experience of the absolute. In both cases, there is a metaphysical or soteriological orientation, a direction, an ultimate meaning. With Zhuangzi, nothing of the sort. There is neither a doctrine of the One, nor a path to awakening, nor a structure of salvation; the world is not a veil to be torn apart, nor an illusion to be dispelled, but a fabric of transformations in which one must participate without becoming rigid. Where Buddhism diagnoses suffering and prescribes a path to liberation, Zhuangzi dissolves the gravity of the diagnosis itself, through humour, the reversal of perspectives, and the acceptance of transformations. Where non-dualism seeks the ultimate identity of all things, Zhuangzi stages the relativity of points of view and the ceaseless mobility of reality. His wisdom is therefore neither ascetic, nor metaphysical, nor redemptive, but a lucid nonchalance, a displacement, a momentary accord with circumstances. It does not promise a final deliverance, but a lighter way of inhabiting the instability of the world. Where other traditions seek the One, salvation, or awakening, Zhuangzi simply invites us not to become fixed, to follow transformations, and to smile gently at those who claim to have found the definitive truth.

Thus, in Zhuangzi, there is neither a priori moral duty, nor a rational order to embrace, nor a causal system to understand. The world is not presented as a logical or divine structure, but as a process of unpredictable transformations. Acceptance is not an act of will nor the result of a rational demonstration; it is a plastic, almost organic disposition, which consists in embracing circumstances rather than interpreting or submitting to them,

for the “true” morality for him is simply to be “available”. This is why he rejects every form of idealistic heroism: he values neither moral grandeur, nor self-mastery, nor the conquest of truth. The sage is not an exemplary model, but an ordinary being, adaptable, almost invisible, who follows the course of things without dramatizing. Where the idealist straightens himself against the world, the Zhuangzian sage bends and passes. He seeks above all the accord with his own deep nature, a silent and unassuming authenticity, without heroic posture. He aims at a discreet justness that allows him to inhabit circumstances without betraying himself, an authenticity that is nevertheless not an immediate gift nor a complacent ease, for it is the fruit of a labour, a continuous task, a patient accomplishment. It is a discreet realisation through which the individual gradually frees himself from what distances him from himself, by avoiding the unnecessary dramatisations that nourish suffering and paralyse action. Yet the sage does not withdraw when circumstances demand a firm gesture, a sharp response, for revolt is possible for him, but only if it ceases to be an identity, a banner, or a personal tragedy. In Zhuangzi, refusal is never dramatic, it is discreet, fluid, without illusions of grandeur, and his proposal culminates in the ideal of x*iaoyaoyou*, a peaceful wandering through the world, free and unhindered.

404 – Intellectual Self-Protection

Periodically, I am accused of living within a system of intellectual self-protection, which, in a certain sense, is not untrue. Nevertheless, one can perceive in this expression a certain conceptual ambiguity that needs to be clarified.

Let us begin with the idea that any organised thinking is by nature a form of self-protection, simply because it structures us from within, as a sort of psychic endoskeleton. To analyse, distinguish, conceptualise, and categorise is to give oneself tools in order not to be engulfed by inner or

surrounding chaos, by raw affect or by the pressure of immediacy, the noise or absurdity of the world, that is to say, to guard against a certain type of alienation. In this sense, anyone who thinks seriously protects themselves, but to accuse someone of this would amount to reproaching them for not letting themselves be carried away by their impulses or mere reactions, which would be a strange accusation. The interesting question, then, is not whether there is protection or not, but what one protects oneself from, and at what cost.

It seems that a system of existential self-protection becomes problematic when it prevents any real questioning, makes us completely impermeable to affect, surprise, or contradiction, and serves to avoid exposure, loss, or the risk of being wrong. In such a case, thought becomes a fortress, a sophisticated defence mechanism, a way of avoiding reality rather than confronting it. There are indeed intellectuals who use thought as an abstract refuge, an ivory tower cut off from reality, or as a screen to avoid emotion. But this aberration does not disqualify thought itself; it only shows that it can be used, like any human power, either to flee from hardship or to endure it. Thus a certain rigidity might set in, a mental exoskeleton similar to the shell of lobsters or turtles, which encloses, represses, and conceals subjectivity. But there is another form of protection, more demanding, in which thinking can also be a discipline of exposure, a way of remaining present without dissolving, of listening without identifying, of questioning without taking refuge in exaltation or complaint, a way of maintaining a certain serenity, a certain stability. This kind of thinking is not a comfortable shelter but a true place of challenge, it is not a citadel, but a permanent workshop. Moreover, intellectual functioning is in itself a risk-taking behavior, as such an attitude often seems strange, even incomprehensible to many people, who see it as a form of rejection, and end up rejecting themselves those who practice it. Intellectuals therefore expose themselves to a form of ostracism and a certain loneliness, because they unwittingly provoke aversion in those who feel threatened by their behavior, who readily interpret it as arrogance or contempt, and it proves perilous to invite most people to engage in rational dialogue.
In this perspective, the accusation of self-protection becomes suspect, as it

