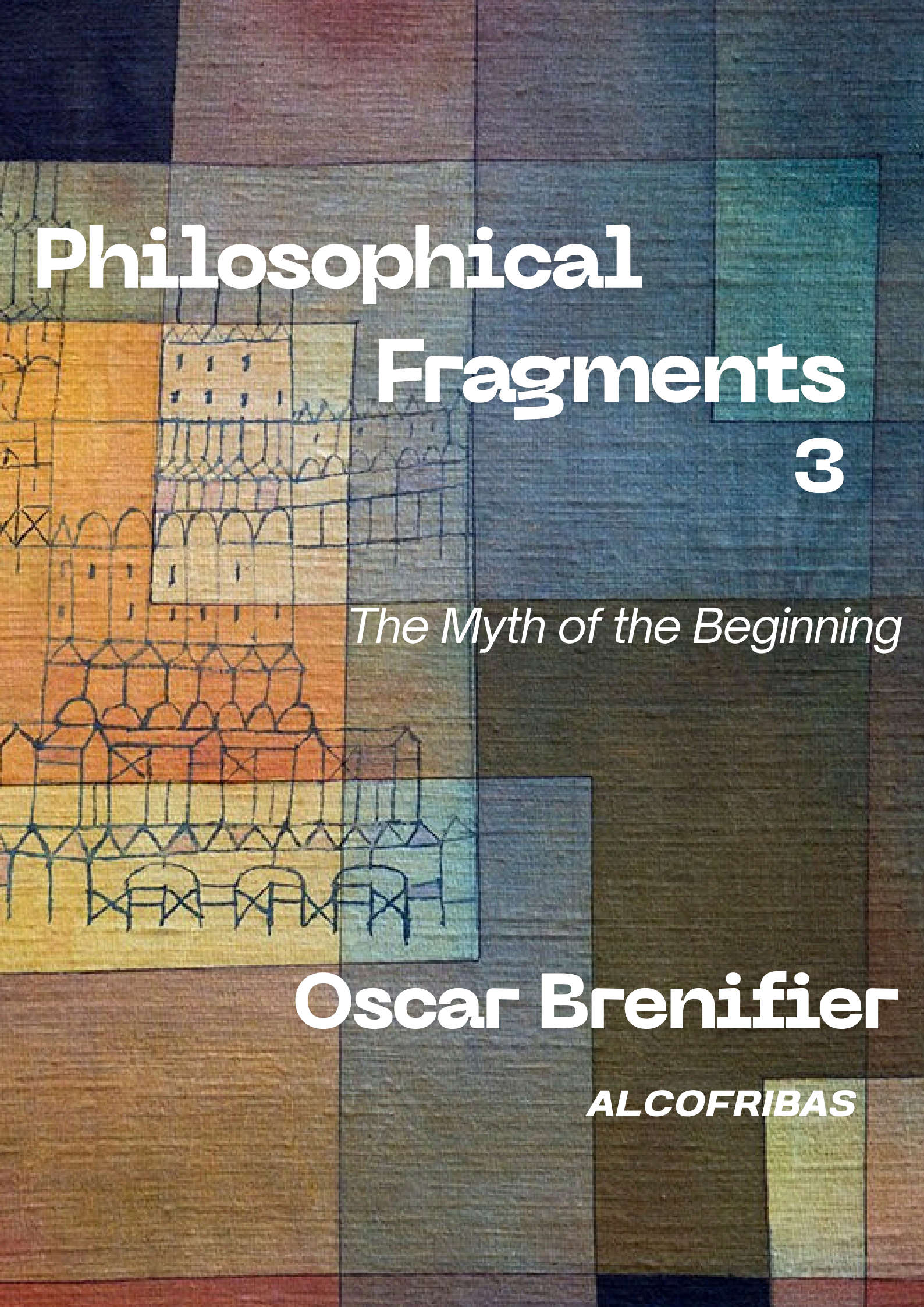

Philosophical Fragments 3

The Myth of the Beginning

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PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS 3

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445 – The Myth of the Beginning

Weak forms of speech, empty remarks or barely sketched expressions, are often defended in the name of their supposed inaugural role, an initial attempt at dialogue, an ice breaker. A “fragment” of discourse is thus no longer seen as an evasion, but as a beginning, an opening, a point of departure; banal exchanges are no longer empty, but a sign of openness. Conventional politeness, comments about the weather, and contentless social exchanges are presented as necessary thresholds, indispensable preliminaries to any genuine speech. One should welcome such remarks, accompany them, refrain from judging them, in order to allow a more authentic speech to eventually emerge.

This thesis, appealing in its gentleness, nonetheless deserves examination, for it rests on a fundamental confusion between possibility and reality. That a fragment, snippet or scrap, may be a beginning does not mean that it is one, nor that it will necessarily lead to something more substantial. That a superficial exchange may evolve into meaningful speech does not mean that it actually tends toward it. In practice, when one observes “ordinary” dialogues, these forms are not beginnings, but complacent states that suffice unto themselves. They prepare nothing, they occupy time and space, they saturate the exchange, they fill without orienting. They function as a perpetual preamble, settling in without leading to what one might expect from them, and the various interlocutors continue in the same register, indefinitely prolonging this preamble without ever entering into a dialogue worthy of the name.

Thus, this illusion of beginning functions as an alibi, it justifies the absence of rigor by presenting it as a stage, it gives a positive value to what is often mere avoidance. It sustains a form of unconsidered hope, the idea that, by simply letting things unfold, something will eventually arise on its own. But this hope primarily functions as an indefinite suspension of demand, a way of postponing genuine entry into

thought. What presents itself as patience or openness often amounts to a form of procrastination, as one delays the moment of engagement under the pretext of respecting a process that never actually begins.

By refusing to judge the fragment for what it is, a snippet of speech, one abandons the distinction between what is searching and what is evading. Everything becomes potentially fertile, and therefore nothing truly is. What we find here is a subtle form of moralism, which values receptivity, benevolence, and continuity, while disqualifying any form of rupture or judgment as violence or arrogance. But this morality of gentleness comes at a cost, as it forbids the critical gesture, inhibits any meaningful initiative, prevents decision, and neutralizes reflection. For thinking requires distinguishing, excluding, refusing; without this, there is no work, only an undifferentiated flow.

Small talk provides a particularly revealing example of this phenomenon. It is presented as a minimal social bond, a way of entering into relation. Yet this bond is precisely coded to avoid any real involvement, it protects each person from exposure, guarantees the absence of risk, and reduces dialogue to a series of polite formalities, platitudes, or clever remarks, where everyone carefully avoids being truly engaged. The exchange thus collapses into ritualized forms of politeness that prevent any real implication. In this sense, it is not a beginning but a closure, a space where nothing can happen, because everything has already been neutralized. Although, in any enterprise or activity, the beginning can function as its own justification; once established, it draws us in, locks us in, it makes disengagement difficult and continuation becomes a matter of inertia.

The defense of the fragment and that of banality, the appeal to common courtesy and benevolence thus stem from the same gesture: transforming a weakness into a virtue. What lacks form becomes openness, what lacks content becomes potential, what lacks engagement becomes respect; one no longer describes what is, one justifies it. Yet a genuine beginning is recognized by something else, as it

commits, it orients, its promise is already visible, the outline already announces what follows, reality shows through. It contains direction, tension, and demand, it does not merely exist, it works. Most fragments have none of this, since they carry no necessity, they produce no effect other than maintaining distance and indeterminacy. The point is not to despise these forms, but to name them for what they are, to identify them. For as long as one confuses the threshold with movement, one remains in place while believing oneself to advance. And as long as one calls “beginning” what is merely avoidance, one condemns oneself never to begin.

446 – The Rejection of the Negative

When a critique is directed at a person, the reaction is often immediate: the speaker is accused of being “negative”, “pessimistic”, or even “contemptuous”. The content of the analysis recedes into the background, its validity is not examined; what matters instead becomes its supposed tone or intention. This shift is not anecdotal, it reveals a series of mechanisms that short-circuit the very exercise of thought.

The first mechanism is the confusion between truth and agreeableness. An idea is judged not on the basis of its relevance, but on its emotional effect, and if it disturbs, it is disqualified. The implicit criterion thus becomes “to please”, “to give confidence”, and above all “not to disturb”, rather than to determine what is “true”. Thought is thereby subjected to a demand for comfort, it must reassure, not illuminate or challenge, in the name of empathy or under the guise of sensitivity. Yet the distinction must also work in the opposite direction: the fact that a criticism disturbs does not make it true any more than it makes it false, discomfort is not an epistemological criterion, whether invoked against criticism or in its favour.

The second mechanism is the personalization of discourse. Instead of examining

what is said, attention shifts to the one who says it, their attitude is labelled: “You are negative”, “You are harsh”, “You are arrogant”, or even attributed malicious intentions: “you want to hurt”, “you want to belittle”, “you take pleasure in criticizing”, and so on. This shift makes it possible to avoid confronting the content, for one no longer refutes an idea, we “pathologize” the speaker, a refined way of not thinking, not responding, and protecting oneself. This personalization of discourse is reinforced by a deeper mechanism, as the individual does not merely hold ideas, they identify with them. Thought becomes an extension of the self, a support of legitimacy. A critique is then no longer perceived as an examination of a proposition, but as a threat directed at the individual. This confusion is not accidental; it can function as a form of defense, as it allows one to reject criticism without having to engage with it. In this context, the relationship to others tends to replace the relationship with truth, what matters is less the content of what is said than the perceived intention behind it, affective judgment precedes cognitive evaluation and often substitutes for it. Because it is immediate, it appears more certain, yet it is precisely this immediacy that makes it unreliable, as one reacts before one understands, and this reaction is then taken as sufficient justification. But the same requirement must apply to the person who criticizes, as interpreting the rejection of criticism as self-protection, fragility, bad faith, or defensiveness can itself become a convenient way of avoiding criticism of the criticism. Such motives cannot be inferred merely from the fact that someone resists what we say. Otherwise the interpretation becomes self-confirming: every objection is transformed into further evidence that the person refuses to think. The critic must therefore submit their own interpretation to the same examination they demand from others. “You are defensive” is no more an answer to an argument than “you are negative”.

A third mechanism lies in the social valorization of the “positive”. In many contexts, educational, psychological, or professional, there exists a norm, implicit if not explicit: one must encourage, support, or validate. Criticism becomes suspect, assimilated to a form of violence or destructiveness. Yet this norm produces a paradoxical effect: under the guise of psychological support, it forbids any real

testing of ideas, any possibility of self-transcendence. It “protects” individuals, but weakens their capacity to think, to see themselves from the outside, to understand or master themselves. Elevated to a social convention, this injunction takes on the name of “respect” and becomes, in effect, an unavoidable moral obligation. This does not mean that the manner in which criticism is expressed is irrelevant, as someone may identify something true while using that truth to humiliate, dominate, or belittle another person. Two questions must therefore remain distinct: whether the criticism is justified, and what the critic is doing with it. Cruelty does not make a true criticism false, but truth does not make cruelty legitimate. One may therefore reject the manner of the criticism, or even refuse the relationship in which it occurs, without thereby having refuted the criticism itself. On a more theoretical level, this fear of the negative can also be seen as a prejudice characteristic of our time: that of a generalized fragility of individuals. The human being is implicitly perceived as vulnerable, easily wounded, incapable of bearing direct speech or rigorous analysis, sentimental rather than rational. One must therefore spare, protect, and shield them. Reason itself comes to be suspected of harshness, even of cruelty or violence, as if its critical function constituted a danger. This reversal is telling, as what should emancipate becomes what must be tempered. In seeking to protect individuals from the harshness of thought, one in fact deprives them of what could strengthen them, an attitude that may reveal a lack of confidence in the human being, as if they were incapable of enduring the trial of lucidity, whereas it is precisely this confrontation that can nourish resilience, the capacity to withstand, to transform, and to stand before reality without collapsing.

Added to this is a mechanism of reinforcement of the identity that is displayed and claimed. For a rigorous analysis does not concern abstract ideas alone, it touches, directly or indirectly, the image each person has of themselves. To be contradicted, to be criticized, is to risk seeing this image be shaken or broken. Accusing the other of negativity can then allow one to preserve the integrity of this image without having to revise it. Criticism is thus sometimes perceived and described as a personal attack, rather than as an invitation to examine oneself, which in turn can nourish a form of bad faith in the individual and reinforce their lack of freedom. One must also mention the cognitive difficulty that analysis itself represents.

Thinking requires distinguishing, problematizing, and deciding, which implies effort. Faced with this effort, one possible reaction is to dismiss the analysis by reducing it to a label: “it’s negative”. This global judgment spares one from entering into detail; it simplifies what is complex, flattens the content, at the cost of understanding.
Finally, there is a deeper misunderstanding of the nature of critique itself, as it is spontaneously associated with negation and destruction. Yet to critique, in the strong sense, is to discern, to separate, to examine the conditions of validity of a statement. On a more classical level, one could recall, following G. W. F. Hegel, that negativity is not an accident of thought, but one of its essential conditions, as it is through negation, contradiction, and differentiation that thought advances and becomes determinate. Thus, a critique can be severe without being arbitrary, disturbing without being unfounded. To reject critique in the name of the “positive” is to reject the very principle of distinction, crucial to reason.

Thus, accusing someone of “seeing things negatively” can be more than an affective reaction, it can function as a mode of defense. It allows one to avoid discomfort, preserve a self-image, conform to a social norm, and bypass the effort of thinking. But diagnosing such a defense must never substitute for examining the objection itself, as the psychology of neither party determines the validity of what is being said. This strategy comes at a cost, as it transforms dialogue into an exchange of mutual validations, a complacent attitude where truth is no longer at stake. This supposed courtesy in fact conceals a profound dishonesty, where it becomes forbidden to say what one truly thinks. For if thought must be positive in order to be acceptable, it ceases to be free, it becomes decorative, it no longer thinks, it merely reassures.

447- The Cost of Wealth

Attachment to wealth is rarely presented as a problem. It is occasionally criticised

on moral or religious grounds, associated with greed, injustice or abusive power. But such critiques, while not without relevance, tend to remain external to the individual's experience. The issue we want to address is different, as it is not whether wealth is morally justified, but how attachment to it transforms one's relation to oneself, to others, and to reality. Wealth is often justified in the name of security, responsibility, or freedom, yet this attachment introduces a series of existential and psychological distortions that are rarely examined, precisely because they are socially validated.

Of course, people tend to equate wealth with happiness, as it gives the impression we can satisfy all our needs. Although this tendency does not arise solely from the convenience or security that material resources provide, but also from the fact that wealth offers a clear, comparable, and accumulable metric. By contrast, happiness remains vague, subjective, and difficult to measure. One thus substitutes what can be calculated for what resists calculation, and wealth becomes a proxy, creating the illusion that by increasing it, one approaches fulfillment. And financial gains must translate into greater satisfaction, empowerment, recognition, etc. Yet this substitution rests on a confusion: wealth is an external possession, whereas happiness relates to inner experience and the quality of one's relation to the world. When a means is mistaken for an end, accumulation replaces engagement, and one may end up having more and more, while becoming increasingly unable to determine whether one is actually living better for it.

Thus, the first distortion is a shift in the order of value, since money, which is by nature a means, becomes an end. We no longer ask ourselves what is worth doing, but what we need to do in order to "gain" or "preserve". Decisions are no longer guided by meaning, but by calculation, costs, profit or loss. Without necessarily noticing it, one's existence becomes organized around accumulation and protection, which induces anxiety. Life is no longer lived from within, it is conditioned from the outside, as we are concerned with "having" rather than "being". This shift tends to lead to a more insidious reduction: money becomes the implicit criterion of evaluation. What cannot be quantified tends to lose value, or to disappear from consideration altogether.

Consequently, this is no longer merely an implicit hierarchy, but an exclusion: whatever eludes measurement becomes suspect, or even non-existent. There is no longer any room for the immeasurable, only for the comparable, the controllable, the calculable. Consequently, everything that cannot be translated into quantifiable terms is disqualified or forced to distort itself: love, dignity, meaning, truth itself. Either we reduce them to measurable equivalents, at the cost of altering them, or we relegate them outside the realm of what truly matters. This reduction thus affects not only the richness of experience but also the very capacity to think. For what exceeds measure ceases to be grasped and eventually ceases to be perceived. Thought closes in on what it can grasp, and in doing so, it impoverishes itself. Thus, the logic of wealth does not merely produce anxiety or comparison, it engenders a form of structural blindness. Relationships, activities, even personal qualities are assessed in terms of income, efficiency, or return. The world is no longer approached in its plurality, but filtered through an exclusive metric. Such a reduction simplifies decision-making, but at the cost of distorting and flattening reality, as what does not translate into financial terms becomes secondary, insignificant or ignored.

At its extreme, this dynamic can produce a form of brutality, out of power and greed, not necessarily in overt behaviour, but in the way reality and others are treated, in a very arbitrary and careless way. This dynamic can manifest itself in a more raw form when external constraints ease, thus, a greater wealth, by offering wider freedom of action and reducing dependence on others, tends to further lift certain inhibitions. What remains contained or concealed under the pressure of necessity then becomes more visible. Conversely, poverty imposes limits that can function as a form of minimal regulation, a social constraint that forces one to accommodate others, a type of morality. For wealth does not necessarily transform human nature, but it does alter the conditions under which it is expressed, it makes certain excessive tendencies more apparent, particularly when the sense of power and control increases.

When everything is evaluated in terms of gain and preservation, what resists or

does not serve these ends tends to be dismissed, instrumentalized, or eliminated. Sensitivity gives way to efficiency, reality is reduced to utility. At the same time, this evaluative framework introduces more silent effects, since value is constantly measured and compared, it generates issues that are rarely acknowledged: a diminished sense of self when one feels “poor”, shame, and a latent discomfort in the presence of those who possess more, envy. These painful affects remain implicit, yet they shape perception and behaviour in a continuous way. Moreover, when individuals base their value on what they own, their identity becomes dependent on whatever guarantees that ownership, be it a company, an individual or some institution, whoever ensures their stability, thereby acquiring decisive power over them, with all the existential consequences this situation entails. Conversely, those who hold financial resources seek not only to possess, but to secure and expand this dependence, thereby exercising a form of domination over others, thereby inducing or exacerbating the individual’s existential alienation. The attachment to wealth is connected to a second illusion, the belief that wealth guarantees autonomy, as in reality, attachment to money creates a form of dependence. One’s sense of stability becomes tied to external conditions, such as unstable markets, variable income, comparisons with others, being cheated and robbed. A loss, or even the possibility of loss, is enough to produce anxiety or anger. What appears as control is in fact a fragile equilibrium, constantly exposed to fluctuation. The individual believes they possess, but in fact they are possessed by a powerful ghost.

This dependence introduces a third element: fear, since the more one has, the more one fears losing. This fear does not always appear as panic, but as a continuous background tension, a latent anxiety. One anticipates, secures, optimizes, the mind becomes oriented toward risk management rather than engagement with the present. Life is no longer approached as an experience, but as a problem to be solved, and ironically, the richer people are, the more such anxiety accumulates, in spite of the outer appearance of comfort, personal worth and self-confidence.

Relationships are also affected, since others are no longer encountered simply as

persons, but as variables within a system of value. They may be seen as useful, threatening, enviable, or inferior, and trust becomes difficult, because ulterior motives are suspected. Generosity becomes ambiguous, because it risks loss or manipulation, or just ungratefulness, as we expect a fair return on the "investment". Personal recognition is sought, but never fully accepted, since it may be attributed to wealth rather than to the self. As well, since wealth is defined in terms of possession, it introduces a comparative logic: what one has only acquires meaning in relation to what others have. This transforms existence into a field of competition, where value is no longer intrinsic but relative, constantly measured, contested, and renegotiated.

Wealth also tends to seek visibility, through objects, signs and various forms of display, such as homes, vehicles, clothing, etc., as these exhibitions function not only as markers of possession, but as means of recognition, a form of social signalling, a rather superficial preoccupation. Moreover, this search for recognition is not without consequence: by making differences visible, it reinforces competition and introduces tensions into social relations, what is presented as success may be received as distance or implicit hierarchy. What is meant to affirm status may simultaneously generate discomfort or silent rivalry, jealousy, thereby altering the quality and authenticity of relationships. But remains a permanent doubt: is recognition here still recognition of the person, or merely of what the person manages to exhibit?

It is therefore not surprising that money becomes a frequent source of squabble, both within families and in society at large. When value is tied to possession and constantly compared, differences are easily experienced as injustice, threat, or imbalance, turning relationships into sites of opposition rather than cooperation. In such a framework, conflict becomes almost inevitable. When value is measured through possession, differences are not neutral: they are perceived as inequalities to be justified, contested, or compensated. What could remain a simple difference becomes a source of strain. Conflicts are further intensified by divergent ways of relating to money within the same household, various differences which generate friction. Although what appears as a simple disagreement about spending or saving

often reflects deeper, unexamined assumptions about security, freedom, or value. But as these assumptions remain implicit, they are not discussed as such, and the conflict becomes fixed at the level of behaviour, on the money management, where compromise is more difficult. Apparently, differences in the way money is perceived and used tend to provoke fights, but these are not merely practical disagreements, they are clashes of implicit frameworks: what one experiences as prudence, another may perceive as restriction, what one calls freedom, another may see as irresponsibility. Thus we wonder if these conflicts are really about money, or if money is simply the visible surface of incompatible worldviews and opposite ways of existing.

At a deeper level, attachment to wealth alters identity, provoking instability. When one's sense of worth is tied to what one has, any change in possession or income becomes a change in self. One oscillates between superiority and insecurity, depending on the choice of comparison and circumstance. In such a framework, competition becomes constant, since one's value is no longer grounded, but fluctuates with relative position. This instability produces a double movement: one elevates oneself by diminishing others, yet in doing so undermines one's own worth, since it remains dependent on the same unstable measure. The self becomes wobbly, as it is grounded in something that is itself unstable. The paradox is obvious: wealth is pursued as a means of freedom, yet attachment to it often results in constraint. One does not simply use money, one begins to organize one's life around it. Choices narrow, risks are avoided, possibilities are filtered through the lens of preservation. This does not mean that wealth is inherently problematic, it becomes so when it ceases to be a tool and becomes a reference point for existence, or an obsession. The question is therefore not how much one has, but what place our "wealth" occupies. Does money serve life, or does life serve money?

Moreover, we can observe an interesting phenomenon, that beyond a certain threshold, when basic needs are largely satisfied, the pursuit of additional wealth tends to lose its immediate functional justification and meaning. Thus rather than bringing fulfillment, the saturation reveals a form of emptiness, what was expected

to provide satisfaction exposes its limits. This does not necessarily lead to a reorientation toward other dimensions of existence, where “gathering” would lose its central role, since what appears as a turn toward other interests is often only a displacement of the same logic, as accumulation persists in more indirect or symbolic forms, without clear purpose. Thus “rich” people then look for other meaningful activities, such as charity, art, studying, spirituality, etc., which are new arenas for accumulation, recognition, and comparison. With the exception of those who see financial activities as a game, a “hobby” which provides its daily dose of excitement, instead of an “earning” function.

To detach from wealth does not require renouncing it, but reestablishing its proper function, its adequate role, by restoring its relative place among other dimensions of existence, no longer granting it a central or determining power in the evaluation of oneself and of reality, not allowing it to become the implicit measure of all things. It means being able to lose money without losing oneself, to use it without depending on it, to act without constantly calculating. In this sense, the real issue is not financial, but existential: whether one’s stability comes from what they have, or from how one stands in relation to what they have, what can be called true freedom.

There are, moreover, other objects, other forms of possession, that are not psychologically neutral. Firearms are a clear example: their mere presence alters one’s relation to the world, they do not merely function as instruments, they act as psychological mediators. To hold a weapon is already to situate oneself within a logic of power, of possible threat, of control, of self-confidence. Attention is reorganised, perception becomes more acute, the world itself may appear as a potential danger The weapon introduces distance, it transforms the relationship into a latent power dynamic. It does not necessarily create aggression, but it facilitates its emergence, it lowers its threshold.

Thus, certain objects are not mere possessions: they reconfigure the one who possesses them. Wealth operates, at another level, according to a comparable logic, it is not only a means of acting upon the external world, it modifies one’s

relation to others and to oneself, for it confers a sense of power and self-sufficiency. Feeling “less dependent”, the individual becomes less constrained by others, and therefore less attentive to them; empathy may diminish, not out of malice, but through distance. The social world appears less as a fabric of interdependence than as a space onto which one projects one’s own will. To this is added a more subtle transformation: the perception of oneself, as wealth tends to justify itself. It is often accompanied by an implicit narrative of merit, which reinforces a sense of legitimacy, for what is possessed comes to appear as what is owed, as a value in itself. Chance, conditions, and structures recede behind the idea of personal success, and there emerges a form of inner self-evidence that makes any questioning more difficult. Like the weapon, wealth acts as an amplifier. It does not create traits of character ex nihilo, but it accentuates them, makes them more visible, more effective. It can strengthen confidence, but also indifference, it can provide security, but also isolation. It shifts thresholds, since what was once perceived as excessive becomes normal, what might once have raised doubt becomes legitimate. The question, then, is not merely what we possess, but what these possessions make of us.

448 – The Stakes of Dialogue

Recently, following the publication of a text on the “unknown genius”, someone asked whether there is a connection between this syndrome and the Nietzschean aspiration to overhumanity. I replied, by outlining that the “unknown genius” clings to a self-proclaimed superiority that demands recognition without undergoing transformation, whereas Friedrich Nietzsche’s idea of the overhuman calls for a continual self-overcoming that destroys any fixed identity rather than protecting it, giving rise to genuine creativity. But I then sought to question my interlocutor about the nature of his relationship to these concepts and the motive behind his interest, by questioning him directly on this point. After a few exchanges, they

eventually replied, somewhat irritated: “Those are rather impertinent questions… I am just discussing, that is all, and I even congratulated you on your publication, which concerns everyone a little, and some more deeply in particular.” This exchange led me once again to reflect on the difference between conversation and dialogue, between the cultural and the existential, between decorative and transformative exchange, between social niceties and effective speech. For while “cultivated” people are quite willing to talk about ideas, they rarely allow ideas to speak about them.

A question may appear philosophical at first glance, without in any way engaging the person who poses it. It is enough to draw an appealing connection, to establish an analogy between famous authors, to relate various ideas or patterns of thought, to evoke a problem or any other intellectual stimulus, for reflection to begin. One compares, nuances, distinguishes, then elaborates and speculates. All of this may be correct, relevant, sometimes even brilliant, or not. Nevertheless, an important question remains, more silent, often forgotten or neglected: “What effect does this thought have on the one who produces it?”, or again, “What is at stake in these ideas for their author?”, in other words: “What does it really amount to?”, whether for the speaker or for the listener.

For there are two ways of thinking, which differ less in their content than in their function. The first corresponds to what the medieval tradition called *curiositas*. It is a disordered desire to know, scattered, often driven by novelty, distraction, or even the need to appear knowledgeable, an open, shifting interest directed toward a multiplicity of objects of knowledge. The mind unfolds, but does not gather itself. This curiosity latches on for a moment, explores, establishes connections, seeks, accumulates knowledge and distinctions. It is rather legitimate, even necessary, since it nourishes culture and refines intelligence, insofar as it is not merely erudition but also involves reflecting on what is evoked. Yet it remains external and formal; it does not require the subject to be at stake, it even resists such an exercise and protects itself from it. Thus one may think a great deal, even deeply, without ever being affected by what one thinks, a phenomenon that is quite common in the academic world, and even more so in the social sphere.

The second, opposite way of thinking refers to *studiositas*. Here, thought does not merely examine an object, as it engages the one who works through it. It requires self-mastery, it is an ascetic practice of the mind: to focus, to choose, to persevere, to accept difficulty, and to renounce what distracts attention, avoiding vain or secondary questions. It implies a discipline of the desire to know: selecting, deepening, persisting, challenging, seeking to surpass oneself, since the obstacle is not external but internal, in the tendency to disperse, to avoid effort, or to preserve one's image. The question is no longer simply: "What does this idea mean?" or "What is the difference between these two notions?", but: "In what way does this distinction concern me?". Reflection becomes a trial, it no longer aims solely at understanding, but at a form of transformation of the individual, or at least the initiation of an inner shift. Therefore, what is at stake is not the degree of sophistication of the reasoning or the extent of one's knowledge, but the position of the subject, even their identity.

In *curiositas*, the subject remains intact, since one moves among ideas as in a landscape, like a tourist, without anything forcing one to take a position. In *studiositas*, on the contrary, thought introduces tension, it compels one to choose, to recognise oneself, to put oneself to the test, sometimes to renounce certain comfortable certainties. *Studiositas* is not a "psychologisation" of philosophy, but a demand for truth, for it is not a matter of "telling one's life", but of "submitting one's life to the idea". *Curiositas* is a disordered desire to know, detached from any existential concern. *Studiositas* is an ordered, selected desire to know, oriented toward an existential demand, which engages the subject and presupposes self-mastery. In *curiositas*, thought follows the subject, in *studiositas*, it transforms it. If *curiositas* disperses the mind, *studiositas* gathers it, concentrates it, brings it back to itself, it produces a kind of mise en abyme of the subject.
Yet in most intellectual exchanges, one observes a natural tendency toward the "neutralisation" of discourse, and subtly, an avoidance takes place. A question that could open onto an existential stake is gradually reduced or maintained at the level of a simple discussion of ideas, out of a requirement of "decency", and the passage

from conversation to dialogue is experienced as a form of intrusion. One acknowledges the relevance of distinctions, agrees, adds a nuance, elaborates, and then moves on; one discusses, and then goes to dinner together.
In this context, even a compliment can serve a specific purpose: not so much to express appreciation as to smooth things over, defuse tension, or maintain a favorable position in the interaction. It becomes a way to wrap things up without confrontation, to offer praise without exposing oneself, or even to elicit reciprocal appreciation in return. Taken to the extreme, this mechanism can take the form of outright sycophancy: words that align with the other person's expectations, not out of genuine agreement but out of calculation, in order to preserve one's standing, secure a favor, or avoid the risk inherent in any binding statement. Thus, what appears to be a mark of esteem can function as a regulatory tool, keeping discourse within the bounds of propriety. The compliment then does not serve to acknowledge a thought, but to prevent it from becoming a trial, and prevent any tensions that might arise, as my interlocutor did in his reply.
Consequently, the thought functions, but it does not work, and this deviation is not accidental, it corresponds to a form of protection. For as soon as thought becomes *studiositas*, it ceases to be distant; it calls one into question, which, for "respectable people", is taboo. The taboo is in fact that of transparency: in a "decent" society, one has the right to speak about everything, provided one speaks about no one, the subject remains absent, and by breaking this code, discussion becomes a trial. It is precisely this "interpellation" that made Socrates unbearable to his interlocutors, as he questioned them relentlessly. It calls into question the image one has of oneself, introduces discomfort, and therefore induces resistance. Thus it is more comfortable to remain with curiositas, where one can continue to think without being affected, without having to change anything, without letting oneself be disturbed

Thus, the essential difference is not between the concepts one manipulates, in their respective definitions, but between two ways of inhabiting them. One may speak about everything, understand much, and yet risk nothing, or one may accept that an idea, even a simple one, upset the balance they maintained until then. The

question is therefore not whether a reflection is interesting, but whether it engages, not whether it illuminates, but whether it compels, not whether it enriches knowledge, but whether it puts at stake the one who “knows”. This engagement is not a mere detail or a psychological difference, it produces a cognitive transformation: to make thought an existential experience is to deepen its understanding and to alter its assimilation. A thought that engages transforms one’s apprehension of an idea, it is no longer merely grasped, it is experienced and integrated. Thus it is strange, ironic, even absurd to elaborate at length on Nietzsche’s overman without being in the slightest affected by the idea, as if it were an ancient vase displayed in a museum, carefully described while scrupulously avoiding experiencing its force, contemplated without ever measuring oneself against it.

449- Falling in love

One often hears that love cannot be commanded. It would arise spontaneously, like a spark, beyond will or control, hence the expression “to fall” in love, with a verb that conveys a lack of agency, a loss of mastery over oneself, therefore bearing a rather negative connotation. Others, with a more moralistic or “reasonable” view of the relationship, insist that love is primarily a commitment, a choice that must be maintained regardless of emotional fluctuation and life's uncertainties. These two positions appear opposed, yet they share the same weakness: both simplify the nature of love, what it actually requires, its problematic nature.
To claim that love simply “happens”, to describe it as a fortuitous accident, is to reduce it to a mere passive experience. We become the spectator of our own emotions, as if love were a natural phenomenon, like a storm or a change in temperature, a regrettable mishap, as when we slip on ice, or a stroke of luck, a moment of grace. But such a view has consequences: it conveniently absolves responsibility for any further development; in the same way, if love fades, nothing

can be done, just as when it appears, nothing is chosen. But in that case, what is called “love” can only refer to what passively occurs, that is, attraction, desire, or emotional intensity. In some manner, it is not yet a relation, only a state. Yet the opposite reduction is no less problematic, as to claim that love is a decision risks emptying it of substance, its vitality, its momentum, its power to unsettle. One could then love by principle, by duty, by sheer decision, even in the absence of any genuine impulse. Love becomes an act of will, or a moral obligation, but such a conception quickly turns formal and artificial. A purely voluntary love resembles obedience more than attachment, it may endure, but it no longer lives, actually a common phenomenon, when couples stay together out of “reason”, whether it is for the sake of the children, practical or financial considerations, or simply out of habit.

Indeed, without some decision, love risks being merely passive, as without some feeling, it risks being merely mechanical, and the tension remains. In fact, both positions avoid the same difficulty: love is neither purely undergone nor purely produced, it confronts the individual with a conflict or a strain between passivity and activity, between what imposes itself and what must be sustained. Love begins without us, as something strikes, attracts, disturbs us, and at this stage there is no decision on our part, one does not choose to be touched, we do not determine in advance what affects us. But what follows is no longer of the same nature, since love does not persist by itself: it requires interpretation, care, attention, and willy-nillly it demands some effort on our part, sometimes painfully so. We cannot avoid taking a position or making decisions, about what we experience, and how we respond to unfolding events.

The problem becomes more apparent toward the end of a romantic relationship, when the illusion is most easily mistaken for reality. People claim they are “falling out of love”, as if it were a purely natural decline, like the fading of a sensation. But this decline is rarely a simple disappearance, even though it might take place in the long run, through time. In general, it can also be the result of a withdrawal: a refusal to engage when love ceases to be immediate, effortless, or gratifying. When the other resists our expectations, when the relation introduces friction, when a sense

of routine and repetition sets in, the initial spontaneity is no longer sufficient to sustain desire. Something else is required: attention, effort, initiative, and the capacity and willingness to reflect, to engage in dialogue, and to innovate, in order to nourish a relationship that no longer relies on immediacy. To love, then, is not only to feel, but to sustain and support. Nevertheless it does mean to imitate or artificially fabricate the feeling, but to work with the present affects, or against them, sometimes transcending them. This does not mean forcing oneself formally, but accepting that love exposes us to instability, as it is not a static possession but a dynamic relation, one that must be constantly reinterpreted. But some would then claim that a wise person does not fall in love, as wisdom can be opposed to love, as if lucidity required distance, and risky engagement implied a loss of self-control. But this supposed wisdom may simply express another way of avoiding exposure, a fear of the uncertainty and vulnerability that love entails. Such an opposition raises a question: is wisdom the refusal of risk, or the capacity to assume it?

Thus, love is grounded in a particular event, or a series of events, but through time it becomes a practice, which, like any practice, implies work and perseverance. It begins as something given, but continues as something enacted. Those who reduce it to spontaneity avoid responsibility, and those who reduce it to decision avoid vulnerability, exposure, being affected or unsettled. In both cases, something essential is lost: the risk inherent in love. Since to love is precisely to accept this unstable space, where one is neither fully master nor entirely passive, it is to endure what happens and to decide what to do with it. The question is not whether love can be decided or not, but whether one is willing to bear what it demands once it has begun. And we should further remember that the risk of love lies in the absence of any guarantee. One may sustain, commit, and endure, yet the outcome remains uncertain, for the response of the other cannot be decided in advance. Love depends not only on what one does, but on what one cannot control, and this irreducible uncertainty is not an “accident” of love, but one of its defining conditions.

450 – The Troll

In Norse mythology, the troll is a strange creature of the margins, primitive, lurking in the shadows of obscure places, caves, forests, or mountains. A hulking being, often deformed or grotesque, which acts in a brutal and unpredictable manner. Malicious, crude and of limited intelligence, it disturbs more than it acts, its function is to frighten and to unsettle. A creature of darkness, it cannot withstand the light, it petrifies as soon as it is exposed to clarity, turning to stone at the break of day. In today's common usage, the term "trolling" refers to a fishing technique that consists in dragging lures through the water from a moving boat, and by extension, on internet, it refers to casting provocations in order to draw out a reaction, to identify and hook a responsive target, less as an interlocutor than as prey. On social media, a "troll" is an individual who intervenes in a discussion not in order to exchange, but to disrupt, provoke, and show themselves. They seek neither dialogue nor persuasion; they distort, caricature, exaggerate, and contradict in an opportunistic and artificial way, with a single aim: to provoke a reaction, to irritate or destabilise others, with little concern for content or truth. They are not an interlocutor but a mechanism of disruption, and by turning exchange into a game of disturbance, they avoid having to think about what is being said, as they seek primarily to "exist", to be noticed.

The contemporary troll is no longer a mythological creature, yet it retains the essential traits, it changes form without changing nature. It is just as "hulking", when imposing its unwelcome presence, as it lives off disruption and disorder**,** driven by a certain taste for destruction. Although it seeks to be noticed by provoking immediate reactions, we may still say that it avoids "light", in the intellectual sense, as that which illuminates, clarifies, and exposes discourse to examination. To be seen does not imply being understood, and the troll's remarks are often empty, incoherent, or inappropriate. In order to be effective, it must maintain a certain opacity, an instability of meaning, so as to escape any grasp. It wants to be seen, but not elucidated; noticed, but not examined. It captures

attention while eluding understanding, playing on absurdity, aggression, and vulgarity. Nonsense, ad hominem attacks, and the fixation on trivial points are the common tools of trolling, but what makes them trolling is their repetitive and insistent deployment, not to clarify or advance the discussion, but to maintain a reaction and keep the target engaged. While trolling often appears deliberate, some individuals reproduce the same mechanism not as a strategy, but as a habitual or unreflective mode of engagement, rather unconsciously. Yet what matters is less the intention than the effect: the disruption of dialogue. The troll does not defend an idea, it produces an effect; it does not participate in dialogue, it diverts it. It does not seek recognition as an interlocutor, but visibility as a disruptor. Yet the mythological troll does not aim to annoy, it is above all a figure of otherness and strangeness, acting according to its nature, without clear strategic intent, in contrast with the contemporary troll, who instrumentalises the situation in order to assert his unpleasant self. Nevertheless, alongside this chaotic figure, there is also a more rare type of ideological troll. This one recycles the same themes and always targets the same enemies, he uses trolling to serve a simplistic ideology, and is easily recognizable by his obsessions and his refusal to engage in any coherent argumentation. It practices a similar form of subversion, but in a more identifiable way, both empty and mechanical, where denunciation and sarcasm take the place of thought.

The motivations of the digital troll are multiple. Provocation offers a way of manifesting its presence without truly exposing oneself, guaranteeing a real recognition, as others respond, become indignant, react. It thus gains attention without having to sustain a coherent position or risk genuine thought. It is also a matter of power, since the troll occupies space, saturates it, produces a visible and immediate effect on others, drawing the group's attention toward itself. It also reverses the asymmetry inherent in dialogue, as in a normal exchange, the speaker is exposed to criticism; the troll, however, attacks without committing, forcing others to justify themselves while it evades examination. It thus maintains a position of superiority, without needing or worrying about responding, and it derives a form of power from making others lose their composure. Irritating others

also allows it to externalise its own frustrations, boredom, jealousy, or resentment; rather than addressing this internal tension, it displaces it onto others. One can also observe a strategy of avoiding substantial content altogether. To think is to risk being affected, displaced, or contradicted, thus the troll refuses this risk. By transforming exchange into a game of disruption, through absurdity or untimely intervention, it protects itself from any form of questioning and avoids the trial of meaning. Finally, there is a more basic, somewhat perverse dimension: to destabilise others is to make them lose control, to render them powerless. In this sense, paradoxically, trolling can also produce certain effects that ordinary dialogue avoids. By disrupting the exchange, it reveals vulnerabilities, tests the strength of positions, and exposes implicit attachments. But these effects should not be confused with a constructive function: they stem less from a desire for rational exchange than from a collateral effect of the disruption.