often emerges as a defensive reversal, or even as a misunderstanding. It appears when distinctions are destabilising, when emotional immediacy is not validated, when rigour is maintained where affective complicity is expected, when one encounters listening rather than a “needed” recognition. Thus, the person frustrated in their relational expectations, instead of responding to what they hear, instead of reacting to the content of the thought, aggressively psychologises the one who thinks, without in fact taking any real interest in what is being said. Indeed, unconsciously, they suggest that the other protects themselves precisely in order not to examine what they say, out of fear of being destabilised.

There is, however, a decisive difference between thinking in order to avoid being touched and thinking in order not to be carried away. Any serious thought protects against confusion, but it does not prevent the ordeal, since on the contrary, it makes it possible, as it allows for a genuine encounter. Moreover, the accusation also reveals a presupposition: it often comes from people for whom thought is experienced as a threat, a coldness, an intolerable distance, because they expect a form of exposure, a shared suffering, an immediate emotional resonance. When this expectation is not satisfied, restraint becomes suspect, coherence appears artificial, and tranquillity is interpreted as a defence mechanism, an artificial behaviour considered unnatural. To say that someone protects themselves intellectually is sometimes simply to say: “You do not let yourself be affected as I would like”, and the accusation no longer describes an objective functioning, but a relational frustration; it mainly reveals a psychological need that the other does not satisfy. This does not mean, however, that all accusations of self-protection are unfounded. Sometimes reason is indeed used as a refuge, a strategy to avoid hurt, contradiction, or questioning. The question should therefore not be sidestepped, but examined concretely, based on content and situations, rather than transformed into generalized psychological suspicion, in order to distinguish between thinking that protects itself and thinking that truly exposes itself.

Thus, we must indeed admit that all thought protects, reason does function as a barrier, a rather “sanitary” one, mine as much as anyone else’s. But it

does not preserve us from the risk of thinking, quite the contrary, for it avoids neither contradiction, nor tension, nor exposure, it does not protect from the ordeal, it is precisely its necessary form, it establishes the ground for it. In this sense, the accusation of self-protection often says less about the one who thinks than about the other's relationship to thought, it reveals a difficulty in tolerating mediation, distance, and rigorous formulation, and in this way it exposes a certain fragility, an instability one would prefer to perceive in the other, in the belief that this would somehow be reassuring. Indeed, faced with our own anxiety, we feel rather alone, and we often wish to drag others into it, to make them participate. It is not structured thought that protects too much, it is when the very demand to think is experienced as an aggression by those who cannot bear intellectual tension, those who fear the demands of reason or the questioning it implies, thus they confuse responding with protecting oneself.

Contrary to a common perception, rational dialogue is not a suppression or denial of affect, it implies another way of being touched. Emotion is not absent, it is simply displaced, as what moves such a person is not primarily social recognition or relational warmth, but the accuracy of an idea, the rigour of a reasoning, the discovery of a contradiction, or the elegance of a conceptual solution. Thought itself becomes a place of intensity, disturbance, joy, or tension, and one who lives in this way is not less sensitive, they are sensitive differently; they are affected by coherence, by truth, by clarity, as others are by gestures or comforting words. It is therefore not emotional dryness, but a displaced sensitivity, oriented towards the life of the mind rather than towards the immediate gratifications of social ties or relational impulses. Thus, when opposition arises, they do not react first with irritation or confrontation, they transform it into an object of reflection, they examine it, turn it over, feed on it. Where one would expect a sharp reaction, an ego wound or an emotional retaliation, they propose an analysis, a distancing, a conceptual elaboration, an attitude often experienced by others as coldness or indifference, since the absence of immediate affective reaction gives the impression of hitting a wall. Yet this wall is not made of stone, it is made of thought, and what seems to be a refusal of relation is in reality another way

of entering it, through the work of the concept rather than through the clash of emotions.