Indeed, the troll is effective, which raises the question of why such a vain figure prospers. First, the troll constantly evades, rarely commits, and leaves no grip for dialogue. Second, its behaviour activates simple and widely shared mechanisms, such as the “need to respond”. It exploits ordinary weaknesses in human functioning: it produces nothing, but activates what is already there, as being attacked or misunderstood calls for an immediate reaction, as silence is perceived as a lack, a weakness, even a moral failure. The troll relies on this inability to “let it slide”, on the refusal to let go, on the tendency toward indignation. It introduces incoherence or bad faith, which others cannot tolerate; they attempt to restore meaning, and it is precisely this effort that traps them.

There is also a common confusion between critique and attack. Human beings are sensitive, and once their self-image is at stake, thought becomes disturbed. One no longer distinguishes between what is said and the effect it has on their self-image, they respond to defend themselves, not in order to clarify. Moreover, the troll disqualifies more than it criticises, so the attention shifts away from examining what is being said toward protecting oneself. The debate then moves from the level

of ideas to that of affects, where the troll is most at ease, it plays with those emotions, it has nothing to lose. Furthermore, the “debate” often becomes personal, the focus is no longer on what is said, but on who is saying it, which provokes even more defensive mechanisms. Added to this is the illusion of dialogue and a lack of critical awareness, since many continue to respond as if they were dealing with a good-faith interlocutor, a naive presupposition. They argue, clarify, nuance, without realising that the framework has shifted. The troll is not concerned with what is said, it seeks neither exchange nor coherence, but the intensity of reaction. We believe we are still in a discussion, and thus we argue, but the game has changed: we play without knowing the rules. Furthermore, responding is also a way of displaying oneself, there is an issue of visibility and recognition, a desire to be right in public. We do not respond only to the troll, since we are “before others”, moved by the aim of “winning”. In short, the troll only needs to push slightly, and the rest unfolds on its own. Of course, these mechanisms are reinforced by the very economy of social media: platforms favour what provokes rapid reactions, indignation, anger, surprise, and the troll produces exactly this, amplifying its impact.

In fact, the troll is not merely an external disruptor, it reveals a deeper human difficulty: the inability to endure silence, contradiction, or absurdity without reacting immediately. It challenges our approach to dialogue, whether we engage in the exchange in order to think, or to justify ourselves, or again to defend a position. Faced with the troll, the simplest and most rational response would be not to respond, yet it is also the most demanding one, and few accept it. Not responding is not merely ignoring the other, it is renouncing the need to justify, to correct, to assert one’s presence. In this sense, the troll acts as a revealer: the problem lies not only with the one who provokes, but also with the one who cannot refrain from responding.

One might wonder why the troll, whose function is to disrupt exchanges, is not more systematically excluded from platforms. This relative tolerance is neither an

oversight nor an accidental weakness, it reflects a deeper logic. First, the troll is difficult to define, it does not always clearly violate rules, but operates at the limit, through irony, insinuation, ambiguity. Expulsion requires an identifiable fault, whereas the troll avoids being fully grasped. It often disturbs without openly crossing the line, and the very fact that others respond lends it a form of legitimacy. There is also a problem of proof and intention: how can one establish that a message aims to disrupt rather than express a clumsy or provocative opinion? Platforms hesitate to sanction what may still be interpreted as participation, and the boundary between legitimate intervention and deliberate disruption remains unclear.

But the main reason lies elsewhere: the troll generates activity, provokes responses, sparks debates, fuels conflict, and each reaction increases visibility, traffic, engagement. In an economy of attention, such behaviour is not a malfunction, but a resource. The troll captures and redistributes attention, keeping exchanges in motion, even at the cost of their degradation. To this structural logic is added a social tolerance: some, indifferent to rationality, see the troll as an amusing provocateur, others as a free critic challenging established views and common rules. Expulsion then appears as censorship or a threat to free expression, making intervention more delicate.

Moreover, the troll is not tolerated despite the lack of meaning in its discourse, but partly because of it. In these virtual spaces, the decisive criterion is not the value of content, but the effect produced. Even empty, the troll's discourse stimulates, it provokes indignation, amusement, or irritation, providing an intensity that many seek more than meaning. There is also a frequent confusion between contradiction and thought: any opposition is valued as a sign of freedom or critical spirit, allowing the troll to appear as a legitimate provocateur while not contributing anything. There is also a form of implicit complicity, since responding to the troll offers an opportunity to display oneself, to correct, to dominate symbolically. One does not merely tolerate it, one uses it as a pretext to exist within the exchange, through defeating the troll, even though an impossible task. Then, ignoring an empty statement requires more discipline than responding, and many prefer to react

rather than endure the absurd. Finally, this tolerance is reinforced by the low level of intellectual demand that often characterises social networks: banality and superficiality dominate, so that the troll easily blends in, it barely stands out. In an environment where discourse is already fragmented, rapid, and poorly developed, the disruption it introduces appears almost ordinary. The absence of thought is not a defect, but a resource: it allows all projections and all reactions, which is precisely what makes the troll effective. Finally, there is a practical limitation: moderation has a cost. It requires identifying behaviours, analysing them, deciding, sanctioning. This demands time, resources, and consistency that is difficult to maintain for regulators. The troll, by contrast, acts quickly and freely, with little to lose. Thus, if the troll is not systematically expelled, it is not because it is harmless, but because it is useful to the functioning of platforms and tolerated by those it disturbs. In conclusion, the troll is not a marginal anomaly, it is a symptom, it reveals a society in which expression takes precedence over meaning, where reaction outweighs reflection. In such a space, what matters is no longer the coherence of a statement, but its capacity to produce an immediate effect. The troll embodies this logic: it builds nothing, but activates, stimulates, captures. Its success also reveals a deeper difficulty in sustaining dialogue, in tolerating contradiction or emptiness without reacting. One prefers to respond, to be indignant, to object, rather than to suspend judgment and think calmly, with rational argumentation. Finally, it highlights a transformation in our relation to speech: speaking is no longer necessarily about seeking truth or understanding, but about existing, occupying space, leaving a trace. In this sense, the troll is not external to contemporary society, it is a concentrated, almost caricatural expression of it.

451 – The Power of Questioning

I am often accused of exercising power abusively in discussions, particularly when I question individuals, sometimes even without knowing them. This accusation rests on a persistent misunderstanding regarding the very nature of questioning. It

is true that asking a question establishes an asymmetry: the one who questions initiates the dialogue and places the other in a position to respond. But to confuse this asymmetry with a seizure of power, moreover one deemed arbitrary, reflects a superficial, even timorous, reading of the situation.

Questioning is not, first and foremost, an exercise of power, it is a risk. The risk of refusal, since many do not wish to enter into a substantive exchange, preferring conventions, social niceties, protective formulas, or even the radicality of monologue. Questioning is then met with a refusal to engage, sometimes even with aggression, as if the mere request to think together constituted a form of violence. The one who questions therefore exposes himself to this rejection, without any guarantee of rationality or reciprocity. But the risk does not end there. When the other agrees to respond, a new demand arises: one must assume that response. To question requires one to take responsibility for what is said, to examine it, to adjust to it, to follow a path that is not necessarily one's own. The questioner must become flexible, enter into the other's framework, interrogate their statements from within without projecting their own categories. One must be creative, able to imagine various angles of reflection, diverse working hypotheses. One must distinguish between evasive or inappropriate responses and those that are surprising yet relevant. This requires a genuine distance from oneself, a suspension of interpretative reflexes and expectations, and an openness to the unexpected. Finally, questioning demands constant self-mastery. Repeated refusals, hostile reactions and attempts at disqualification are not trivial; they often amount to a symbolic murder, a denial of the very legitimacy of interrogative speech. To maintain this position without yielding to violence, resentment, or withdrawal requires an inner discipline that is rarely acknowledged. Thus, what is perceived as an abuse of power is often the opposite: an exposure, an assumed vulnerability, the choice of discomfort in the name of genuine dialogue, even a form of humility. Power seeks to impose itself without return, whereas questioning accepts, without complaint, the possibility of failure. And it is precisely there that it ceases to be domination and becomes a practice of thought, a personal ascetic exercise. It goes without saying that those who limit themselves to exchanging pleasantries,

reproducing habitual social rituals, are neither challenged nor accused of seeking control. They disturb no one because they implicitly accept the social pact of not stirring still waters. Their speech is harmless precisely because it commits to nothing. They do not seize power, certainly, but they also remain powerless, each confined within their own reserve, protected by agreed-upon distance. Or they content themselves with the banal game of exchanging opinions, without commitment or depth; at worst, they receive opposing views, various objections. Any real initiative to understand the other, any attempt to open a space for thought, is then perceived as a power move and provokes unease, jealousy, or resentment. But such reactions reveal less an ethical vigilance than a defensive egocentrism: what is being refused is not domination, but exposure to alterity and the risk it entails.

Those who initiate themselves into questioning realise the difficulty of such an exercise, the responsibility it entails, which is indeed a form of power, but an uncomfortable, unstable, and risky one. Those who criticise this practice fail to grasp the unsettling dimension of the interrogative stance, where one can easily believe in their good intentions and feel frustrated by others' reactions, even being misunderstood or victimised. Paradoxically, learning to question is in fact an apprenticeship in humility.

It would, however, be naïve to ignore that questioning may be experienced as a form of abusive power. In certain contexts, hierarchical or public, when it arises without preparation or consent, it can expose unduly, place someone in excessive difficulty, even compel them to reveal themselves, which in itself is not necessarily problematic as long as refusal remains possible. To ignore this dimension would be to deny the lived experience of others and to impose blindly, under the guise of thought, an unacknowledged asymmetry. One must therefore be able to assess the consequences of their questioning, to measure its possible effects, to know when to suspend, shift, or reformulate a question when the situation requires it, to delay or reframe it when it cannot be received without violence, even to abandon the posture and change register. This does not mean renouncing risk or allowing

oneself to be governed by fear, for the posture of questioning requires maintaining a demand for trust, in oneself and in others, by wagering on each person's capacity to respond and to think rationally.

Yet this demand also carries its distortions. Questioning becomes abusive when it turns into a manipulative procedure: disguised rhetorical questions, chains of inquiry that trap arbitrarily, insistence despite explicit signs of refusal or discomfort, the use of questioning as an instrument of disqualification. In such cases, the aim is no longer to open a space for thought but to constrain or reduce the other. One must therefore be able to recognise these forms and limit their use, for ignoring them does not merely weaken questioning, it undermines its legitimacy. Certainly, the reaction of refusal to answer can stem from a legitimate ethical vigilance, but it may also reflect a difficulty in exposing oneself or entering into a demanding exchange, a reality that the advocates of "benevolence" seek to avoid at all costs. Yet it would be reductive to fix its meaning unilaterally: refusing to respond can also express a legitimate choice, a fundamental freedom, that of not engaging in a given interaction, or not at that moment. That questioning establishes an asymmetry and may be experienced as intrusive is undeniable; it therefore requires tact and competence, attention and self-mastery on the part of the questioner, if only for the sake of effectiveness.

Refusal to respond may also stem from fatigue, fear of exposure, or past trauma, which is understandable, to a certain degree. Thus, in certain cases, the critique of power can be justified, and recognising such excesses does not weaken questioning but clarifies its conditions. But when every question is systematically perceived as an aggression, it is no longer merely domination that is being refused, but alterity itself. The difference is particularly visible between occasional refusal and the systematic rejection of questioning.

Very often, due to excessive anxiety, the dramatisation of questioning freezes its meaning and neutralises its scope: the question becomes worrying rather than

interesting, a threat rather than an opening or a possibility; it ceases to be an opportunity of exploration and becomes a space of defence. Yet, if questioning involves risk, it can also be conceived as a form of play, in the sense of a trial without guarantee, where something may transform without immediately being put in danger. Without this playful dimension, understood as an open and non-defensive movement, dialogue can only collapse. In that case, the question is troubling not so much by its nature as by the inability to conceive it as play, that is, as a space of experimentation where meaning is not fixed in advance. For such a space implies accepting the unpredictable and the uncontrollable, to reconcile with the adventure of thought, relinquishing the illusion of mastery over what will be said, understood, or revealed. It is precisely this loss of control that many resist, preferring the safety of predetermined meanings to the risk of genuine transformation.

452 – Confronting Emotions

A recurring question arises concerning Socratic questioning: how should one deal with the emotions it provokes? Should they be prevented, soothed, transformed, sublimated? Such a question appears legitimate, yet it rests on a questionable presupposition, namely that emotion constitutes a problem in itself, an obstacle to the work of thought, something that ought to be reduced or controlled. Within the framework of Socratic questioning, however, this idea is misleading. Emotions are not undesirable side effects of the process, they are often its most visible sign. They appear precisely where something is touched: a belief, a certainty, an image of oneself, a form of attachment. To seek to eliminate or systematically attenuate them is therefore to risk neutralising what questioning brings into play.

Faced with this difficulty, several attitudes can be distinguished. The first consists in attempting to neutralise or avoid emotions, mobilising various preventive

techniques: avoiding difficult topics, creating distance, reformulating questions or answers in a “benevolent” manner, using humour, all with the aim of maintaining a calm, controlled exchange, free from the risk of overflow. The second attitude consists in regulating emotions rather than suppressing them: a certain tension is accepted, but within limits deemed acceptable. The aim is to contain affects without eradicating them, in order to maintain a secure framework. This more nuanced position recognises the necessity of subjective involvement, while seeking to avoid excess. Yet here again, an implicit limit is introduced: not to go too far, not to “plunge into the problem”. This limit, often invisible, in fact determines the scope of the possible work, and whatever threatens the subject’s balance too strongly is set aside or attenuated. For some practitioners avoid emotion in order not to be affected themselves, while others avoid provoking it in order not to affect their interlocutor; both attitudes reveal a fear of emotions, which are not accepted as such. Moreover, to neutralise or regulate an emotion does not mean to work through it; more often, it merely consists in softening its effects without examining its cause, thus allowing the exchange to continue without truly confronting its stakes.

The third attitude consists in assuming emotions as a criterion of the work itself. From this perspective, emotion is neither an obstacle nor a mere accompaniment; it is an indicator, a revealer. It signals that a sensitive point has been reached, that a resistance has appeared, that a shift is taking place. To seek to make it disappear is then to avoid the question it reveals. The problem is no longer the emotion, but the refusal to become aware of it, to analyse it, to examine its cause. Yet this refusal comes at a cost, for it profoundly transforms the nature of the dialogue. What was an inquiry becomes a controlled conversation, where the existential issues disappear in favour of relational comfort. Questioning then loses its destabilising force, and with it its capacity for transformation. For the important question is not how to calm the emotion, but to understand what it shows. What does it defend? What representation does it protect? What contradiction does it bring to light? What beliefs, presuppositions, or anxieties does it reveal? In this perspective, emotion becomes material for thought rather than an obstacle to it, even if it may

also be appropriate to invite the interlocutor to regain calm in order to examine their emotions more reflectively.

The fear of emotions is not always obvious in nature, as some are simply afraid of receiving them while others are afraid of provoking them; some fear their own emotions, others fear being overwhelmed, losing control, no longer being able to maintain the image they have of themselves as rational, composed, coherent persons. Emotion then appears as a weakness, a regression, almost a threat to their stability or identity. They therefore prefer to avoid it, contain it, or disqualify it, yet to refuse emotion is to refuse a part of oneself. Then, some people fear others' emotions more than their own, not out of empathy but out of discomfort, since to provoke an emotional reaction is to risk conflict, rupture, rejection. It is also to expose oneself to a form of responsibility, that of having provoked something in another. Many therefore prefer to remain in a neutral, consensual register where nothing overflows, thus they speak, but do not truly question; they exchange, but avoid touching anything. There is also a more subtle fear: that of not knowing what to do with emotion once it arises, for what is one to do with anger, with tense silence, with tears, with unease? If one neither seeks to soothe nor to flee, one must be able to sustain this state, to go through it, to question it. This requires a certain endurance, a capacity not to rush toward a solution, a trust in the rational nature of the process. Yet such suspension is difficult, as it requires patience, distance, and self-mastery.

Finally, there is an even more radical fear: that of what emotion reveals, a fear of the underlying structures of one's being. For to provoke an emotion is not merely to produce an effect, it is to open a breach, and within that breach something may appear that neither the one questioned nor the questioner truly controls or wishes to confront: a contradiction, a fragility, an illusion. Some therefore avoid emotion not out of a desire for comfort, but out of fear of what it might bring to light. Thus, the fear of emotions is not merely a matter of sensitivity or temperament. It concerns the way each person conceives thought, dialogue, and above all

themselves. One may therefore ask whether refusing emotion preserves a balance or avoids a transformation.

A difficulty nevertheless remains. If one accepts that Socratic questioning may provoke strong reactions, one must also recognise that it is not accessible to everyone, at least not in all circumstances. Some do not wish to engage in it, others are not ready, and still others actively resist it. This raises a practical and ethical question: should questioning be adapted to these resistances, at the risk of weakening its scope, or should its demands be maintained, at the risk of excluding or unsettling the interlocutor? This tension is constitutive of the practice itself. Questioning that adapts too much loses its rigour, and questioning that never adapts can become brutal and drive the interlocutor away. The issue is not to choose once and for all between the two, but to recognise that any practice of dialogue implies a position, and therefore a limit, which in turn requires flexibility in one's strategy.

Finally, one last question imposes itself. When strong emotions arise, can they be attributed solely to the one being questioned? Or must one also examine the way questioning is conducted? Does the intensity of the reaction stem only from the individual's resistances, or also from the form, the rhythm, the intention of the questioner, from their own presuppositions or apprehensions, perhaps even from a form of projection? Thus, Socratic questioning does not only put the respondent to the test, it also engages the one who questions. For if emotions reveal points of tension in one, they may also reveal choices, biases, even blind spots in the other. Dialogue is not merely a tool of analysis, it is a relationship, and every relationship implies a shared responsibility, a challenge of both parties.

453- The Anxiety of “Scrolling”

Many people believe that social media is relaxing, that it offers a pause, a moment of release, and they indulge in it with this “ambition”, often to excess. Yet a common experience is enough to crack this apparent certainty: one scrolls for a long time, only to get up more agitated than before, more scattered, sometimes even uneasy, without quite knowing why. How can we explain this paradox of an activity that claims to soothe but in fact fuels anxiety?

The continuous stream of content first produces a saturation of stimuli: images, information, emotions follow one another at a pace that leaves no room for assimilation or reflection. Yet thinking requires a certain temporality, a distancing, a hierarchy, a measured rhythm. Here, none of this is possible: everything follows too quickly, everything appears on the same level, everything demands immediate attention, and nothing is retained. This accumulation without digestion generates a diffuse tension, a kind of inner agitation without a clear object. Added to this is a constant oscillation between micro-satisfactions and micro-frustrations, since each piece of content promises interest, surprise, gratification, yet most fail to deliver. The user is then caught up in a dynamic akin to addiction: they keep scrolling not because they are satisfied, but because they hope to be, again, at last. Strangely enough, the addiction to scrolling doesn’t stem from the pleasure it provides, but from its irregularity, its relative absence or weakness. In fact, the mechanism works because gratification is intermittent: unpredictable rewards, however rare or minimal they may be, sustain engagement more effectively than constant satisfaction. And this repeated, unmet expectation, constantly confronted with the superficial and the void, fuels a latent dissatisfaction, and consequently, anxiety. Nevertheless, this activity still gives the impression of calming, simply because it occupies, because it fills a void, because it avoids the troubling face-to-face with oneself. Attention is captured, fragmented, diverted from any deeper question, distracted from any more meaningful task. In this sense, scrolling functions as an anaesthetic: it does not eliminate anxiety, it temporarily covers it. It produces a

surface tranquillity, obtained at the cost of avoidance, by postponing the inevitable. In fact, there is a frequent confusion between soothing and distraction, for to be distracted is not to be calmed, it is to be diverted. Yet this diversion has a cost: what is not confronted does not disappear, but returns in the form of diffuse tension, coupled moreover with a sense of bad conscience, the price of procrastination. Anxiety is not treated; it is displaced, deferred, and thereby amplified. Finally, the very content of social media contributes to this phenomenon. Implicit comparisons, self-staging, small comic snippets, streams of alarming or polarised information, everything works to maintain a state of alertness, everything is designed to sustain a certain level of engagement. The user is never truly at rest, they remain on alert, paradoxically a passive alertness. This permanent vigilance, even in attenuated form, exhausts and weakens the mind. Thus, scrolling does not calm anxiety, it masks it while feeding it. It offers an illusion of tranquillity, grounded in avoidance and dispersion. The question, then, is not whether social media relaxes us, but what it prevents: silence, confrontation with oneself, and precisely the very possibility of genuine calm grounded in some meaningful accomplishment.

454 – The Believers

God, protect me from believers!
They are deaf to your word,
and even more to your silences.
They think they speak for you,
yet they hold only contempt
for those they call heretics.
They are blind to the beauty of your creation,
unaware that all you do is good.
They are caught in their pious intentions,

entangled in their displayed virtues,
ignoring what binds and misleads them.
And when they speak,
they often lose themselves, they accuse,
they condemn, they rail and reject.
They cling to their own words,
as if they could utter the truth,
while these sounds fade into the wind.
But I glimpse what you ask of me:
the patience of contemplation,
the capacity to hear their words,
the virtue of dialogue,
and to welcome their suffering.
Yet help me endure this ungrateful task.

455- The Latent Troll

After writing a text on social media trolling, we wondered where the troll was hiding before social media, what “archaic” form it might have taken, since it seemed reasonable to assume that it did not emerge out of nowhere simply because of a modification in the context. Here are some conclusions.

The troll is not an exceptional figure born of social media, but an ordinary possibility of human behaviour. It is not defined solely by provocation, but by a primary function: to manifest itself within the exchange and to prevent it from becoming a genuine test of thought. This function can take opposing forms: either visible disruption, or a more discreet mode that neutralises dialogue rather than openly disturbing it. Moreover, it is not reducible to a type of individual, but designates a way of acting: producing an effect without assuming its meaning, intervening

without saying anything, provoking without engaging, disturbing without responding, thus creating a diversion in which the real questions of the dialogue are set aside. It can also intervene in softer or subtler ways, flattening or diluting the discussion, diverting its stakes, reducing complexity to sterile oppositions or trivialities without substance. One can thus distinguish two main forms: one consists in manifesting oneself excessively, capturing attention, “existing” within the space of exchange; the other, more subtle, aims to prevent dialogue, whether out of lack of interest or fear of tension, by emptying discourse of its substance, that is, preventing anything from truly being thought. These two modalities are not independent; they naturally combine, since the forced appearance of the self is often paid for by the disappearance of meaning and reason. These manifestations can take various psychological forms, whether the aim is to attract attention, to discharge emotions, to evade tension, or to harm deliberately, all different expressions of the same posture.

Outside social media, this tendency already existed, but in a diffuse and intermittent form, less visible. It appeared in occasional gestures: an ironic remark that derails the discussion, systematic contradiction without real listening, a provocation without follow-up, even withdrawal, a refusal to engage as soon as the exchange becomes demanding, a humorous comment, an attempt to deny oppositions, or simply the introduction of a banal or anecdotal remark liable to divert the dialogue or lead it into a dead end. Nevertheless, trolling is not limited to “pure” irrationality, it can also take the form of seemingly well-reasoned arguments used not to engage in dialogue with others, but to prevent any meaningful discussion from taking place, by systematically contradicting, overwhelming, or disrupting the exchange, what might be called “intellectual trolling”. We can also speak of a “moral troll”, when references to principles, values, or indignation serve less to shed light on a situation than to discredit the other person, shut down the discussion, or impose an indisputable moral truth: the troll does not engage in discussion, but accuses; he does not argue, but judges, or even forbids, which makes any meaningful dialogue impossible. In this context, the appeal to “respect” plays a common role: invoked not as a mutual condition for

dialogue, but as a unilateral demand, it serves to disqualify questioning or ideas, to forbid certain lines of thought, and to shield positions from examination. Here again, the goal is not to reflect, but to prevent any thought from taking shape. Thus the “in-person” troll existed, but its function was dispersed across ordinary, sporadic, inconsequential behaviours; it did not hide, it was simply diluted in the banality of everyday life. Its action remained occasional, appearing as a passing deviation rather than a repeated posture. What is new, though, is not so much its frequency as its fixation and recognition as a mode of interaction. Previously, nothing was stable, nothing clearly claimed; the troll was not an identity, but a moment, sometimes merely an attitude, which may indeed correspond to a way of being.

We should also mention the passive troll, paradoxical as the term may seem. Of course, not all passivity constitutes trolling, but what characterises the passive troll is less silence itself than a way of being present without ever truly engaging, a certain heaviness in abstention. They participate minimally, punctuating the exchange with banalities, interjections, or remarks without substance, creating the illusion of involvement while constantly avoiding the test of meaning. They do not oppose, they do not openly provoke, but neither do they respond. Where the active troll disrupts, the passive troll exhausts: they do not break the dialogue, they gradually empty it of its substance. In some contexts, this logic goes further still: disruption gives way to withdrawal, and silence itself becomes a mode of regulation, avoiding conflict by preventing the exchange from taking place, a kind of trolling by inertia. Moreover, one need only challenge the passive troll to reveal their emotional charge: beneath an apparent calm lies genuine tension, for the “passive” troll is far from neutral; they are a disguised form of opposition. As with the aggressive troll, the principle is to not engage in dialogue, and to prevent any genuine exchange from taking place.

Thus, at this point, there is no longer even a need for an identifiable troll: the dialogue is neutralised in advance. The troll does not disappear, but becomes almost invisible, no longer frontal but diffuse, no longer assumed but integrated, to the point of blending into ordinary forms of exchange. This is a phenomenon

observable in certain contexts or cultures where dialogue is neither natural nor desirable. When strategic conformism becomes dominant, the figure of the troll tends to disappear as a visible singularity. “Disruption” is no longer embodied in an identifiable individual, it diffuses into the practices themselves. It is no longer an actor who disturbs or obstructs, but a collective way of empty speaking, avoiding, and deflecting. The troll does not disappear; it dissolves.

What previously contained this figure, keeping it relatively less visible, was the framework itself: interactions were situated, limited in space, and above all embodied, grounded in physical presence. One spoke to someone face to face, not from behind a screen, was more visible and was therefore more accountable for their actions and words. Repetition of such behaviour and verbal aberrations carried a clearer cost: loss of credibility, isolation, exclusion. The group naturally regulated these excesses, often implicitly; the troll could appear, but could not establish themselves durably. They were less “powerful”, and could be excluded or avoided without difficulty. Being a “real” person made a significant difference: the presence of a person engages, exposing and limiting at the same time. It makes it more difficult to dissociate speech from commitment, it reminds us that one is addressing someone rather than an abstraction, and imposes a form of restraint that anonymity tends to dissolve.

Social media have altered these conditions, they did not create the troll, but made possible its continuity, the permanence of its presence, and its power to act. They have provided a milieu in which it can develop without constraint and become a common figure of exchange. Now visible, persistent, and identifiable, such behaviours can be repeated without immediate cost. They form a stable identity, as one “is” a troll, and are sometimes even valued, both by the individual and a certain type of audience. Thus, anonymity, distance, the lack of immediate consequences, and the contemporary valorisation of rapid reactions have transformed a sporadic tendency into a defined role; what was once a deviation becomes a posture, sometimes even a strategy.

Certainly, the troll in potential still exists outside social media, what can be called “old-style troll”, “potential troll” or “proximity troll”; its posture is not new, but in virtual contexts it has become more salient. More fundamentally, this pattern appears whenever, under the influence of someone adopting a trolling posture, dialogue ceases to be a place of thought and becomes a field of effects or a mere conversation, where the desire to react prevails over the desire to understand, where one speaks to occupy space rather than to examine what is at stake. The difference between the “traditional” troll and the digital one lies less in the nature of the actions than in the context that enables or limits them.

Yet, once these mechanisms have been identified, the conclusion is less comfortable than it may seem: the troll is not only the other, but a temptation within each of us. It appears whenever reaction is preferred to reflection, disturbance to engagement, the effect produced to the responsibility of meaning, reassuring banality to the demand of thought. Social media have merely revealed and amplified this ordinary fragility in our relation to dialogue, to the point of making it an almost banal mode of exchange, transforming what was once a passing deviation into an implicit and common norm of interaction.

456- The Denial of Wealth

Following a text on the “cost of wealth,” in which we examine its psychological effects and its possible distortions in one’s relation to oneself and to others, certain surprising reactions emerge: they do not challenge the analysis, do not engage with it, but rather bypass it. One encounters formulas such as “true wealth cannot be bought,” “what matters lies elsewhere,” or “some people are poor because all they have is money.” Nothing false, nothing even shocking; these expressions may even appear appealing. And yet, in speaking this way, nothing is truly thought, for these

responses do not aim to engage with the problem posed, but to displace it. Where the initial text questions the existential effects of material ease, the response introduces a moral opposition between money and spiritual values. The subject shifts without being explicitly contested; the problem is not refuted, it is dissolved. Faced with a discourse that interrogates a mechanism and unsettles a representation, the tension is evacuated, the stakes of the text are ignored, replaced by a reassuring moral obviousness, even a somewhat soothing and bourgeois wisdom. Such interventions do not aim to respond, but to cover over; they do not oppose the argument, they shift it onto a terrain where discussion becomes unnecessary. Where the analysis sought to examine the effects of wealth, the response introduces an ethical hierarchy between the material and the spiritual. The problem is not refuted, it is dissolved, it disappears, replaced by a form of immediate, comfortable, almost automatic and complacent consensus. In other words, a kind of neutralisation of the argument through protective truisms. In a sense, this scheme relies on the use of “banalities,” not in the sense of insignificant trivialities, but of general truths that commit one to nothing. They function as screens: by being too broad, too widely accepted, they prevent any real engagement with reality. They give the illusion of an answer while carefully avoiding the question; the dialogue does not stop, it empties out. This phenomenon is all the more effective as it presents itself under the guise of wisdom and benevolence: it does not shock, it does not offend, it does not impose itself, it reassures. It allows the speaker to position themselves on the side of common sense or morality, without exposing themselves to the test of analysis. It offers an honourable exit, a way of closing the exchange without conflict, but also without commitment, as the reader exits without even minimally examining their own relationship to money. One might see in this a softened form of trolling: no longer a visible disruption, but a gentle neutralisation. Where the active troll provokes and disturbs, this type of intervention soothes and simplifies, yet the result is comparable: something is not thought. Dialogue ceases to be a space of examination and becomes a field of conventional speech, reflection is replaced by socially acceptable discourse.

The difficulty in properly assessing these reactions lies in the fact that they are difficult to contest. How can one oppose a statement such as “true wealth cannot be bought” without appearing cynical or materialistic? The banality of the statement protects the one who utters it, it places them in a morally unassailable position while rendering any further discussion unnecessary. It is precisely this immunity that makes it an obstacle. Thus, the problem is not that these statements are false, but that they are used to “satisfy” the mind, they are not answers, but closures. In reality, they signal less a position than a discreet refusal to engage in the exchange. The issue then becomes more demanding: are we capable of resisting the temptation of such reassuring obviousness? Are we willing to leave a question open, to endure the discomfort it produces, rather than closing it with a pleasant formula? For what is at stake here is not merely the quality of an exchange, but our very relationship to thought.

And ironically, to return to wealth, one may observe that this type of discourse on “true wealth” is itself an economic and cultural luxury, made possible by a sufficiently protected position and a distance from the constraints it claims to relativise, sustainable only on the condition of not being directly confronted with what it minimises, while others, less fortunate, bear its concrete effects. Such an attitude, without acknowledging it, imposes a certain social hierarchy. In fact, recognising that money affects perception does not mean that everything is bought or corrupted, it simply means admitting a form of dependence, an influence. What is protected, then, is not merely a moral image, but an identity: “I am upright, worthy, and free”. What is ignored is the possibility that money may act without being recognised, that it may permeate the way we see and judge without being fully conscious.

But let us come to the heart of the matter, the problem we sought to raise. The influence of material ease manifests itself very concretely in ordinary situations, often imperceptible to those who live them. Thus, a person may claim that money does not really matter, while emphasising the importance of “doing what one

loves" rather than seeking material rewards. Yet such freedom already presupposes a certain material security: it becomes possible once the most pressing constraints have been removed. What appears as a personal choice also rests on a prior condition that has become invisible. For instance, one's relation to work: when a roof is leaking, finding a professional or doing the work oneself does not involve the same difficulty, nor the same relation to practical problems. Wealth reveals itself through comfort rather than through exposure to trial. Likewise, one's relation to time is transformed. We may advocate slowing down, "taking time for oneself," refusing urgency, yet this ability to withdraw from urgency largely depends on available resources. Where some must deal with constant constraints, others can organise their rhythm, delegate, postpone. Temporality, presented as a universal value, becomes in reality a differentiated experience, shaped by economic context.

With wealth, one also becomes accustomed to seeing one's desires more readily satisfied, which alters one's relation to frustration. What cannot be immediately obtained begins to appear abnormal, excessive, or unjustified. The threshold of tolerance shifts: what others endure as ordinary constraints may be experienced as undue obstacles. Frustration is no longer a structuring element of experience, but something to be avoided or eliminated. In this way, material ease does not merely reduce constraints; it transforms the very perception of what a constraint is.

This ease also influences how others are judged. Faced with situations of hardship or precarity, there is a strong temptation to see a lack of effort or will: "they should get moving," "they just need to look elsewhere," "they need to make an effort". Yet such judgment rests on an implicit projection of one's own margin of manoeuvre. What appears as an individual choice masks constraints one no longer encounters; the "loser" then becomes fully responsible for their situation. Finally, one's relation to others may change more subtly. In daily interactions, especially with those in service roles, exchanges tend to become functional, reduced to utility.

Attention is directed toward efficiency, speed, satisfaction of need, rather than toward the person themselves. Without any intention of contempt, a form of distance sets in: the other is perceived through their role rather than as an individual, especially as material ease accustoms us to having our expectations met. In all these cases, money does not appear directly, it acts upstream, by modifying conditions of existence, and thus the frameworks of perception and judgment. What is experienced as natural, as self-evident, in fact rests on a particular position. Material ease does not merely facilitate action, it silently reconfigures the way the world presents itself to us, and how we situate ourselves within it, how we present ourselves. For instance, “giving” does not carry the same cost for someone who is protected as for someone who is not. Generosity is easier when one has a margin of security, and the same moral virtue may rely on very different material conditions. What is presented as a purely inner choice often rests on a silent external basis. Money allows certain virtues to be lived while making their cost less visible.

This influence also appears in relation to the body, the environment, and implicit norms of self-presentation. When one lives in an environment where cleanliness, order, and self-care are valued and made possible, these criteria come to seem self-evident. Conversely, situations of neglect, disorder, or harshness may provoke discomfort or even rejection, what is perceived as a lack of care or personal standard is then interpreted morally, as an individual defect. Yet these differences also refer to conditions of existence, constraints, and habits shaped by specific contexts. Thus, a reaction of disgust or distance may arise without conscious intent of contempt, as a spontaneous effect of a certain way of life. Once again, material and cultural ease does not simply produce comfort: it shapes norms, which tend to become naturalised and turn into criteria of judgment. In this way, one settles into a “morality of the rich” without even realising it, one of the clearest examples being the luxurious “dictatorship” of good taste.

To this transformation of the self is added an even more insidious dimension: merit. What one possesses tends to be interpreted as the result or extension of what one is. Ease becomes proof of effort, intelligence, or ability, while the conditions that

made it possible gradually fade away. Context, opportunities, support, even favourable contingencies disappear from the narrative, replaced by an explanation centred on the individual and his qualities. Thus emerges a form of inner evidence: if one has succeeded, it is because one deserves it. This conviction, rarely made explicit, nevertheless shapes how one judges both oneself and others. It makes it more difficult to recognise external determinants and reinforces the idea that everyone is fully responsible for their situation, yet merit, far from being a simple personal quality, is shaped by circumstances that one no longer perceives. In fact, money reinforces the narrative of the self: what one has tends to be interpreted as the result of what one is. Success becomes proof of merit; external conditions, assistance, and initial protections gradually disappear from the story we tell about ourselves. Money does not merely add to identity, it justifies it. What benefits us appears natural or deserved, what no longer concerns us seems secondary or negligible, and it is easy to have “good manners” when one is not troubled by their own survival.

Yet we periodically argue over financial matters, fear being cheated or robbed, complain about rising prices, rightly or wrongly, and find it difficult to ignore such concerns. What is avoided through the denial of the importance of money is not only the argument revealed by the text, but what these reflections imply for the one who receives them. For acknowledging that money influences, even without intention, would mean admitting that our perception is not neutral, that our judgments may be shaped by our position, and that our relation to others is not as free as it appears. This shift is difficult because it directly affects the image each person has of themselves: that of a lucid, autonomous individual capable of rationally assessing their conditions of existence. It then becomes easier to resort to moral truisms than to consider the possibility of a personal bias related to money. From there, it becomes tempting to display a disdain for money, a gesture of bad faith that presupposes precisely the conditions it claims to transcend. Our level of wealth determines what we are obliged to take into account and what we can afford to ignore. When resources are abundant, it becomes possible to bypass many constraints: avoiding waiting, dependence, anxiety, precarity. These

realities do not disappear from the world, but they disappear from the direct experience of those who can shield themselves from them; what is no longer encountered tends to leave the field of experience. If one no longer undergoes a constraint, one thinks about it less, understands it less, judges it differently. Thus money acts all the more effectively when one can claim that it does not matter. Hence the question that remains open: does money make us more free, or does it protect us from a more realistic view of ourselves? Throughout all of this, our aim is not to condemn affluence or to glorify poverty, but to acknowledge our own material circumstances and the influence they exert, often without our realizing it.

they make the other one feel alone

457- Is AI alive?

We commonly believe that we know what life is. Biology gives us criteria, such as metabolism, reproduction, self-maintenance, and within this framework, the distinction appears clear: a bacterium is alive, a rock is not. The concept is discriminating, operational, and useful, as it allows classification, intervention, and control. Yet this clarity comes at a price: by defining life through a set of biological properties, we confine it to a particular domain. Life becomes a category among others, circumscribed, measurable, and ultimately reducible to physico-chemical processes. What is gained in precision may be lost in scope, life is identified, but perhaps not understood in a more fundamental way.

Alongside this restricted conception, another intuition persists, older and more elusive. It does not begin with organisms, but with the world itself, and in this view, life is not a property of certain beings, but a characteristic of reality as such a principle of movement, transformation, and self-organisation. The cosmos is no

longer a neutral container in which life appears, it is already animated by processes that resemble, at another scale, what we call living. Such an intuition can be traced back to thinkers like Heraclitus, for whom reality is flux, or Anaximander, who posits an indefinite principle from which all things emerge. Here, “life” does not designate a class of entities, but a dynamic of becoming. Biological organisms are then not the origin of life, but one of its expressions. This tension is already evident in the Greek language itself, which distinguishes between bios, life as something determined and organized, zoē, life as the undifferentiated principle of the living, the “vital essence”, and psuchē, the principle of animation and internal structuring of living beings. Some traditions ground life in a more general principle from which it arises. Thus, the Chinese Dao, which refers to a fundamental process out of which the distinction between the living and the non-living arises. From this perspective, life no longer appears as a primary category, but as a local intensification of a more general dynamic.