Another aspect of the problem is that many people have difficulty accepting that one of their own might possess a strong intellectual identity, that they might be inhabited by a passion in which the life of ideas takes precedence over relational comfort, over immediate adherence to opinions or affects. They would almost prefer rejection or aggression, so suspicious and almost inhuman such a “distant” attitude appears to them, as if giving priority to thought necessarily meant despising people. They tolerate opinion, commentary, spontaneous reactions, even excessive ones, but they distrust the one who organises their life around conceptual work, who accepts the solitude, tension, and misunderstanding that it implies. Intellectual commitment seems excessive, unbalanced, even pathological to them, because it escapes ordinary affective codes and does not seek first to please, reassure, or belong. Thus, it is not only thought that disturbs them, but the fact that it can become a way of being, a form of existence in its own right.

For many, ideas have no value in themselves, they matter only as relational or utilitarian instruments, as means of belonging, recognition, or confrontation. An idea is not examined for its accuracy or coherence, but for what it produces socially, for the effect it has on others, for the position it allows one to occupy. In such a perspective, the one who attaches themselves to ideas for their own sake, who works them like a living material, appears strange, even disturbing, since they escape the usual logics of alliance, conflict, or seduction. Where others see a mere tool, they see an end in itself, where others seek a temporary position, they seek a “truth”. And this autonomy of ideas, which serves neither image nor relationship, becomes profoundly unsettling, which moreover explains a certain solitude in the lover of thought.

By way of conclusion, one might speak of a form of equanimity, not as a cold indifference or an artificial neutrality, but as an inner stability born from the patient engagement with ideas. One who lives in this way does not particularly seek to triumph in exchanges, nor to defend their image,

but to understand what is at stake, to let tensions produce their meaning. Equanimity is not an absence of affect, but a way of not being carried away by every emotional movement, of maintaining enough distance for thought to work, it does not eliminate disagreements or wounds, but it prevents drama. It is a form of active tranquillity, a fidelity to the life of the mind, which allows one to pass through oppositions without hardening, without dissolving, without renouncing the demand for truth, an attitude in which one may indeed perceive a certain form of self-protection. Yet this equanimity deeply disturbs some, who see suffering as an inalienable condition of humanity and therefore wish it to be shared as a proof of authenticity, as their own anxiety seeks company, an echo, a confirmation. Faced with someone who does not dramatise, who does not collapse, who transforms tensions into material for reflection, they experience unease. They do not understand that a person might, for reasons that seem obscure or suspect to them, refuse to enter the same tragic regime. Equanimity then appears to them as coldness, distance, even inhumanity, when it may simply be another way of passing through the troubles of existence without drowning in them.

405 – Anger

There are people for whom irritation or anger, beyond its purely emotional and psychological aspect, plays a central existential role. They are quite prone to these moods, which are easily triggered, whether by external causes or by their own inner movements. For them, these affects are not mere passing reactions but genuine modes of being, as they settle into them, recognise themselves in them, and find in them a form of inner consistency. Anger gives them relief, intensity, a justification for their existence in relation to others, it offers a reason to live and act, a motivation, a psychic energy that keeps them in motion, as if this tension itself became a form of vitality. As a result, in such people, ordinary annoyances quickly take on a personal, intense, even dramatic dimension;

an observation, a hesitation, the slightest remark, even one devoid of any critical intention, becomes a sign of hostility. Their threshold of tolerance is low, and irritation is easily triggered, like a reflex, since for them, anger is not merely a reaction, it is a permanent disposition.

What also characterises these people is their relationship to the anger of others, as an echo of their own way of being: they fear it, anticipate it, and project it everywhere. In every word, in every silence, they look for signs of irritation or dissatisfaction, a neutral tone becomes a harsh tone, distance becomes rejection, a reflection becomes an attack; they live in a kind of permanent stormy climate, even when the sky is rather clear. One could sometimes say that they almost wish for this anger in others, for it confirms their view of the world: if the other becomes irritated, it proves that they are hostile, unjust, aggressive, and their own mistrust then finds justification, they even find in it a form of expected recognition. The anger of others becomes a proof, a fuel for their own inner agitation, and their calm becomes unbearable, like a form of denial of themselves; it is a mirror that reflects their own agitation, so they must “invent” hostility in the other. Thus, any disagreement is immediately interpreted as a gesture of irritation, even when nothing indicates it, a divergence of opinion is no longer an intellectual fact but an emotional event. Consequently, they do not respond, argue, or explain, but become irritated, lose their temper, shout, and instead of questioning or trying to understand, they attack. Some people grow progressively agitated during discussions, the tension mounts, the tone rises, and at a certain point they explode, either by throwing insults, breaking off the exchange, storming out, or, in extreme cases, turning to physical aggression.