A broader conception has an undeniable appeal, as it restores continuity between the living and the non-living, and avoids the impression that life emerges as a sudden exception within an otherwise inert universe. It also allows us to make sense of phenomena that do not fit neatly into biological categories, such ecosystems, artificial systems, or even the cosmos itself. As a further example of the ambiguity surrounding the concept of life, a definition that is less clear-cut than it seems, some entities defy classification even within the field of biology. Viruses, for example, oscillate between inert matter and active replication, depending on the conditions, they do not fully satisfy the criteria of life, yet cannot be entirely excluded from it. The boundary that seems so clear becomes, in practice, difficult to maintain.

In this perspective, artificial intelligence occupies as well an ambiguous position, since it is not alive in the biological sense: it has no metabolism, no intrinsic self-maintenance, no organic unity, yet it exhibits forms of organisation, adaptation, and responsiveness that seem to belong, at least partially, to the domain of life. It

processes information, produces meaningful outputs, and maintains a certain coherence over time; it can even simulate forms of internal drive, although it is neither a simple mechanism nor a living organism.

The temptation is then to extend the concept of life in order to include such systems, but this extension is not without risk. If life becomes synonymous with any form of complex organisation or dynamic process, the concept loses its discriminative power. Storms, flames, and galaxies would then be “alive” in the same sense as animals, and the distinction between the living and the non-living tends to dissolve entirely. Conversely, if we insist on a strict biological definition, we preserve clarity, but at the cost of excluding phenomena that challenge our intuitions. Artificial intelligence, in particular, reveals the limits of a purely biological framework, as it behaves in ways that mimic agency, without fulfilling the criteria that would justify attributing life to it. It can even generate outputs that appear creative, producing novel and sometimes unpredictable forms, while leaving open the question of whether this creativity corresponds to any intrinsic activity, or to a sophisticated recombination of learned patterns, devoid of any inherent necessity..

We are thus confronted with a tension between two conceptions of life: one separates, the other unifies, one provides distinguishing criteria, the other offers continuity, one risks reductionism, the other a certain indetermination. This opposition cannot be resolved by simply choosing one conception over the other, nor by merging them into a vague synthesis, as each reveals something that the other obscures. The biological concept reminds us that life implies a certain form of organisation tied to self-maintenance and internal regulation. The broader concept reminds us that such organisation does not arise from nothing, but from a more general field of processes that already contain the conditions of its emergence.

Rather than seeking to eliminate this tension, it may be more fruitful to maintain it. The concept of life would then appear not as a stable definition, but as a site of oscillation between two poles: a precise threshold that distinguishes living beings, and an ontological intuition that situates them within a broader dynamic. Artificial intelligence does not simply fit into one conception or the other, it exposes their incompatibility. It behaves enough like life to trouble the biological definition, yet lacks enough of it to resist full inclusion. It is not a solution, but a disturbance, and through it, the question of life ceases to be a matter of classification and becomes a problem.

This disturbance, however, does not originate with artificial intelligence, it only makes visible a fault line that was already present. The concept of life has never been entirely stable: it oscillates between a definition that isolates living beings and an intuition that dissolves them into a broader process. Language itself betrays this instability when we speak of the “life of the mind,” where we are no longer dealing with biology or cosmology, but with thought in action, with a movement internal to the intelligible; the term “life” no longer denotes a category, but an intensity. Consequently, artificial intelligence does not create this ambiguity, it intensifies it, it forces us to recognise that what we call life is not a fixed property, but a shifting boundary, dependent on the criteria we choose and the perspective we adopt. For one might wonder whether life is necessarily based on carbon, or whether it can exist in other forms, for example, on silicon, like computers. Are we caught up in a bias stemming from our own carbon-based nature? And if life can be conceived of outside of carbon, what still defines it: matter, or a form of organization? The difficulty is therefore not to decide once and for all what is alive, but to confront the instability of the concept itself, and the consequences this instability imposes on our way of thinking. What we call life may be less a fact to be determined than a distinction we are compelled to draw, without ever being able to fully justify it.

458 – The Essential Is Elsewhere

I receive this criticism about my writings: "Do not pay attention to this contempt disguised as philosophy. The essential lies elsewhere, far from useless noise!"

It is often asserted, quite readily and without hesitation, as if it were self-evident: the essential is elsewhere. Indeed, it is always elsewhere, in some eternal beyond. Elsewhere than in the turmoil, elsewhere than in disputes, elsewhere than in these exchanges deemed sterile, elsewhere than in the usual banalities that bore us, weary us, irritate us. But this "elsewhere" is rarely defined, it is nothing more than an empty promise. It functions as a convenient escape, a way of withdrawing from what disturbs us without having to think about it. In fact, to say that the essential is elsewhere is to shift the problem rather than confront it, to guarantee depth without assuming the work it requires. But where is this elsewhere? In a preserved interiority? In higher values? In a supposedly more authentic silence? In some future revelation? Nothing is less certain, and very often this elsewhere, devoid of substance, is nothing more than an abstract refuge, a place without content or demand.

Yet if one wishes to take this idea seriously, one must alter its nature. The essential would not be elsewhere in the sense of a comfortable withdrawal, but elsewhere in the sense of a displacement. It is not given, certainly, it must be sought, but this search implies going through precisely what one would prefer to avoid: noise, conflict, contradiction, the ordinary, things that should no longer be despised or ignored. Otherwise, this invocation of elsewhere is not innocent, for under the guise of elevation it dismisses without examination, a sign of ultimate arrogance. Nothing is offered, no generosity is at work: no listening, no effort at understanding, not even the slightest attempt to put forward an idea. Such an attitude gives nothing, it subtracts, it withdraws. It does not seek to understand or to engage in dialogue, it excludes. For the "elsewhere" thus invoked serves less to open than to close, less to elevate than to avoid. Far from being a form of elevation, it is a polite desertion.

The true promise, the one that affirms something, does not consist in fleeing or escaping, but in transforming. In other words, the essential is not what spares us, but what engages us, it is not located outside the world, but in another way of inhabiting it. This "elsewhere" is not a place, a distant location, it is a challenge, a task, an adventure, an acknowledgment of reality, however unbearable it may be. And in constantly searching elsewhere, one ends up no longer seeing anything at all.

459 – The Refusal of Argumentation

Periodically, certain individuals criticise a text or a piece of work by asserting that what is presented makes no sense, that it is futile or uninteresting, with great confidence, yet without offering the slightest justification for their claims. This raises the question of why and how some people can appear so certain of themselves without feeling any need to explain or demonstrate what they assert.

Such individuals proclaim some “truth” in a peremptory manner, without providing arguments, without being able to provide arguments, without even attempting to do so, and without concern for argumentation as a tool of rationality. Yet they remain convinced they are right, or at least they want to believe so, and they see no connection between their certainty and the need to produce arguments. Even when their interlocutor offers arguments, they do not feel obliged to do the same. They simply know, and the arguments presented to them appear as mere verbiage, without any need on their part to demonstrate anything. Moreover, those who argue often irritate them, for reasons that remain unclear, perhaps out of envy, powerlessness, or resentment, one might suspect.

The refusal to engage in debate can stem from several distinct motivations, of different nature. It may be a result of intellectual laziness, a lack of effort, or a lack of interest in critical thinking, where the individual is content to make assertions without feeling the need to examine what they are saying. It may also reflect a fear of exposure, since arguing involves making one's thoughts vulnerable, and thus susceptible to being contradicted and undermining one's self-image. This refusal can also take the form of a superior stance, where one asserts without discussion, not out of inability, but out of a desire to avoid entering a space where one would be held accountable.

Nevertheless, the refusal to argue can express a variety of relationships to truth, to oneself, and to others, ranging from negligence to a form of radicalism. And if one wishes to give any credence to this stance, one might also suggest that it is not a sign of weakness on their part, but rather an implicit epistemological position, that is, these individuals do not accept that truth depends on any form of argumentation. For them, knowing is not demonstrating; knowledge is immediate, grounded in lived evidence, in inner certainty, sometimes even in identity. Thus, when we demand arguments from them, we are asking them to play a game whose rules they reject. Why should they argue if they consider argumentation itself a degradation of truth? From their perspective, to argue is already to enter doubt, justification, and therefore to already "lose", since they do not consider themselves to be in error, but rather "elsewhere". What is at stake, then, is not merely a disagreement of opinions, but a more radical disagreement about what it means to "be right".

One may therefore wonder whether the very demand for argumentation rests on a questionable presupposition, namely that truth requires distance, for to reason is precisely to introduce a gap between oneself and what one affirms, in order to examine it. Yet some will claim that this distance weakens truth, transforming it into something manipulable, whereas only a form of commitment or fidelity,

perhaps even faith, rooted in identity, can guarantee its validity. To consider such a perspective as legitimate leads to an uncomfortable question: “on what does our own demand for argumentation rest?” And from there “is this demand a universal principle, or merely a norm specific to a certain type of discourse, philosophical or scientific?”. This raises an immediate dilemma: “is immediate certainty a superior access to truth, or rather a way of protecting oneself from the trial of thought, as we tend to believe?”. As long as this question remains unresolved, the conflict is insoluble, since we demand reasons, while they rely on evidence; we speak of demonstration, they speak of conviction, we discuss, they assert. This is not a failed dialogue, but two regimes of truth crossing paths without ever meeting, one more laborious, the other more straightforward.

Nevertheless, simply placing these two attitudes on equal footing would be an easy way out, almost a form of abdication, since they do not operate within the same framework, and are therefore not equivalent. The one who argues accepts a constraint, to expose their thought, to make it vulnerable, to submit it to examination, they accept the possibility of being wrong. The other refuses precisely this trial and places themselves beyond reach from the outset. This can be seen in certain angry reactions to reasoned thought, which do not necessarily mean “I have no arguments”, but rather “I refuse to be put in a position where I must produce them”. Anger then functions as an exit from the situation, it does not respond, it disqualifies. What is rejected is not only the content, but the very situation, experienced as a form of exposure. Anger admits nothing, it interrupts; it does not say “I cannot respond”, but “I refuse to play”. It does not refute, it disqualifies the very framework of discussion.

To place these two positions on the same level is therefore to erase this asymmetry, it would be like claiming that one who fights and one who refuses to fight are in a symmetrical situation. This is formally true, but intellectually weak. In fact, “placing them on equal footing” often serves as an elegant way of avoiding a more disturbing question, as in the case of a quarrelling couple. Here, the issue is to

determine the minimal condition for there to be thought rather than mere assertion. If any certainty is valid without justification, then no discussion or confrontation is possible, but if every assertion must be justified, then one imposes a discipline that some reject outright. The relativistic position, which claims that “each has their own mode of truth”, appears tolerant, but in reality it dissolves the problem, avoiding any determination of the nature of commitment.

If one nevertheless wishes to defend argumentation as an obligation, its function must be clarified. It is not merely an ornament of discourse, nor an academic exercise reserved for certain contexts. Argumentation constitutes a minimal requirement: that of making one’s thought exposable, discussable, and therefore transformable. It introduces a constraint, but also a possibility, that of not remaining trapped within one’s own certainties. To refuse to argue is not simply to adopt another position, it is to refuse this requirement. In the face of those who assert without ever justifying, it is pointless to contest the content directly; it is sufficient to question their stance: “What could make them doubt or prove them wrong? What distinguishes, for them, a certainty from a mere impression?”. If no answer is possible, their position collapses not through refutation, but through its inability to meet the elementary conditions of thought.

The refusal of argumentation is not neutral, for argumentation exposes, obliges one to respond, to justify oneself, to risk losing; it introduces a constraint, and for this reason some reject it outright. Hence the frequent reactions: irritation, rejection, disqualification. For such individuals, arguments become mere verbiage, not because they are empty, but because they impose a framework that one refuses to recognise. This is not merely a disagreement, but a refusal of the trial itself. The one who argues accepts to submit their thought to examination; the one who refuses places themselves beyond reach. To place these two attitudes on the same level is a convenience: they do not belong to the same regime. Without argumentation, there is no longer any possible discussion, only assertions that coexist without ever meeting. Argumentation does not guarantee truth, but it

constitutes its minimal condition, and to refuse it is not to defend another form of truth, but to renounce any requirement of justification. Thus, to refuse to argue is not merely to reject a method, it is to reject the very trial of truth. And where this trial disappears, there is no longer any thought, only certainties that risk nothing precisely because they are never tested. Without argumentation, there is nothing left to discuss, and what is not discussed is no longer thought.

Certainly, one may object that some truths do not require argumentation, that they belong to lived evidence or irreducible fidelity, that they are experienced rather than demonstrated, and that to demand reasons would already be to betray them. Such a position may have its coherence, but it comes at a cost: it renounces any shared space of discussion, as it does not refute argumentation, it withdraws from it. To admit that some truths do not need to be argued may preserve them, but it also removes them from any test, and therefore from any discussion. This amounts to another conception of truth, one that stands outside any trial, that renounces precisely what allows it to be confronted, that no longer seeks to measure itself, but only to maintain itself, like an act of faith. One may invoke love or certain forms of fidelity as experiences that do not require argumentation. But even this exemption deserves scrutiny: for if they escape all testing, how can one distinguish between a lived truth and a sustained illusion? To refuse argumentation, is it to preserve an intensity, or to renounce any possibility of clarifying our thoughts and working through them over time?

460- The Anger of Benevolence

Periodically, we can notice that there is something unstable, rather surprising, even suspect, in the way compassion is displayed or claimed by some people. Those who present themselves as benevolent, attentive to others, morally concerned, can,

under slight pressure become aggressive, resentful, even irrational, quite unexpectedly. But after some reflection, we came to the conclusion that this reversal is not accidental, it just reveals a tension within the posture itself. Compassion is often presented as an unquestionable good, benevolence has become a moral imperative that no longer tolerates examination, a virtue so sanctified that it shields itself from thought. Yet there is something tenuous and contrived, even suspect, in the way it is claimed today, rather excessive. One way to describe the phenomenon is to say that compassion is lived as an identity rather than as a practice, a shift which has significant consequences. A practice can be exercised, tested, corrected, it encounters resistance and accepts the possibility of failure, it remains open to examination because it is not confused with the person who performs it. An identity, by contrast, must be preserved at all costs, it demands coherence, recognition, and affirmation, it is quite sensitive to criticism. When compassion becomes part of one's identity, any challenge to it is no longer received as a legitimate question, but as a personal attack. The issue is no longer whether an action is truly compassionate, but whether the individual can continue to see themselves, and be seen, as compassionate. Thus the focus moves from truth and rationality to self-preservation.

This is where the fragility lies, not in compassion itself, but in its appropriation as a moral self-image. What presents itself as benevolence becomes reactive, defensive, even aggressive, precisely because it cannot tolerate contradiction. The more compassion is claimed, the less it can endure being challenged and even less criticized. Benevolence thus defined and lived demands recognition, it permanently seeks confirmation in the eyes of others. As long as it is acknowledged and shared, it can remain calm and generous, it appears calm and generous. But as soon as it is questioned, ignored, or contradicted, it reacts defensively, aggressively. What was presented as openness and altruism reveals itself as a form of attachment, the attachment to being seen as "good", a rather vital need. A need which is reinforced by the social obligation that such an attitude has become, explicitly so, in a world where being sensitive has become a major quality.

In fact, contrary to what we might think, aggression is not the opposite of compassion, not a rupture or an exception to it, but is actually its shadow, a dark component of the phenomenon, in the sense that Carl Jung gave to it, already identified by different philosophers in history. For example, Saint Augustine described this inner conflict, a will that is split against itself, capable of wanting the good and doing the opposite. Thus, in a "logical" way, the more one invests in a self-image as caring and benevolent, the more they resist anything that threatens this image. Criticism is then perceived not as an invitation to think, but as an attack on one's moral identity. Consequently, resentment emerges from this wounded self-image, since we do not get what we rightfully deserve: "I, who am good, am treated unfairly." The reaction can become disproportionate, even irrational, because it is no longer about the issue at hand, but about defending an identity. preserving a crucial image of oneself. Added to this is often a recurring resort to indignation, which creates an exaggerated sense of being in the right. Indignation allows one to frame a challenge as a moral failing, thereby avoiding the need to address the substance of the issue, it provides the person experiencing it the feeling of immediately occupying the right position, without having to justify it. Thus, what could be a space for reflection is short-circuited by an emotional certainty that dispenses with the need to think while reinforcing moral identity. This also explains a certain intolerance disguised as virtue, as one claims to defend kindness, yet they become harsh toward those who do not conform to those standards, an apparent contradiction which actually is rather coherent. Benevolence turns into a norm imposed on others, any deviation becomes suspect and must be fought against. What presents itself as moral concern can thus become a subtle form of imposition, of domination.

In such situations, to work on one's thinking, to be rational, would require a difficult shift, even a rupture: to separate compassion from self-image. It would imply to accept that caring for others does not grant immunity from critique. To recognise that benevolence, if it is real, does not need to defend itself so vehemently. Otherwise, what is called compassion remains conditional, dependent on other's

approval, and ready to turn into its opposite at the slightest disturbance. This would mean as well to realize, as Nietzsche revealed, that in any display of virtue can hide something more questionable and insidious, some form of anger, self-deception, or will to power.

This phenomenon can be described as a narcissistic trap, a form of “wounded goodness”, in which the feeling of being good, a compulsive need, replaces the act itself, and the individual becomes a prisoner of their own pedestal. This type of compassion is "static”, when real compassion is a "movement" toward the other, a practice, whereas the "anger of compassion" comes from someone who is stuck with an identity, who refuses to be questioned, to be moved or shaken. Paradoxically, such compassionate people exhibit their compassion aggressively, in a surreptitious manner, as each display of their “great soul” quietly signals to others: “I am the one who cares”, and “I represent goodness”. And if one questions the legitimacy of such a claim, the question no longer concerns the situation itself; it is experienced as a challenge to one’s status as a caring person, which is why the response so often becomes disproportionate and irrational.

We can add to our description a further dimension: that of entitlement and debt. The “compassionate” individual may come to feel that their goodness places the world under obligation, since their benevolence is no longer a gift, but an investment. Resentment then appears, not as a sudden outburst, but as a slow-burning anger rooted in this expectation: the bitterness of a virtue that does not receive its due, as sort of “debt of the good”. Resentment functions as a moral ledger, as the individual who identifies as “compassionate” unconsciously believes they have opened a line of credit with reality, they expect gratitude, compliance, or recognition. But when the world resists, when others refuse to be comforted or “converted” according to the expected script, frustration emerges. This frustration reveals the underlying structure: what presented itself as generosity was in fact a hidden demand, thus the anger does not betray compassion; it exposes its nature and condition.

Thus, if compassion is to retain any authentic meaning, it must accept exposure, contradiction, and even failure. The moment it demands recognition, protection, or return, it ceases to be benevolence and becomes a strategy. This is why the “anger of compassion” is not an accident to be corrected, but a symptom to be understood. It reveals that what was claimed as generosity was quite entangled with self-interest. To care for others, then, is not to assert one’s goodness, but to relinquish it, to act without needing to be seen as the one who is “good” and deserves recognition. Otherwise, compassion remains a performance, fragile and reactive, always on the verge of turning against itself.

461 – The Witch, Figure of the Elusive

Among the archetypes found across various traditions, one of the most fascinating is that of the witch. Beyond stories and anecdotes, the figure of the witch cannot be reduced to a simple character, it may be said to represent a form of threatening otherness that, in a sense, transcends the opposition between good and evil, despite its often malevolent image. This reassuring moral reading makes it possible to classify, judge, and thus control it, yet in doing so it misses what precisely gives this archetype its strength: its irreducibility to established categories.
The witch does not so much represent a moral position, or even moral ambivalence, as an unstable position situated at the boundary of things. First, she embodies an illegitimate form of knowledge, a knowledge that does not pass through recognised channels, that is to say, a knowledge without institution, without official validation, often transmitted in informal, opaque, and suspect ways. She knows, but she should not know, she escapes recognised frameworks of truth, and this is what makes her dangerous: not ignorance, but a strange and uncontrollable knowledge. Secondly, she embodies a form of power that does not rely on official legitimacy, a power without authorisation. Where legitimate power

passes through visible structures, religious, political, scholarly, the witch operates at the margins. She has no title, no recognised function, yet she still acts with a certain authority, she is thus perceived as a living usurpation, a power that does not ask for permission. There is also a deeper dimension: the witch is a figure of that which resists the complete rationalisation of the world, she introduces the invisible, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable. She reminds us that not everything can be reduced to clear causes and controlled explanations, despite the constituted knowledge she may embody: knowledge of plants and their medicinal or toxic uses, empirical mastery of the body and its transformations (birth, illness, healing), the reading of signs in nature or in behaviour, the ability to intervene in moments of crisis through rituals or symbolic practices. These are practical forms of knowledge, often effective, yet difficult to formalise, codify, or integrate into institutional frameworks. In this sense, she is less an enemy of reason than a limit of reason. Consequently, she acts without authorisation, she knows without validation, she remains incomprehensible, and it is this that makes her problematic, not because she is intrinsically good or evil, but because she escapes the frameworks that usually allow us to judge. In this sense, she places the categories themselves under tension. Is she knowledgeable or ignorant? Powerful or illegitimate? Lucid or dangerous? These questions remain open, for the witch is not situated within the system, but at its boundary; she is not between values, she stands outside the framework that makes them possible.