In such contexts, the other’s thought is immediately translated into a gesture of mood or a malicious intention, and discussion becomes impossible. In this climate, relationships stiffen, the exchange of ideas or perspectives turns into an emotional duel, for each person speaks under the suspicion of aggression or of being attacked. Anger is no longer a punctual reaction to a real injustice, it becomes a principle of interpretation

of the world. Yet this affective regime is exhausting, for oneself as for others, since it locks the individual into a state of permanent vigilance, it prevents any distance, mediation, or reflection. Where thought could introduce nuance and diversity, anger imposes a binary logic: one can only be friend or enemy, support or aggression. In fact, it functions as a cognitive short circuit, for the angry person seeks to simplify reality, and ironically, their outburst is a form of intellectual laziness disguised as vital energy. As a result, anger ceases to be one emotion among others and becomes an existential structure: it organises perception, relationships, and expectations. It certainly provides a form of meaning, which explains its persistence, however painful it may be; nevertheless, it is a narrow, tense, defensive meaning, and the individual eventually no longer knows how to exist except within this tension, as if calm itself became suspect, almost disturbing.

Nevertheless, we must recognise that this permanent anger also functions as an armour, a sort of ontological shell, for it spares one from having to doubt, to question oneself, or to acknowledge one's own vulnerability. It also acts as a bulwark against the fear of emptiness, boredom, or depression, which explains its "appeal". For these people, anger is no longer an accident but a substance, it gives "relief" to an existence that, without this tension, would fear emptiness or insignificance. It offers a rampart against vulnerability, for the one who is angry does not need to reflect, they are entirely occupied with their opposition to the world. Such systematic anger may even constitute the last resort of someone who feels disqualified by the system or by society, a desperate attempt to signal that one still exists.

But this protection comes at a price. Psychologically, it maintains a constant tension, a nervous fatigue, an inability to savor tranquillity or simple joy, since everything becomes a pretext for irritation or struggle. Existentially, it locks the individual into a posture of permanent combat, where the world always appears hostile or disappointing, which impoverishes experience and narrows the horizon of life. On the relational level, it wears down bonds, installs mistrust, provokes avoidance or confrontation, and ultimately isolates the one who indulges in it. For in this regime, the other no longer exists as a real subject, they are merely a projection screen, a

“fuel” for internal agitation, and we may see here a form of passionate solipsism. And what presented itself as a protective force then becomes an inner prison, a device that prevents any appeasement, any genuine encounter, and any transformation of the self. Thus, what protects against emptiness ends up producing another emptiness, that of relationships, joy, and existential depth; anger becomes a strategy of survival that gradually turns into a mode of impoverishment of being. But as a conclusion, we should mention that this portrait is intentionally archetypal, and thus somewhat excessive, but one can easily recognise in it the softer, more discreet or less intense versions that many people embody every day.

406 – The Aristocrat

The idea of aristocracy today evokes a bygone world, laden with privileges, inequalities and social pretensions, and the term itself appears suspect, arrogant, almost indecent in an era that values equality of conditions and individuals, and distrusts any distinction or hierarchy. Yet, if one frees it from its hereditary or worldly meaning, the concept of the aristocrat can recover a deeper and more demanding significance, no longer as a status transmitted by blood or obtained through social recognition, but as a quality acquired through work on oneself. In this sense, the Chinese tradition offers an illuminating figure: that of the *junzi*, the noble man, a being of virtue, as opposed to the *xiaoren*, the petty man of low concerns. The *junzi* is not noble by birth, but by his conduct, he does not distinguish himself by his titles, power or wealth, but by his inner stance, by the rectitude of his judgement, by the constancy of his character. He seeks rightness rather than approval, coherence rather than advantage, truth rather than popularity, his nobility is not a claim but a silent demand, a daily discipline, it is measured in ordinary gestures, in the manner of speaking, deciding, and assuming responsibility. By contrast, the *xiaoren*, the petty man, is not defined by his social condition either, but by his inner

orientation: he pursues immediate interest, easy gratification, seeks recognition, clings to appearances and benefits, and lets himself be guided by circumstances, passions and collective pressures. Where the *junzi* strives to be worthy of himself, the petty man strives above all to be approved and satisfied.

To rehabilitate the idea of aristocracy is therefore to rehabilitate the idea of a qualitative demand in existence, it is to affirm that not all lives are equal from the point of view of their inner orientation, that some seek convenience while others seek rectitude. The aristocrat, in the spiritual sense of the term, is the one who stands above himself, who refuses complacency, who cultivates a form of greatness without display. He does not seek to dominate others, but to master himself, and such an aristocracy has nothing ostentatious about it, as it is often discreet, invisible, and frequently misunderstood. In this sense, he can hardly be arrogant, because arrogance implies comparison and the desire to appear superior, whereas his gaze is directed primarily toward the demands he places on himself. This inner composure does not imply hardness or invulnerability, but rather the lucidity of a person who has no illusions about himself and who accepts his own fragility without making it an argument or a spectacle. However, this requirement does not make him a rigid model or a figure to be imitated, his demeanor is not heroic or morally ostentatious, but rather embodied in a flexible and discreet manner of being, simple and natural, which seeks neither to give lessons, nor to impose morals, nor to make itself visible, but to inhabit situations with an accuracy that is neither proclaimed nor calculated.

This quality does not proclaim itself, it is recognised, in authenticity, in speech, in fidelity to a certain idea of the human being, it claims neither privilege nor power, only a demand, for oneself as for others. In a world saturated with resentment, with affective and moral egalitarianism, where equality is confused with levelling, where everything is expected to be equivalent, where any demand is suspected of arrogance and any distinction experienced as an offence, this figure is disturbing. It reminds us that dignity cannot be decreed, that it is not given automatically, that it must be built and acquired; it suggests that equality of rights does not imply equality of attitudes, efforts or inner orientations. The aristocrat is not the

one who possesses more, but the one who demands more of himself. Understood in this way, the aristocrat is neither a relic of the past nor a symbol of social injustice, he is a timeless figure, a challenge addressed to each individual. He embodies the possibility of a nobility without title, a distinction without privilege, a greatness without domination, that is to say, an aristocracy of the soul, accessible to all but chosen by few. The aristocrat may inspire admiration, although he does not care much for it, but above all he may easily become unbearable, a source of bad conscience, he may be indifferent to criticism, but he is especially impermeable to praise or flattery. Paradoxically, the petty man is proud, even arrogant, because he esteems himself so little beneath his pretentious exterior; he fears contempt, he wants to be noticed, honoured, recognised. “All are equal,” he says, without truly believing it, and he demands respect, above all for himself, a false and highly artificial sense of equity or universal dignity. Because of his expectations, the petty man experiences ups and downs, great hopes and great disappointments, he expects much from others because he does not experience peace in his relation to himself. Thus he seeks to singularise himself by every means, for he fears his own insignificance; he wants to be special.

The aristocrat, thus redefined, is no longer the beneficiary of a rank, but the artisan of a stature. While the petty man exhausts himself in the quest for external signs to compensate for his inner emptiness, the aristocrat of the spirit finds his stability in the adequacy to his own demands. This nobility does not separate men by privilege, but by the direction of their gaze: toward the pleasure of approval for some, toward the rigour of rectitude for others, toward psychological comfort for some, toward fidelity to an inner demand for others. The principle of aristocracy is not an exclusion, but a permanent invitation to substitute the dignity of character for the vanity of recognition. Yet this demand upon oneself is not a narcissistic withdrawal, for it has meaning only in relation to others, as it is a responsibility toward them. The aristocrat does not work on himself in order to contemplate his own image, but in order to make possible a more just presence in the world and among human beings, he does not seek to

distinguish himself, but to make his environment a little less vulgar, a little more habitable.