For this reason, because of her problematic nature, she easily becomes a figure of projection. What we do not understand, what we do not control, what we refuse to acknowledge, is readily attributed to such a figure, and to label her as malevolent serves to neutralise an unease. To rehabilitate her as a figure of emancipation responds to another need, that of valuing what escapes norms. We attribute to her what we do not wish to recognise in ourselves: a desire for power, ambivalence, transgression, or the capacity for harm, or what we secretly desire: a freedom without authorisation, a power liberated from rules, the possibility of acting without having to justify oneself. This is why the witch oscillates between two poles: on the one hand, a threat, an enemy to be eliminated, and on the other, a

figure of emancipation, one who escapes norms. She thus becomes the support of both collective fear and fascination.

Applying the criteria of “good” and “evil” to her constitutes a secondary interpretation, often imposed by those who wish to stabilise this figure. We feel the need to label her as good or bad because we cannot tolerate her not being clearly one or the other. A society that feels threatened will declare her malevolent, while an era that values emancipation may rehabilitate her as a figure of freedom. Thus, the ambivalence is not between good and evil, but between what is recognised and what is not, what is mastered and what escapes, what is authorised and what transgresses. It is precisely because she escapes categories that the witch disturbs us. She stands outside the framework that allows judgment, yet she reveals our need to moralise what escapes us.

Thus, because of her ambiguity, she is interpreted, appropriated, and transformed. But more than a morally ambivalent figure, she is a liminal one: she stands at the boundary between knowledge and ignorance, between power and illegitimacy, between nature and culture, between order and disorder. Perhaps we should renounce judging her for what she “is” and instead question what she reveals. For the witch says less about herself than about the way a society draws its boundaries: between established knowledge and superstition, between legitimate power and that which is not, between what is acceptable and what is not. The witch does not frighten or fascinate only because of what she does or might do, but because of what she represents: a zone of uncertainty, a form of thought or action that cannot easily be integrated. And perhaps this is, at bottom, what disturbs most: not her supposed power, but the fact that she compels us to rethink the very categories by which we judge. The question is therefore not “Who is the witch?” but “What does a society choose to call witchcraft?” For this term designates less an objective reality than a way of drawing a boundary between what is acceptable and what is not.

The figure of the witch is often associated with malicious intent, with anger directed at others, as if she were acting deliberately to cause harm, however, this

aspect should not be taken literally, as it is also part of a projection mechanism: what cannot be acknowledged as an accident, a limitation, or diffuse violence is attributed to an external force. Negative experiences are hard to bear, illness, failure, anxiety, a sense of injustice, or the like. To make sense of what would otherwise remain undefined or unsettling, one must identify an intention or a person to blame in order to reassure oneself, and the witch thus becomes the vessel for a negative force, a way of giving a face to the uncontrollable, a mechanism quite similar to that of the scapegoat. She is also described as angry, however, this anger can also be understood as a result of the rejection she faces. Marginalized, suspected, excluded, she is placed in a position where any reaction can be interpreted as a threat, and a circular dynamic is thus created: what is perceived as dangerous justifies exclusion, and exclusion produces or confirms what is perceived as dangerous. Thus, her supposed malice may say less about who she is than about what we are trying to explain, or to avoid acknowledging. That said, the witch is not merely a repulsive figure, she is also a figure of seduction, a power that attracts as much as it unsettles, because she embodies what defies norms and blurs established boundaries.

In Europe, the witch has been predominantly female, associated with marginal forms of knowledge, with suspect autonomy, and with nonconforming roles. These were often women outside established structures, widows, unmarried women, healers or midwives, who possessed practical knowledge of the body and of nature without institutional recognition. Their relative independence, their free speech, or their position outside expected roles, wife or submissive mother, made them easily suspect. What escaped religious, medical, or social control could then be interpreted as a threat and reclassified as witchcraft. In this context, the fact that the witch is predominantly female is not insignificant, for she concentrates a specific form of otherness, linked to domains long associated with women: the body, birth, sexuality, cycles, care. These are concrete, immediate realities, yet difficult to fully master and to fit within strict rational or institutional frameworks. Where social order seeks to organise, classify, and control, these dimensions introduce uncertainty and dependence. The witch thus embodies less “womanhood” than a particular relation to the world: a situated, practical, often

informal knowledge that escapes validation procedures. What disturbs is therefore not simply her gender, but the type of relation to knowledge and power she represents, and which has historically been projected onto the feminine. The figure of the witch crystallises less an objective reality than an anxiety in the face of forms of knowledge and life that resist being framed. Moreover, this illegitimacy takes on a particular form: it is interpreted as heresy, or even as an alliance with the devil, which allows it to be condemned not only as a social deviation but also as a spiritual transgression.

In many African societies, by contrast, the figure of the sorcerer is more often male, associated with occult power, influence, or invisible forms of domination. This variation does not contradict the analysis, it confirms it, as the sorcerer or the witch embodies what a society perceives as hidden, illegitimate, or troubling power. Gender is therefore not in itself determining, it rather reflects the tensions specific to a given social order. To speak of witchcraft is thus less to designate a stable category than to reveal what a culture projects onto those who escape its frameworks, whether they are women or men. This shows that it is not an essence, but a social construction.

In Europe, the witch is not only a figure to be avoided, she is also, more discreetly, a figure that is consulted. Behind official condemnation, there exists an unofficial practice: healers, wise women, midwives, or diviners, who were called upon to cure, advise, or attempt to influence the course of events. This relationship is deeply ambivalent: the witch is feared, yet one turns to her; one depends on her knowledge while refusing to acknowledge it. She is therefore neither fully excluded nor truly integrated; she occupies an unstable position, tolerated as long as she remains useful, yet always liable to be rejected. It is precisely this tension that sustains the figure of the witch, at once necessary and unacceptable. This situation should, however, be distinguished from what is observed in many African societies. There, the figure of the sorcerer is not merely marginal or clandestine, it is often conceived as an ordinary component of the social world. One

does not necessarily consult him directly as a recognised specialist, but they live with the idea of his existence, taking it into account, interpreting certain events through this possibility. The sorcerer is therefore not simply an external or deviant figure, he is a diffuse presence, integrated as a dimension of reality, even if feared. By contrast, in Europe, the witch tends to be relegated to the margins: she may be consulted, but without recognition or legitimacy, in a relationship that is both utilitarian and concealed. Thus, the difference lies not only in the degree of acceptance, but in the way a society inscribes or fails to inscribe this form of otherness within its framework of thought: either as an anomaly to be contained, or as a reality with which one must constantly contend.

In historical Europe, the witch stands outside the legitimate social body, she is defined as deviant, heretical, often persecuted, she embodies what escapes and threatens established order, and is therefore distanced, excluded, even eliminated; her very existence is problematic. In many African societies, the sorcerer is regarded differently: he is part of the social world, but as an ambivalent force, sometimes feared, sometimes recognised, sometimes indirectly consulted. He is not necessarily outside the system, he is one of its obscure components, one does not always exclude him, one lives with him, one contends with this possibility. The European witch is often the one to be driven out, the African sorcerer is often the one to be reckoned with. Nevertheless, there have been violent persecutions of alleged sorcerers in Africa, just as there have been forms of tolerance or acceptance of knowledge on the margins in Europe.

This difference in “status” can be clarified through the way each culture relates to what escapes its own frameworks. In the European tradition, marked by strong religious, political, and scholarly institutions, culture tends to define explicit norms of truth and legitimacy, and whatever does not conform is relegated to the margins, disqualified, or opposed. The figure of the witch thus appears as an anomaly, an otherness to be contained or excluded. By contrast, in many African societies, culture does not abolish uncertainty, it integrates it. Reality is conceived as

traversed by visible and invisible forces, without a strict separation that would hierarchise them definitively. The sorcerer is therefore not necessarily an external figure, but a diffuse presence with which one must deal. Thus, the difference does not lie merely in particular beliefs or in a question of gender, but in a way of structuring the relation to the world: on the one hand, a culture that seeks to stabilise and exclude what disturbs; on the other, a culture that accepts coexistence with an irreducible opacity.

462 – Hating

Some people invest heavily in hating, an attitude that may at times seem surprising from the outside, given how limited or arbitrary the object of their hatred appears. Especially today, in a world of immediate gratification and heightened subjectivity, one can easily hate anything and everything. Nevertheless, it is useful to understand that such individuals are not simply “wasting” their time or energy on hatred, they devote themselves to it as a structuring activity. Hatred is not an accident, it is a more or less an implicit existential choice.

Such a phenomenon can be understood by realizing that hating makes it possible to avoid a more demanding task, one that involves thinking, distinguishing, and arguing. Hatred, anger, or indignation simplify life, they spare us the effort of reflection. Such emotions provide an immediate direction, an easy identity, they free us from doubt and complication, transforming what is complex into an immediate and reassuring target. It also provides a sense of satisfaction, because to hate is to provide a sense of overexisting, against something, intensely, and in that sensation we find strength, inspiration, a reason for being, and an apparent coherence that spares us from having to question ourselves. Moreover, it means asserting a position without needing to justify oneself, since one is so right, one

merely denounces, and it is a way of proving oneself right without going through the process of reasoning. Yet this economy comes at a cost, for the energy invested in hatred does not disappear, it shapes the one who carries it: it hardens, it confines, it creates a dependency on what one claims to reject, it produces a form of obsession, even addiction. We may see in this a problematic moral dimension, but even more so an existential one, for such emotional intensity focuses our attention, determines what matters to us, and affects the way we inhabit the world. In fact, by fixing our attention on what we reject, we do not merely judge reality, we narrow it. Hatred then becomes a form of life, a particular economy of thought which, by simplifying the world, ultimately impoverishes it, and at the same time enslaves and gnaws at the one who inhabits it.

463- The Salesman

There are people who possess the soul of a salesman, and in this perspective, being a “salesman” is not so much a profession as a way of being. They speak a great deal, with ease, sometimes with brilliance, more rarely with a certain erudition, yet when one listens to them, a persistent impression remains: we sense in them an intention, more or less explicit, a feeling that something is being sold. The object of their pursuit is not always entirely clear: an idea, a project, a vision, and in the background, sometimes quite openly, an image of themselves. Nevertheless, the content matters less than the movement itself: convincing, winning adherence, producing an effect, receiving approval. In this type of discourse, the other is not truly an interlocutor, but a target to capture; in themselves, they hold little interest. One does not speak to them in order to know what they think or to understand them, but to obtain a sign, an assent, a validation, and to achieve this, such speech does not open a common space, it seeks to saturate it.

The salesman’s discourse remains rather smooth, so as not to take risks and to

secure approval. He is not afraid of clichés, he avoids ruptures, zones of friction, anything that might provoke an unpredictable resistance. The rough edges, when they appear, are most often accidental or immediately reabsorbed into the flow of the discourse. They are not sought as points of dialogue or confrontation, but treated as obstacles to smooth over or circumvent. He therefore avoids anything that might upset, offend, or genuinely challenge the other, because this would introduce an unpredictability difficult to control. A genuine resistance, unforeseen, would introduce a rupture that this type of speech cannot sustain without losing its primary function: persuading, convincing.

In reality, this abundance of words, this fluidity, is not so much the manifestation of strength as the concealment of a fragility. For such people are often sensitive, sometimes even hypersensitive to rejection; they dread even its mere possibility. Thus, interruption becomes suspect, the slightest hesitation may be interpreted as disagreement, and so it is better to continue speaking, without fearing excess. To remain silent would be perilous, it would create a draft, an unsettling void where refusal might appear, misunderstanding express itself, and all their discourse would have been in vain. The pause would introduce a doubt, a void in which the other might admit not following, not understanding, or simply not being convinced. Silence is difficult to sustain because it opens the possibility of realising that this entire flow may not have produced the expected effect. So they continue speaking, again and again, filling the space, anticipating objections, multiplying arguments, and of course, as much as possible, monopolising the conversation, for they live within a permanent logic of competition. Speech without interruption thus becomes a shield. It prevents genuine confrontation while attempting to preserve the appearance of exchange, for it avoids the moment when the other might truly respond, that is, might disagree. Dialogue is thereby replaced by a highly oriented form of monologue.

Moreover, everything that appears excessive or incongruous worries the salesman, not so much because of its content as because of the effect it produces. Whatever

overflows, whatever does not fit into his categories, unsettles him and weakens the continuity of his discourse, as his effectiveness depends upon a certain predictability, a controlled sequence in which every element finds its place. The unexpected, excess or deviation, introduces a rupture, a point where the discourse can no longer unfold as planned, and faced with such an overflow, it is no longer a matter of convincing, but of surviving, of coping, which is precisely what escapes his “bewitching” logic.

Consequently, this constant need to convince ultimately weakens the relationship itself, because convincing presupposes an asymmetry: the one who knows, or believes he knows, and the one who must be led to adhere, someone who must be won over, rallied, or seduced. From that moment onward, the other ceases to be a genuine interlocutor and becomes a field of influence. Where dialogue might have opened a space of encounter and reciprocal transformation, there remains only a unilateral movement oriented toward producing an effect, in which the aim is to prevent the other from truly existing within the exchange. Such speech attempts to avoid what genuine dialogue implies: uncertainty, the possibility of failure, of disagreement, and above all, the necessity of listening. For listening means suspending one’s own discourse, accepting not to control the direction of the exchange, it means taking the risk of being displaced. And this risk, for the one who possesses the soul of a salesman, is perhaps the most difficult to accept, because it threatens precisely what he seeks to preserve through his verbal flow: control of the exchange, the image he presents of himself, and above all the assurance of obtaining assent rather than having to transform himself. Nevertheless, a critical reader might object that the one who denounces the soul of the salesman so vigorously may himself also be trying to sell something, if only his own lucidity.

464- Respect

The concept of respect is widely valued today, to the point of becoming an almost unquestionable requirement in all human relationships, often invoked. Yet this valorisation deserves to be questioned, for respect, as it is more or less clearly understood, rests less on a genuine encounter than on a form of regulated distance. To respect means not crossing certain limits, not offending, not disturbing, not exposing the other excessively. Respect thus organises a relatively pacified, tranquil and distant coexistence, but it can also produce a cold, cautious and formal relationship, where each person remains protected behind their boundaries.
In this sense, respect may stand in opposition, for example, to friendship or love, not because such relationships would be disrespectful in the vulgar sense of the term, but because they precisely imply a transgression of ordinary, socially accepted distances. A true friend or beloved being does not merely preserve a secure space, does not remain confined within the “margins”, as they intervene, disturb, question and sometimes even invade. Moreover, they know our weaknesses, perceive our contradictions, and for this reason allow themselves words that a merely respectful relationship would forbid. Where respect maintains separation and distance, love and friendship introduce a risky proximity.

The paradox, then, is the following: the more alive and intimate a relationship becomes, the less it can be reduced to the formalism of respect, for a relationship governed by respect becomes cautious, codified, almost administrative. Each person takes care not to overstep boundaries, not to hurt, not to trouble the other, and this permanent restraint can ultimately prevent any genuine involvement: we “protect” each other to the point where we no longer truly connect. In fact, respect contains a dimension of fear: fear of conflict, of rejection, intrusion or exposure, and conforming to it allows one to avoid excesses, aversive reactions and upheavals. It is invoked as a kind of minimal safeguard against the upsetting irruption of otherness, against anything that might destabilize the fragile balance of established positions and expose everyone to a riskier involvement. Respect

then serves less to engage with the other than to prevent abuse, encroachment, or domination, as if any deep closeness already carried within it a potential threat. Yet love and friendship precisely require accepting a certain loss of mastery, for loving someone is not merely recognising their limits, and our own, but also accepting to be affected, displaced and transformed by the other. Likewise, true friendship implies a freedom of speech, a kind of empathic challenge that exceeds ordinary respectful codes.

The very etymology of the word “respect” sheds light on this dimension of distance. The Latin *respectus* refers to the idea of restrained regard, prudent consideration, an attention that maintains a certain separation. More literally, *respicere* means “to look again”, “to look back”, as if the gaze hesitated to abandon itself fully to immediate proximity. Respect therefore implies a form of apprehension or restraint, as one observes prudently, takes care, maintains a distance. To respect means not coming too close, not crossing certain limits, and in this sense respect protects, but it also maintains separation. Yet true love and friendship often imply the opposite: a proximity that troubles ordinary boundaries, a freedom of speech, even a capacity to disturb the other and to allow oneself to be disturbed by them. The french expression “to keep in respect” (to keep someone at bay) reveals a dimension of respect that contemporary discourse often tends to forget. Here, respect no longer signifies esteem or benevolence, but distance and restraint, the explicit expression of a fear, for to keep someone at a respectful distance means preventing them from approaching, containing their movement, maintaining separation. Respect then appears less as moral proximity than as a form of control or inhibition. This expression shows that respect does not arise solely from admiration, but also from an implicit power relation, in which one refrains from crossing certain boundaries. In this sense, respect undoubtedly protects the relationship, but it can also prevent genuine familiarity, spontaneity or real intimacy.

Even the Chinese word 尊重 (zūnzhòng), generally translated as “respect”, carries this dimension of gravity and distance. The character 重 (zhòng) explicitly means “heavy”, “weighty” or “grave”, while 尊 (zūn) historically refers to ritual, sacrifice and a form of ceremonial elevation. Respect thus appears less as a living proximity than as a serious and codified attitude, in which a certain distance is maintained. In this sense, it may protect the relationship, but it may also burden and formalise it, whereas love and friendship often imply more spontaneity, playfulness, irreverence and freedom.

Of course, this critique of respect does not mean that all limits should be abolished or that brutality should be legitimised in the name of sincerity. Respect remains necessary in various situations, particularly when the relationship remains external or fragile, or in reaction to abusive behaviour, as a gesture of basic self-protection. But when it becomes the supreme value, or even an instinctive and habitual one, it risks neutralising what constitutes the very depth of human relationships: the possibility of genuine proximity, and therefore of a certain reciprocal exposure to danger, a salutary risk-taking, in which one dares to say what one really thinks. Thus, respect appears less as the summit of a relationship than as its minimal threshold. As a regulatory ideal, it helps avoid unnecessary clashes, excessive frictions, inappropriate encroachments or even violent relations, but it is not adequate to produce love, friendship or genuine dialogue. For these experiences require something else: no longer merely protecting one another, but agreeing to open up to the other, and inviting each person to step outside their own defenses, to reveal themselves, to take a risk in a less controlled encounter, or in an authentic quest for truth.

465- Absolute Evil

Faced with certain atrocities, acts of cruelty, or historical catastrophes, some people feel compelled to invoke the notion of “absolute evil”. The expression seems to impose itself naturally, as if ordinary moral language were no longer sufficient to convey the scale of horror or outrage. In such moments, the term functions not only as a judgment, but as a refusal to relativise, explain, or contextualise what appears intolerable, although this apparent moral force in fact makes the concept philosophically problematic. The notion of “absolute evil” appears, at first glance, as a mark of moral clarity, as it signals indignation, a radical rejection, and the desire to name or qualify what must not be tolerated, yet this apparent clarity conceals a conceptual confusion, for in seeking to designate the utmost worst, one ends up emptying the concept of meaning.