Most often, the petty man is caught in routine, in immediacy, in small calculations and ordinary satisfactions, he lives from day to day, without a stable inner orientation, guided by habit, prevailing opinion, comfort, the fear of displeasing, the desire to be recognised. In this case, he has neither real passion nor real ideal, or rather, his “meagre ideals” are social slogans, borrowed opinions, desires for recognition, vague expectations of happiness or success, “moral” visions or indistinct sentiments that console him for his own banality. But when he gives himself a more substantial ideal, it is often in order to reassure or singularise himself, and the petty man, thus exalted, clings to passions or to “grand schemes” in order to fill his emptiness, yet he does not stand upon a stable inner demand. These are not ideals that demand something intimate of him, but representations that console him, even if he may devote his time and energy to them. Nevertheless, since he does not confront himself, he may easily act unjustly or in bad faith in order to “nourish” or “protect” his passion. The aristocrat, by contrast, may or may not have a passion, may or may not pursue an ideal, but this is not what defines him, for he is guided above all by an inner direction, a stance, a fidelity to a certain idea of the just. Thus the ideal is not what carries him, it is only what takes form from his stance, a consequence of his relation to himself. The aristocrat does not need ideals in order to feel that he exists, he does not need to “take sides”, as his very stance gives shape to what he does, and from it, if he has them, his passions and commitments are born.

Thus there are two opposing logics: that of dependence and that of stance. Admittedly, these two figures do not describe distinct human categories, but rather orientations present in everyone, the two poles of an inner tension inherent in all existence. Thus the petty man may need an ideal or a passion in order to feel alive, he clings to it, projects himself into it, justifies himself through it, the ideal becomes a refuge, a compensation, sometimes even an intoxication. It serves to fill an inner lack or to give importance to an existence that would otherwise seem empty to him, and

in this case, the passion possesses the individual more than he possesses it. The aristocrat is not without ideal or passion, but he does not depend on them, for his point of support is not what he loves, hopes for or pursues, but the manner in which he stands in relation to what he does. The ideal is not a refuge but a direction, passion is not a possession but an energy placed at the service of an inner demand, in other words, in him, the ideal does not replace the stance, it follows from it. It does not serve to flee reality, but to orient action, and passion is not a loss of self, but a disciplined intensity integrated into a broader coherence. The petty man is carried away by his passions and consoles himself through his ideals, while the aristocrat stands upright, and it is this uprightness that gives shape and limit to his passions as to his ideals. His relation to the ideal is therefore neither fusion nor dependence, he does not live for an ideal, he lives in a certain manner, and the ideal is only the expression of this manner of being. To clarify the point, let us say that the difference lies less in the object of commitment than in the manner of committing oneself, for the *junzi* and the *xiaoren* may defend the same political cause, use the same words, and gather at the same demonstrations. Externally, their behaviour may appear identical, but internally their relation to the cause is very different, as the *xiaoren* identifies himself with his cause; it becomes an extension of his ego, of his need for recognition or security, he clings to it because it gives him a place, an identity, a sense of importance. Thus, anything that threatens the cause also threatens his self-image, he easily becomes aggressive, dishonest, intolerant; he is ready to twist facts in order to protect what he identifies with, because the end justifies the means, and for him the issue is no longer justice but the preservation of his attachment. The *junzi*, by contrast, does not merge with his cause, he engages in it because he judges it just, but his first fidelity is to rectitude, not to the camp to which he belongs. If he discovers that his cause leads him to lie, humiliate or act unjustly, he is capable of correcting himself, taking distance, or even withdrawing, as for him, the cause is at the service of rightness, not the other way around. He does not need to be right at all costs, nor to save his camp, nor to triumph symbolically; his commitment remains measured, coherent and inwardly free. Thus, the *xiaoren* serves his cause in order to serve himself, passion becomes an identity, while the *junzi* serves the cause

but remains at the service of rectitude, and passion remains an orientation that may be modified. It is therefore not the object of passion that distinguishes the two men, but their relation to it: fusion and defensiveness in one, freedom and discipline in the other.

407 – Answering Without Answering

From time to time, we are reproached, during an exchange, for not answering a question. Either we seem to answer beside the point, or we make an ironic remark, or we simply move on to something else, or to someone else, without answering at all. The reaction is almost always immediate: dissatisfaction, frustration, accusations of evasion or contempt. Very often, the person does not take the time to ask whether this non-answer might in fact have been another form of answer.
This reaction mainly reflects a consumerist mentality, within such a framework, the question functions like an order, and the answer like an expected service, dialogue becomes a transaction, the interlocutor a provider, and if the answer does not come, or does not correspond exactly to expectations, the client feels wronged, frustrated. Certainly, a direct answer satisfies curiosity, but it often short-circuits reflection, yet philosophical dialogue is not a commercial exchange, and thought is not delivered to one's door. This attitude also reflects a "primitive" vision of dialogue, in which the interlocutor is unable to recognise detours, irony, or shifts of perspective, or is simply unwilling to do so. In a dialectical exchange, some answers are not given in the form of direct statements; they must be guessed, reconstructed, or discovered gradually, thus, the refusal of an immediate answer may nevertheless constitute a pedagogical gesture, an invitation to reflect.

It also happens that the questioner does not truly deserve an answer, because they are not seeking to understand, to examine their claim, or to

become aware of the issues involved, they merely wish to show off, provoke, argue, or fight, thus to answer in such conditions would be to feed sterile agitation, silence, avoidance, or the redirection of the discussion then become answers in themselves, entirely legitimate ones. At other times, the question is such that the person can answer it themselves, almost as an obvious matter of common sense, if they would only take a moment to reflect. Another possibility is that the question itself is unclear, or that the person is not conscious of what they are truly asking, one must then interpret, attempt to respond to what one perceives as the hidden intention, identify its presuppositions, or bring to light the problem contained in its formulation, at the risk of error or misunderstanding. The interlocutor may then feel that we have deviated, that we are not answering the question, even though we are trying to address what actually motivates it, the underlying problem. Thus, to give the answer too quickly, too literally, is to infantilise the interlocutor, to deprive them of the opportunity to exercise their own judgement, to miss the chance for an awakening, and the refusal to answer directly becomes an invitation to autonomy, an encouragement to think for oneself.

More radically, there are also cases in which the interlocutor is closed, stubborn, already convinced of being right, of “knowing everything”, so any answer would be rejected or distorted, and insisting would only produce irritation or confusion. Not answering becomes a way of recognising and openly acknowledging the sterility of the situation, or at least of admitting a certain helplessness. Other questions are purely rhetorical, they seek not an answer, but approval, recognition, or emotional confirmation. One may sometimes yield to such a request, but often, depending on the situation, it is clear that responding literally would be inappropriate, as it would amount to participating in a banal and conventional game. Silence or irony then indirectly reveals the absurd nature of the question, for those willing to hear the message.

There are also situations in which one does not answer because the answer cannot be offered in a formal or descriptive way, it can only emerge during

the course of the discussion, within the process itself, in a performative manner, through demonstration. An idea sometimes needs time to manifest itself, to unfold, and answering too early, too quickly, in a definitive way, would close off a process still in formation, whereas the aim is to keep the space open. The absence of an immediate answer then becomes a form of conceptual patience, an invitation to remain available, a positive view of the feeling of dissatisfaction. There is a formative dimension in this gesture, for not answering immediately trains people to endure waiting, to refrain from demanding intellectual comfort or instant gratification, it breaks the dynamics of reflex and immediacy. Thus, irony, analogy, indirect answers, the use of a metaphor, even making a joke or telling a story, are all strategies that oblige the interlocutor to work, to reflect in order to understand. Rather than handing them a ready-made answer, one invites them to produce it themselves, they must transpose what they have seen or heard. In fact, a true answer, worthy of the name, deserves an effort, it implies an inner transformation. In this sense, contrary to appearances, and somewhat counter-intuitively, not answering directly may be a gesture of respect, not the “sentimental” respect for the person or their image, but a deeper respect, the respect for their capacity for reason, since one assumes they are capable of understanding, searching, and surpassing themselves, rather than seeing them as an anxious, fragile, and powerless being.

Thus, the absence of an explicit answer is not necessarily an evasion; it may be a pedagogical strategy, a dialectical gesture, an invitation to reflection. What is initially experienced as frustration may turn out to be a necessary trial, and what is called silence or escape may prove to be the most demanding form of answer.

408 – Taking Sides

In many discussions, some people seem incapable of moving beyond the elementary stage of “I like” or “I do not like”, some “he is right” or “he is wrong”, formulations often accompanied by laudatory or disparaging remarks. This frequent attitude can be illuminated by several psychological, cognitive, social, or existential hypotheses, which do not exclude one another but often combine.