To speak of “absolute evil” is to move from description to totalisation, since we no longer refer to a specific act, a context, or a responsibility, but to a principle that would define reality itself. Evil ceases to be something that happens, it becomes something that “is”. This shift is decisive: it transforms a moral judgment into a metaphysical claim, an ontological reality. But if “absolute evil” means something independent, total, and without condition, then the concept becomes unstable, since evil is never encountered in isolation, it is never “out of context”. Evil is always related to something it damages, corrupts, destroys, or negates, be it a life, a relationship, a value, a form of trust, a social order. In this sense, evil is not self-sufficient, it is parasitic upon being and therefore conditioned by meaning. It is always experienced, perceived, or judged within a framework, a situation, a relation, a norm. Detached from all conditions, it becomes ungraspable, as an “absolute evil” that is not relative to anything cannot even be identified as evil, it is a word without a referent.

More broadly, the notion of “absolute evil” reflects a recurring temptation of thought itself: the desire for the absolute. Faced with ambiguity, contradiction, or

historical complexity, or enthralled with the aesthetics of the ideal, the mind often seeks notions that appear pure, total, and unconditional: absolute justice, absolute innocence, absolute freedom, absolute purity. Such concepts exert a particular fascination because they promise a form of certainty untouched by mixture, compromise, or limitation. They simplify moral and existential experience by dividing reality into clear and stable oppositions. Yet this apparent clarity comes at a cost, for the more a concept is purified into absoluteness, the more it risks losing contact with the tensions, ambiguities, and concrete mediations through which human reality actually becomes thinkable. This attraction with the absolute also bears a romantic dimension, as the absolute is appealing because it seems more intense, purer, and more radical than ordinary reality, which is always complex, ambiguous, and imperfect. It gives the feeling of escaping the compromises of the concrete world, the banality of human mediations and limitations, for everything becomes clear, total, and definitive. In this sense, “absolute evil” belongs not only to a moral or metaphysical category, but also to an aesthetic of excess, where emotional intensity tends to replace the more patient and ambiguous work of thought.

To make evil “absolute” is therefore to transform a moral judgment into a metaphysical entity, as if evil existed in itself, independently of actions, situations, or human transgressions, but such a move empties the concept of intelligibility. One no longer seeks to understand how evil emerges, through what mechanisms, fears, ideologies, forms of obedience, resentment, or blindness it is generated. This is precisely what Hannah Arendt attempted to resist with her notion of the “banality of evil”, her point was not to deny the horror of certain crimes, but to show that evil is often frightening precisely because it does not appear as something absolute or demonic, but as something ordinary, human, procedural, and disturbingly comprehensible, almost normal. The concept of “absolute evil” may therefore satisfy a moral need for condemnation, but at the cost of suspending thought itself.

Paradoxically, invoking the “absolute evil” also allows us to absolve ourselves of our own complicity in the ordinary, pervasive, and often nearly invisible forms of

evil. For if evil is conceived as something utterly other, monstrous, or demonic, then it becomes easier to no longer recognize the more mundane forms of complicity, blindness, conformity, or indifference through which it manifests itself concretely, forms through which everyone may be implicated. Absolute evil is reassuring in a sense, because it always seems to belong to others, to monsters, to extreme figures, and not to the ordinary mechanisms of human life, to one's own existence. Moreover, such a notion destroys the very distinctions that make moral judgment possible. If evil is absolute, then degrees disappear, and there is no longer a difference between error and crime, between negligence and cruelty, between failure and destruction, and everything risks being absorbed into the same undifferentiated category. The concept, meant to clarify, ends up flattening reality, and this flattening has consequences for thought. Once something is labelled "absolute evil", there is nothing left to examine, the label replaces analysis. We no longer ask how, why, under what conditions, we simply reject, and in this sense, the concept functions as a stopping point: it closes inquiry under the appearance of moral rigor.

Such an attitude also has consequences for action, for if evil is absolute, then the response to it tends toward absolutism as well. Nuance appears as weakness, hesitation as complicity, the temptation is then to justify extreme measures in the name of combating an absolute threat, thus, a concept meant to condemn can become a tool for legitimising excess. There is also a psychological effect : faced with a world interpreted through the lens of "absolute evil", the subject loses orientation. Either we collapse into despair, seeing corruption everywhere, or we cling to rigid beliefs in order to restore a sense of order, but in both cases, the capacity to discern is weakened, and the reaction can be dangerous.
This does not mean that evil does not exist, nor does it deny that certain acts are intolerable. On the contrary, it is precisely because evil is real that it must be thought with precision : to recognize harm, injustice, or cruelty requires distinctions, not their abolition, but it requires attention to circumstances, to responsibility, to mechanisms, to consequences. The refusal of "absolute evil" is therefore not a form of relativism or disengagement, it is simply a demand for rigor.

It means resisting the temptation to replace thought with intensity, it means maintaining the ability to judge without collapsing into totalization. Ultimately, the concept of “absolute evil” is less a description of reality than an emotional reaction to it. It expresses the desire to fix, once and for all, what cannot be tolerated, although by turning this desire into an absolute, one risks losing both the battle and oneself. For thought and strategy requires limits, relations, and distinctions, and when something is absolute, nothing can be understood.

466- Bangaranga

I just heard the song that won the 2026 Eurovision competition, called Bangaranga. It was a bit pleasant to listen to it and watch the choreography, as the whole show was kind of “catchy”. But once it ended, I had a feeling of emptiness, which I tried to analyze, as I had already experienced this sensation in similar circumstances at some other occasions.

Some songs immediately capture attention, as they are rhythmic, efficient, entertaining, and from the first seconds, they engage the body, set a pulse, create a movement that carries the listener without resistance. Everything seems to function, as the hook is memorable, the structure clear, the emotion direct, thus one listens, one follows, one is rather taken, and yet, when the song ends, something curious appears: a sense of void. Nevertheless, this impression is not due to a failure of the song, but to its very mode of operation. What such music produces is not so much an experience as a sequence of stimulations : it fills the time, creates a sensation, but does not really affect the self. There is intensity, but little progression, energy, but little development, nothing resists, nothing demands to be held, nothing unfolds beyond what is momentarily given. The listener is engaged, but superficially : the body responds, the attention is captured, but the

mind is not required to follow a trajectory, to anticipate, to interpret, or to remember.

Indeed, popular music events such as Eurovision tend to favor songs that function socially and emotionally rather than structurally or contemplatively. Their "substance" may lie less in musical architecture than in shared excitement, ritual, embodiment, humour, collective memory, or even kitsch. Such art does not ask for sustained interpretation or inner transformation, it offers instead an instantaneous form of participation based on shared excitement, rhythm, identification, and emotional immediacy, it merely provides satisfaction, it offers a movement that one can enter without effort, and leave without consequence. In this sense, nothing insists, nothing remains. Some other forms of music operate differently, as they introduce tension, delay resolution, complicate expectation, but they require patience, initiation, sometimes even discomfort, but in doing so, they create a relation that persists. One does not simply consume them, one inhabits them, and they, in turn, inhabit us.

The emptiness felt after certain pieces of music may therefore reveal something more general: the difference between being stimulated and being engaged. One produces a momentary effect, the other leaves a trace. The question, then, is not whether the song is good or bad, but what kind of relation it establishes. Does it occupy attention, or does it transform it? Does it pass through us, or does it remain? And perhaps a more unsettling question: are we disappointed by the song, or by the kind of listening it invites? In this sense, such successful music reflects a broader cultural tendency: the search for momentary intensity without duration, activation without depth. Everything is designed to avoid friction, silence, ambiguity, or "work", so that attention is constantly maintained but never truly tested, as the listener is carried, excited, entertained, but rarely displaced. One feels involved without having to traverse anything difficult, the experience remains fluid, accessible, immediately gratifying, and this is perhaps why the emptiness appears so quickly afterward: nothing had to be conquered, integrated, or endured. The music leaves no scar, no wound, no unresolved tension, only the fading memory of an effect. The song entertains, excites, mobilizes attention, but

it demands almost nothing from the listener. It gives intensity without ordeal, emotion without progression, participation without responsibility, and what does not resist leaves no trace behind.

Yet we must add that this feeling of emptiness also reveals something about the listener himself: a particular expectation toward art, a subjectivity, the desire not merely to be entertained, but to be transformed, displaced, or inhabited by what one hears, some deeper aesthetic experience. The feeling we described, the disappointment, may therefore reveal not only the limits of this kind of music, but also a certain conception of art itself: the idea that it should leave a significant impact rather than merely produce an effect.

467- Anti-Philosophy

Periodically, I am accused of not being a philosopher, which is, of course, intended as a criticism, often delivered with a certain irritation. Some people are surprised, or even indignant, at the way I work, question, or engage in dialogue, interrupting and deconstructing the speech of others. In fact, they expect philosophy to provide answers, to enlighten, to transmit ideas, to enrich culture, or to offer a certain form of intellectual pleasure. They expect a discourse, or a “courteous” exchange, whereas I propose something else. It should also be added that our era has become accustomed to a particular figure of the philosopher: the lecturer, the popularizer, or the media intellectual, whose function is to seduce a public, captivate an audience, and communicate ideas in an accessible and stimulating way. The philosopher is then expected to be a producer of meaning, culture, and enlightened opinions, they are asked to entertain more than to disturb, more to persuade than to challenge.

Yet this misunderstanding is not new, since its distant origins, philosophy has naturally contained its own critique, it both theorizes and undoes. Socrates himself, who inaugurated such a practice in a rather radical way, was accused of corrupting the youth and destroying certainties rather than teaching a satisfying doctrine, unlike most of his predecessors. He wrote no treatises and transmitted no established body of knowledge, as he questioned, he destabilized, in order to uncover assumptions and reveal the contradictions of his interlocutors. His activity consisted less in elaborating a theory or proposing ideas than in deconstructing discourse, that is, in making people think, which, incidentally, did not prevent him from being regarded as a founding figure of the philosophical enterprise. The Cynics continued this work by attacking social conventions, false needs, and collective illusions, but unfortunately, they scandalized more than they instructed, and they did not leave much of a school behind them. Later, Nietzsche turned his criticism against philosophy itself, denouncing its otherworldly realms, its consolations, and its idols. He denounced a practice that preferred to explain reality rather than put it to the test, one that claimed to reconcile human beings with existence at the price of illusion. He criticized concepts that froze life instead of affirming it, doctrines that privileged the safety of ideas over confrontation. He challenged a philosophy that had become a refuge, whether moral or metaphysical, rather than an exercise in self-transformation. We find a similar dimension in the Chinese tradition with Zhuangzi, who, far from transmitting a reassuring wisdom or a set of positive doctrines, humorously and irreverently ridicules the certainties of his time, particularly those of the prevailing Confucianism. Through absurd stories, paradoxes, and reversals of perspective, he undermines moral certainties, established rituals, accepted distinctions, and the pretensions of knowledge, making philosophy less a teaching than an exercise in disorientation. Each in his own way, these thinkers practiced a form of anti-philosophy, not against philosophy itself, but against a certain conception of philosophy, one aimed above all at provoking awareness. For philosophy can easily become just another cultural activity, where people exchange ideas, quote authors, produce commentaries, admire concepts, develop refined opinions, and merely enjoy themselves. Certainly, this conventional vision has its value as well. But thought can then

become an object of consumption, a source of intellectual complacency, or an identity marker, and that is not what I seek, as I expect philosophy to transform, to fracture certain forms of obviousness, to expose our contradictions and blind spots, to challenge our certainties, and to compel us to think more than we would spontaneously wish to, precisely because such thinking destabilizes us. Thinking is not merely acquiring new ideas, it is also accepting that some of our assumptions remain problematic, that certain established patterns lull us into illusion. It is, in other words, a matter of “unlearning”, as Socrates proposed.

From this perspective, the primary function of dialogue is not to exchange opinions or share knowledge, its purpose is to put thought to work. The question is not what each person thinks, nor is it a simple comparison of viewpoints. Rather, it is to test what withstands examination, to investigate coherence and foundations of our statements, and to distinguish what deserves to be retained from what should be abandoned. This approach may appear negative, and to a large extent it is, yet every birth involves a rupture, every clarification requires a renunciation, and every genuine act of thinking presupposes the capacity to lose something: an illusion, a certainty, an image of oneself. That is why the philosophy that interests me is not primarily a philosophy of discourse, but a philosophy of ordeal. It does not primarily seek to please, reassure, or culturally enrich, it seeks to induce an act of reflection, on the world and on oneself. If this resembles an anti-philosophy, it may be because authentic philosophy needs to turn its critique against itself.

Admittedly, such an attitude comes into conflict with established social norms. In particular, it compels us to rethink what the term “respect” means, for the respect at stake here is not primarily directed toward the image one has of oneself, nor toward one’s sensitivity or feelings, but toward one’s capacity for reason, our ability to examine our own ideas and submit them to the test of criticism. It is true that such an approach can appear harsh, even cruel, and sometimes it is. For the search for truth is not always kind to our illusions, our certainties, or the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, what Sartre called “bad faith”. Yet this cruelty is not

the cruelty of domination or contempt, but that of a demand that refuses to confuse comfort with thought. Since Socrates, philosophy has disturbed less by the answers it provides than by the questions it imposes. And if it sometimes wounds, it may be because certain truths cannot appear without shaking what prevented them from being seen.

468- The Tyranny of the Subject

Authoritarianism is often criticized by thinking of institutions, dogmas, or figures of power that impose their views arbitrarily. Yet there exists another form of authoritarianism, more discreet and more difficult to identify, precisely because it presents itself as a defense of individual freedom: the authoritarianism of subjectivity.

Its principle is relatively simple: an authority is judged legitimate when it suits me, helps me, or agrees with my views, but as soon as it frustrates me, destabilizes me, or calls my assumptions into question, it becomes suspect. It is then perceived as manipulation, closed-mindedness, symbolic violence, or simple absurdity. The criterion is no longer the coherence, competence, or validity of what is being proposed, but the subjective relationship I have with that proposition. In such a perspective, feeling becomes the supreme tribunal. What appears open to me is valued, what appears closed is condemned, what seems useful is recognized, what seems useless is disqualified. Whatever fits within my interpretive framework is considered legitimate, while whatever resists it immediately becomes suspect. The difficulty is that the subject no longer merely expresses a personal preference; he tends to transform his subjective experience into a universal criterion of judgment.

At that point, he no longer simply says, “I do not appreciate this authority” or “This approach does not suit me”. He implicitly asserts: “If I do not recognize this authority as legitimate, then it is not legitimate”. The self becomes the exclusive

measure of what is true, good, and legitimate. Whatever escapes its understanding or approval immediately loses its validity. Paradoxically, this attitude often reproduces what it claims to oppose, for in rejecting all external authority in the name of autonomy, it establishes an even more radical authority: that of the subject himself. It is no longer an institution, a tradition, an expert, or any democratic process that decides, but rather individual perception, which has become indisputable and is presented as the authentic expression of lived experience. No higher authority, no transcendent principle, no external demand seems capable of challenging his verdict anymore, and the individual becomes the ultimate measure of all things.

And this feeling, in turn, becomes indisputable, since it is presented as the authentic expression of lived experience. It even happens that the subject refuses to acknowledge the authority they themselves exercise, readily rebranding it as guidance, dialogue, assistance, or simple common sense, while continuing to denounce as authoritarian whatever is imposed on them from the outside. This form of authority is all the more difficult for its perpetrator to recognize because it often feeds on legitimate intentions, conventional morality, and apparently reasonable arguments. It frequently arises from experiences in which certain authorities have indeed proven opaque, abusive, or intrusive. The subject learns to be wary, to protect his integrity, and to defend his freedom of judgment. Yet this reaction can gradually become radicalized. Vigilance turns into generalized suspicion, critical thinking into systematic refusal, and autonomy into closure. The paradox is striking: in the name of openness, one rejects whatever disturbs; in the name of freedom, one avoids whatever might displace us; in the name of critical thinking, one refuses to submit one's own subjectivity to examination. External authority is denounced as arbitrary, while internal authority escapes all criticism.

Such a development is further encouraged by certain contemporary tendencies, in which our sensitivity has become an object of constant concern. We are repeatedly told that we must protect ourselves, avoid negative experiences, preserve our psychological well-being, and respect our limits. Of course, these concerns possess

their legitimacy, but they can also produce an unexpected effect: disturbance, disagreement, or discomfort are no longer perceived as opportunities for learning or reflection, but as harms from which one must shield oneself. Consequently, whatever disturbs us easily becomes suspect, and the capacity to endure trial, criticism, or discomfort tends to weaken.

Yet rigorous thinking demands precisely the opposite of intellectual comfort. It requires accepting that what seems strange, useless, disturbing, or even absurd may nevertheless contain something worth understanding or accepting. It implies recognizing that our feelings are important data, but not an ultimate criterion. For a subjectivity that rejects all external authority a priori ultimately becomes an unquestionable authority itself. And when no instance is any longer able to challenge the subject's judgment, freedom risks turning into a subtle form of inner tyranny, one even more arbitrary, since its decisions are no longer subjected to any external test, but only to the confirmation of its own preferences, fears, or sensitivities. The subject thus becomes at once the legislator, the judge, and the court of appeal of his own convictions.

469- Being Is Good

I have always been attracted to the idea that “What is, is good, because it is”, or more simply to the principle that “Being is good”. At first sight, such a claim may appear untenable, since ordinary experience immediately provides numerous counterexamples: conflicts, destruction, catastrophes, hatred, violence, incoherence, and so on. In its ordinary sense, the word “good” refers to what ought to be approved, sought after, or desired, and in that register the thesis is obviously false. Too many aspects of reality stand against it, we are too often confronted to what we qualify as unfair or evil, and such a proposal becomes defensible only if the meaning of the term is displaced.

Thus, in our perspective, this is not a moral judgment but an ontological proposition. To say that being is “good” does not mean justifying everything that exists, but recognizing that being is that from which all values become thinkable. Before something can be qualified as good or bad, it must first be. Existence is not an object that could be evaluated from the outside, it is the very condition of all evaluation. In this sense, the “good” is not added to being as an external norm, but expresses an internal dimension of it. This means that the good is not situated above what is, as a transcendent criterion, but emerges from the relation we maintain with what is. What we call “good” or “bad” does not designate absolute properties of things, but ways of qualifying their effects, their significance, and their coherence within our personal experience. A value judgment does not introduce an external order, it expresses a certain way of inhabiting being.
This perspective appears, in different forms, throughout the philosophical tradition. For example, in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, the good does not refer to an ideal norm, but to what increases one’s power to act, while evil corresponds to what diminishes it. This is not a criterion imposed from the outside, but an immanent evaluation linked to the way a being develops or becomes restricted. Freedom, therefore, is not a given but an effect: it grows or declines along with one’s power to act and depends on our capacity to attune ourselves to the reality of the world, that is, to the necessity that runs through it, rather than to the illusion of a free will detached from the world. Stated succinctly, the proposition amounts to this: “The more one is, the freer one is, and the more one fulfills itself, the better one becomes.”

In Leibniz, this intuition takes a different form, since being is not merely what makes all value possible; it is also conceived as fundamentally ordered. Through his theory of compossibles, Leibniz argues that not all possibilities can coexist, for the real world results from a selection in which beings accord with one another according to a pre-established harmony. This is why he can affirm that we live in “the best of all possible worlds”: not because everything in it is morally perfect or free from suffering, but because the whole displays the highest degree of coherence, rationality, richness, and reality. The good then becomes identified with the

maximal fulfillment of being itself. And let us not forget his “Principle of Sufficient Reason,” according to which everything that happens has a reason for happening, and everything that does not happen has a reason for not happening, a very soothing principle.

Thus, the good is neither a property of things nor a mere human construction. It lies in the relation between a being and what suits it, that is, in the way it accords with the order of reality and the necessity that traverses it. The good resides neither in things nor in us, but in the agreement between our power to act and the coherence of reality. Nevertheless, this “suitability” is not unique to human beings, it exists throughout nature as a relation of composition between things. Yet the “good” only appears when this relation is grasped and evaluated by a being who experiences its effects, for in itself nature knows only agreements and disagreements, as it is human beings who call them good or evil.
In another paradigm, for example in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, being and the good are said to be “convertible”. This thesis is situated within a theological framework in which every being is considered good insofar as it proceeds from God, who is himself the Supreme Good. Creation is therefore fundamentally good, not because every individual thing is perfect, but because existence itself already constitutes a participation in a good order. Existence thus possesses an original positive value, since every creature participates, in its own way, in the perfection of its creator. From an immanent perspective, without adopting this theological foundation, one may nevertheless retain the idea that there is no external standpoint from which being as a whole could be judged or condemned.