Thinking requires effort, since distinguishing, clarifying, examining arguments, and problematising demands time and energy, whereas binary judgment is simpler, faster, and more comfortable. Such behavior constitutes a form of intellectual laziness, of which the use of emojis is a very good example, but also a strategy of mental economy, a way of reducing the complexity of the world to a few simple and immediate comments. Moreover, many people confuse thought with an emotional reaction: if an idea displeases them, they judge it false, if it pleases them, they judge it true. The criterion of truth thus becomes affective comfort, and the discussion ceases to be a search for relevance, becoming instead a management of moods, where the expression of subjectivity takes precedence. One may consider that this binary reaction has a rather irrational dimension, since it stems less from a reflective judgment than from a reflex of self-preservation, where one decides in order to reassure oneself, without any objective examination of the content. Such binary judgment can be the beginning of thought, the problem is that many people stop there and go no further. They do not provide arguments for their choices, they no longer examine the basis of their judgments, nor do they submit those judgments to further scrutiny. The mind then becomes saturated by the satisfaction of being “agreed with” and the anger of being “disagreed with,” these two dominant emotions leaving no space for free and creative thought.

Furthermore, any subtlety opens a space of doubt, complexity introduces

dilemmas, and this uncertainty is unsettling; moreover, carefully analysing the stakes of a statement is an ungrateful, anxiogenic task, whereas simply declaring “he is right” or “he is wrong” stabilises the world and gives an impression of order and clarity. Sharp judgment functions like a mental anxiolytic, a way of protecting oneself from the disturbance of thought. Added to this is identification with ideas, as for some people an idea is not an external object to examine, but an extension of themselves, a component of their identity, and contradicting an idea they like amounts to attacking them personally. Discussion then becomes a “moral” affair, a game of loyalty or betrayal, rather than a concern for truth. This binary logic also echoes a quasi-tribal reflex, close to ordinary xenophobia, where the world is divided into “us” and “them,” and whatever is not immediately recognised as familiar or conforming becomes suspect, even dangerous. One must acknowledge that schooling and socialisation often reinforce this tendency, since the expected “right answer” is commonly valued more than questioning. One learns to distinguish right from wrong according to established criteria, but rarely to analyse the conditions of a problem, or to consider the multiplicity of perspectives and the diversity of possible answers. This binary logic becomes a durable reflex, and we are far from the Hegelian idea according to which the so-called false is only a stage of the true. On the social level, the need for belonging also plays a role, because taking sides, declaring “he is right” or “he is wrong,” allows one to situate oneself within a camp, to become a member of a clan. Discussion then becomes a space of identity alignment, where the issue is no longer understanding, but showing to which group one belongs, to the “right group,” of course. In this context, bad faith becomes almost legitimate, even natural, for once one is convinced of defending the “right” cause, the end seems to justify the means, and loyalty to the camp prevails over concern for integrity.

Moreover, complexity is frightening, because it forces us to recognise contradictions, limits, grey areas, blind spots, even nonsense. It weakens certainties and self-images, it exposes our cognitive difficulties, whereas binary judgment spares us such ordeals, simplifying reality and reassuring the mind. One must also recognise that some people, indeed many, derive

no pleasure from conceptual analysis, as they seek above all validation, agreement, and recognition. For them, discussion is not a work of the mind, but an affective exchange, a relational operation, a scene of mutual confirmation. And very often, in many contexts, discussion simply means winning or losing, since one is right and the other wrong, necessarily. The debate is thus conceived as a confrontation, and if we adopt this model, taking distance becomes useless, even suspect: someone must be right, the other wrong, and the discussion ends there.

Ultimately, binary judgment proves to be an existential posture, for holding sharp positions gives an impression of strength, clarity, and identity, one feels “sure” of oneself. This “strength” is not only psychological, it is also practical, from the fact that judgment enables action, since to judge is to decide, and to decide is already to act in a certain direction. Judgment brings clarity and certainty, and indeed, clarity and certainty are in general necessary conditions for action; without a firm position, one hesitates, delays, or remains paralysed by doubt. In this sense, binary judgment offers not only identity and reassurance, but also a practical orientation in the world. Complexity, by contrast, may be experienced as weakness, indecision, or even betrayal. With us or against us, everything is there, and radicality becomes a way of existing. At bottom, this behaviour reveals a difficulty in considering ideas as autonomous objects, capable of being examined for their own sake, as fragile and limited positions or propositions. Thus, as long as ideas remain tied to comfort, identity, or belonging, discussion does not move beyond the stage of “I like” or “I do not like”, it ceases to be a work of thought and becomes a simple affective mirror. Taking sides provides safety and identity, whereas reflection sustains uncertainty in order to preserve the openness of thought.