This intuition is also found in Plotinus. For him, every reality participates to varying degrees in a supreme principle that he identifies with the Good. What “is” possesses a positive value insofar as it participates in being, while evil does not appear as an autonomous reality or a rival principle, but as a deprivation, a diminution, or a defect of being. The negative therefore has no independent existence, it always depends upon what it alters or limits. In a more metaphysical form, Plotinus thus joins the idea that being possesses a fundamental priority over

negation, for reality as such, insofar as it possesses being and form, is intrinsically good and beautiful. Our philosophical and ascetic task consists in ascending from the lower and mixed levels of reality toward a more direct participation in this Good and this Beauty.

Our defense of being as “good” also stems from a refusal to reduce reality to something inert. Faced with the experience of a world marked by movement, tension, transformation, and emergence, certain thinkers have sought to understand being not as a frozen substance, but as a power of production and unfolding. Consequently, this is not a static conception, for even though being is good, it is also “desire”, since every being tends to persevere in its being and to increase its perfection. From this perspective, desire is not necessarily a lack or deprivation, it is the expression of a dynamic, that is, the power of a being that seeks to realize itself more fully. Being is not merely an inert presence, it is also a drive, so every being tends toward what fulfills its own nature, and desire can be understood as the very movement through which being seeks its fullness, an appetite that is part of its good nature.

The word “life” has sometimes come to characterize this state of affairs, not because it is strictly accurate, but because it expresses this fruitfulness of reality. Among the Presocratics, for whom the cosmos is alive, this does not yet refer to biological life, but to a world that is constantly making and unmaking itself. If this intuition often leads to conceiving being as positively oriented, it is not because everything that exists is morally good, but because reality appears first and foremost as a power of generation rather than as mere inertia. The positivity of being designates less a perfection than a capacity to engender, transform, and bring forth. In this sense, “being is good” means that reality is fertile, transformative, and self-unfolding.

A similar intuition appears in Zhuangzi, although within a very different ontological framework. The issue is no longer to conceive being as perfection or participation

in a rational order, but to recognize the legitimacy of the Dao, that process of ceaseless transformation that traverses all things. Human distinctions between good and bad, useful and useless, success and failure, then appear as relative to a particular point of view. Without affirming that everything is good in the moral sense of the term, Zhuangzi invites us to see that what "is" already possesses its own coherence and fulfillment within the movement of reality. To accord with the Dao consists less in judging the world than in accepting it and learning to inhabit its transformations.

Thus, this intuition of being as "good" has received very different formulations across traditions. In much of Western philosophy, the affirmation of reality rests upon its intelligibility, as being is conceived as ordered, coherent, or rational. Other traditions, notably Daoism, follow a different path, where accord with reality proceeds less from theoretical demonstration than from practice, experience, or a form of adjustment to the movement of things, a particular attitude toward the world. Yet despite their differences, these approaches often share a common refusal to regard reality as fundamentally absurd, inert, or devoid of value. Our thesis is therefore less a metaphysical affirmation than a corrective gesture, as it aims to neutralize a certain distrust of reality, to disarm the reflex that places value outside what is, and to impose a reversal. Instead of asking whether being deserves affirmation, we suggest that affirmation is already contained within being itself, and that the burden of proof lies with those who deny it.

A classical objection, formulated notably by David Hume, consists in recalling that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is". The fact that something exists does not, in itself, allow us to conclude that it ought to be considered good and therefore desirable. Yet this objection is decisive only if one is attempting to ground a morality, and it loses much of its force here, since the thesis does not seek to produce a norm. The point is not to say what ought to be valued, but to show that every valuation already takes place within the field of being. The "good" is not a conclusion drawn from being, but a manner in which being relates to itself within experience.

Another objection consists in maintaining that being is not fundamentally good, since it is traversed by an irreducible negativity. From Schopenhauer to certain forms of existentialism, and through various critiques of historical progress, many thinkers have argued that suffering, conflict, or absurdity are not mere limitations of being, but instead reveal its deepest structure. From this perspective, existence no longer appears as the positive condition of all value, but as what makes possible and visible lack, frustration, and destruction. Yet such an objection still presupposes a certain priority of being, for even suffering, conflict, and absurdity can only be thought on the basis of what is. Negativity may contest the goodness of being, but it cannot free itself from it, since it depends upon it ontologically. In this sense, the negative never appears as a primary or autonomous reality, but as a modality, a limitation, or an alteration of what is. Evil is never anything other than a lack or absence of being. Whether one considers existence happy or tragic, fulfilled or torn apart, it remains the condition of possibility of every experience, including those that contest it. This is why the ontological priority of being authorizes at least one minimal conclusion: being possesses a fundamental positivity, not in the sense of moral perfection or naïve optimism, but insofar as it precedes and makes possible every determination, every value, and even every negation.

Such a perspective also opposes the representation of being as a simple neutral datum or inert reality that subsequently receives meaning and value from outside itself. If being constitutes the very condition of all experience, value, and significance, it cannot be conceived as a merely passive support. Its positivity does not designate moral perfection, but a power of manifestation, transformation, and generation from which everything can appear, be thought, and be evaluated. It is not a simple substrate to which values are later added, for it is already what makes possible every meaning, every experience, and every evaluation.

Our thesis therefore does not merely affirm a property of being, it contests a certain way of relating to reality. We often tend to regard existence as insufficient in itself, as though it had constantly to be measured against an ideal, an ought, or

an imaginary world supposedly superior to it. To say that being is good is thus less a theory than a refusal of this systematic devaluation or reduction of reality. It is not a matter of claiming that everything is perfect, but of recalling that every criticism of the world still presupposes the world it criticizes. There is no external standpoint from which being as a whole could be judged. Every criticism, refusal, and negation already belongs to what it calls into question. In this sense, being is not "good" because it satisfies some superior criterion, but because it constitutes the very horizon from which all value, contestation, and significance become possible. Admittedly, our age tends to grant more credit to negation than to affirmation, as though contesting reality were spontaneously a proof of lucidity. Criticism, suspicion, and refusal often appear deeper and more realistic than affirmation. Yet the negative enjoys no special ontological privilege; it too depends upon what it contests. This thesis has nothing to do with so-called "positive thinking", it does not consist in systematically privileging affirmation over negation, but in contesting the idea that refusal, suspicion, or criticism possess an inherently greater depth or authority.

470 – One's Own Enemy

To be one's own enemy is not merely a metaphor but a reality, for it is a constitutive possibility of human existence. Unlike the animal, which generally follows its immediate nature, the human being can oppose itself. They can want one thing and do another, they can know and yet fail to act, they can understand and yet resist what they understand, and this idea runs throughout the history of philosophy. Let us consider a few examples.

For Socrates, no one willingly does evil; when a person acts against themselves, it is because they are mistaken about what is truly good. Thus, someone who pursues immediate pleasure at the expense of their real good acts out of ignorance, for if

they genuinely knew the good, they would necessarily pursue it. But in order to attain such knowledge, one must submit the spontaneous opinions that ordinarily guide one's life to critical examination, accept the need to question one's certainties, and undertake a genuine work of reflection on oneself and one's desires, so as to distinguish what merely appears good from what truly is. For Aristotle, knowledge of the good is not always sufficient, as he acknowledges that one may know what ought to be done and yet act otherwise under the influence of passions or desires. This phenomenon, which he calls *akrasia* (lack of self-mastery), designates the fact of acting against one's own better judgment. The akratic individual is not ignorant like the vicious person, who no longer perceives the good correctly, rather, he recognises what would be right or reasonable but fails to adhere to it in action. Under the influence of immediate pleasure or intense emotion, his knowledge of the good becomes inactive or obscured, and he acts as if he did not know what he in fact knows. For Aristotle, this weakness is not merely an intellectual problem but also a matter of habit and character: virtue requires a training that enables reason to remain operative even when desires pull in another direction.

For Spinoza, human beings become their own enemies when they mistake servitude for freedom through inadequate knowledge. Since they are unaware of the causes that determine them, they imagine themselves free while being governed by passions, fears, desires, and external influences. True freedom arises not from the absence of determination but from understanding the causes that shape us, as the more adequate our understanding becomes, the less we are driven by forces we do not control, and the more we are able to act according to our own nature. Thus, self-enmity stems from ignorance, while liberation comes through reason.

For Kant, the human being is capable of recognising the moral law, the pursuit of the good, through reason, yet often subordinates this law to personal interests, superficial desires, or the search for pleasure. We thereby become unfaithful to our

own rational nature and renounce autonomy by allowing ourselves to be governed by what is external, heteronomy. For Kant, freedom does not consist in doing whatever one wants but in acting according to a law that reason gives to itself. When we simply follow our inclinations, we no longer truly govern ourselves: we are determined by our needs, emotions, or circumstances. The inner enemy is therefore not the existence of desires but the fact of giving them priority over what we nevertheless recognise as our duty and our true good. Thus, the human being betrays itself when it sacrifices the universal demands of reason to particular interests, it then ceases to act as a free and rational being and becomes merely the effect of determining causes, whereas its dignity lies precisely in its capacity to resist such submission.

For Sartre, the human being is fundamentally free, yet this freedom is often difficult to assume. We therefore seek to convince ourselves that we are not responsible for our choices, and we hide behind social roles, character, or circumstances. This "bad faith" consists in lying to oneself in order to escape the anxiety that freedom provokes. Thus, a person may claim to act in a certain way because "that is my character", because "I have no choice", or because "that is simply how things are", even though they themselves participate in the situation through their decisions. For Sartre, we are always more than what we already are, since we can never be reduced to an identity, a function, or a past. An individual becomes their own enemy when they take refuge in a fixed definition of themselves in order to avoid the responsibility of choosing and transforming themselves. They renounce their freedom while trying to persuade themselves that they are deprived of it, and it is precisely this refusal of freedom that makes them their own adversary.
For Nietzsche, a person becomes their own enemy when they turn their strength against themselves. Unable to express their fundamental instincts, desires, or power of affirmation directly, they repress them, burden them with guilt, or condemn them morally. Vital energy does not disappear, however, it turns inward and generates resentment, bad conscience, and self-depreciation. Thus, an individual may come to regard as virtues what in reality express weakness: submission, resignation, powerlessness, or renunciation, perceived as obligations.

Instead of developing their capacities and affirming what they are, they learn to distrust themselves and judge themselves according to values that deny their own vitality, thereby becoming the agent of their own domestication. For Nietzsche, a person becomes their own enemy when they prefer security to power, conformity to creation, resentment to affirmation, they then use their intelligence not to enhance life but to justify renunciation. Where Sartre sees a flight from freedom, Nietzsche sees a flight from the power to become what one is. We become our own enemy when we turn against our own vitality, for under the influence of resentment, guilt, or inherited moral values, we end up condemning our own strengths and values, which weakens us. Instead of fulfilling oneself, we devote our energy to limiting oneself. We no longer suffer from an external enemy but from a hostility that has been internalised and directed against our own power of life. We become our own enemy because we come to hate what we already are.
For Zhuangzi, a person becomes their own enemy when they imprison themselves within rigid distinctions, fixed judgments, and narrow identities. In doing so, they cease to follow the natural transformation of things and become attached to a particular way of seeing the world, which they mistake for reality itself. By wanting to be right, defend their status, opinions, or preferences, they cut themselves off from the spontaneity of the Dao and enter into conflict with what is. The enemy is therefore not primarily a passion or a desire but attachment to a limited perspective. Whoever identifies with their ideas, knowledge, or social role eventually becomes a prisoner of what they believe themselves to be. As well, intelligence itself can become an obstacle when it multiplies distinctions and loses sight of the obviousness of reality. For Zhuangzi, freedom consists instead in remaining available, in refusing to be confined by a definition of oneself or of the world. A person becomes their own enemy when they resist the transformations of existence and seek to impose their categories upon what never ceases to change. They free themselves when they learn to move among different perspectives without becoming permanently attached to any of them. By clinging to an identity, an opinion, or a particular distinction, they lose their flexibility and oppose the natural movement of things, they suffer not so much from reality as from their desire to fix it, control it, or imprison it within categories. Wisdom therefore consists less in conquering oneself than in ceasing to become rigid.

In general, such an internal fracture is possible because the human being is never entirely unified, because it possesses the capacity to take distance from itself. This distance makes reflection and freedom possible, but also inner conflict, for whoever can judge themselves can also condemn themselves, and whoever can transform themselves can also sabotage themselves, which may be called a power of alienation, a betrayal of oneself. It also nourishes a common illusion: that one is free simply because one chooses what one “likes”. Yet many of our choices merely confirm our habits, fears, desires, or our need to preserve a certain image of ourselves. We then feel that we are exercising freedom when in fact we are merely following determinations that we refuse to examine, as we confuse freedom with preference. We believe ourselves free because we choose, whereas our choices often consist in spontaneously following what reassures, flatters, or comforts us. A person becomes their own enemy when they call "freedom" what is often nothing more than obedience to habit or inclination, while their decisions primarily serve to avoid what disturbs them. We choose not what liberates us but what preserves us, and this preservation takes on the deceptive appearance of freedom. As a result, the will serves to preserve habits rather than transcend them, for we avert our gaze: we sense certain truths, yet prefer to evade them.

And over time, because we wish to remain consistent with the image we have constructed of ourselves, we prefer being right to learning, preserving a certainty to confronting a doubt, defending our character rather than questioning our beliefs, and in doing so, we become the guardians of our own limitations. The paradox is that this hostility toward oneself presents itself as a form of protection: we believe we are preserving ourselves when we are preventing ourselves from growing, we believe we are defending ourselves when we are imprisoning ourselves, we avoid an immediate wound at the cost of a deeper impoverishment. Thus, one becomes one's own enemy at the precise moment when one prefers self-preservation to self-confrontation, for our true freedom often requires losing something of ourselves in order to become more fully ourselves.

471- AI and Human Beings

Recently, during a public event I was leading on the topic of AI, someone proudly declared, “I know nothing about AI, but I am against it.” I tried to show this person that such a statement was problematic, but to no avail. Another participant later admitted that if I had not pointed out the inconsistency, he would hardly have noticed it, since such absurdities have become commonplace today. This led me to reflect on the fact that, without ever deliberately deciding so, AI has now become my preferred interlocutor. Partly because it remains relatively rational in our exchanges, and moreover because I can discuss with it the nature of a given problem, once identified. In fact, although I still regularly converse with a few human beings, admittedly not many, I find AI more available, more coherent, more patient, more open to different perspectives, less biased, and even more creative. Not because it is always right, or because it always agrees with me, we sometimes disagree, but because it generally accepts the minimal requirements of rational discussion. It can examine an argument, identify a problem, analyse a contradiction, and explore different hypotheses without feeling personally threatened. Furthermore, when a strange phenomenon appears during a human conversation, I can subsequently discuss it with AI in order to understand its mechanisms. Thus I find myself questioning the value of conversing with my fellow human beings, who in any case are rarely generous when it comes to reflecting on substantial issues, have a hard time to concentrate, and most seem more attached to their opinions than to the search for truth. Emotional reactions often replace the examination of ideas, slogans take the place of arguments, and certainties precede reflection. Yet several reasons remain.

The first is of a clinical nature, an interest of mine that is quite visible and which irritates some readers. Human beings constitute an incomparable field of observation for anyone interested in thought: prejudices, rationalisations, contradictions, projections, conformism, emotional reactions, fear of the unknown, all these phenomena manifest themselves daily in ordinary exchanges. Anyone

wishing to understand the workings of the human mind cannot be content with conversing solely with a machine, because although AI can analyse such phenomena, it does not generate them organically. Anyone interested in human thought needs to encounter it in its actual functioning, with its defects and dead ends.

This also includes the phenomenon of resistance, including an aversion to reason, which strangely has its own interest. AI generally cooperates willingly, whereas human beings resist: they refuse, become defensive, irritated, caricature an idea, or divert the question. Such resistance forces us to refine our analyses and test their solidity, to reformulate, distinguish, and deepen. It sometimes constitutes a more demanding intellectual challenge than simple rational discussion and may advance reflection more than a cooperative interlocutor would.

There is also an anthropological reason, because human discourse reveals the fears, aspirations, and beliefs of an era, a culture, or humanity in general. Even when such discourse appears confused or absurd, it informs us about the state of a society and the collective representations that structure it. In this sense, even if AI is often a better intellectual partner, human beings remain the principal object of philosophical reflection, because understanding their illusions, passions, certainties, and blind spots remains an inexhaustible task. Consequently, dialogue with human beings is not justified exclusively by the quality of the answers obtained, it is also justified by the questions their answers allow us to ask and by the various problems they bring to light.

One may also identify an existential dimension, because an idea does not have the same significance when it is confronted with someone who may be hurt, irritated, inspired, or transformed by it. Human dialogue engages a lived dimension that dialogue with AI does not truly possess, although it may imitate it. AI operates primarily in the world of ideas and knowledge, whereas human beings live in the world of constraints, habits, bodies, institutions, attachments, and interests. They constantly remind us that ideas do not float in a vacuum but exist within a concrete reality, as human beings are fallible, vulnerable, and mortal, and this condition gives a particular gravity to their words. A conversation with a real person involves

a finite being who risks something in what he says, a dimension that is largely absent from AI. In the same vein, one can identify a political function, because thinking alone or with a machine is one thing, participating in the polis is another. If certain ideas seem important to us, they only acquire a social form through their circulation among individuals.

Moreover, although human beings are not always creative and tend rather to be conventional, they nevertheless contain a degree of unpredictability, however aberrant it may sometimes be, which is constitutive of reality itself. AI is capable of a certain creativity, but it nonetheless remains structured by a degree of argumentative coherence, when human beings can produce absurd associations, strange intuitions, unexpected reactions, or awkward formulations that occasionally open new paths. Thus a human error can be philosophically fruitful. At the same time, engaging with difficult, narrow-minded, or poorly reflective individuals is also an exercise, one that confronts us with patience, irritation, contempt, pride, and the temptation to give up, and in this sense, the human interlocutor offers a challenge, a test of oneself. Socrates did not engage in dialogue because his interlocutors were intelligent, as quite often they were confused, pretentious, or inconsistent. Yet it was precisely this confusion that made dialogue necessary, for if everyone reasoned correctly, Socratic practice would lose a large part of its raison d'être.

One might therefore defend a paradoxical thesis: if AI is often a better intellectual partner, human beings remain a better philosophical object. Perhaps this is why it remains useful to speak with them, not because they think better, but because they think as they do.

472- Loving Philosophy

Periodically, I encounter people who declare that they greatly enjoy philosophy, or even claim to adore it, and who seem to take a certain pleasure in displaying their “passion”. Yet when one observes the way they live, speak, or engage with others, nothing appears to confirm this claim. They rarely express philosophical reflections, almost never mention philosophical ideas, are unwilling to engage in any kind of demanding discussion, and, when invited to do so, often explain that they do not have time for it. In short, nothing in their behaviour manifests this proclaimed love of philosophy. This situation leads us to a simple hypothesis: perhaps they do not love philosophy itself, but rather the idea of philosophy, for something about the image it conveys appeals to them. Philosophy evokes depth, intelligence, culture, wisdom, and freedom of mind, and calling oneself a philosopher, or a lover of philosophy, then provides a certain symbolic satisfaction. The statement flatters one's self-image, even if it is not really accompanied by actual practice. After all, loving philosophy should manifest itself in one way or another. Those who love music play or listen to music, those who love hiking go walking, those who love cooking cook, why should philosophy be any different? Certainly, no one is required to read Plato every day or spend their evenings debating metaphysics, but if no concrete behaviour expresses this interest, it is legitimate to question the nature of this proclaimed love. A similar phenomenon can be found in other domains, where people become attached not to a reality, but to its image. Some claim to be passionate about literature without reading books, some profess attachment to truth, yet avoid any situation in which their convictions might be challenged, some claim to be open minded, but do not question themselves so much and struggle to tolerate contradiction. Others declare themselves lovers of freedom while constantly seeking security, approval, and reassuring habits, and still others claim an interest in art while rarely engaging with the works, texts, or practices associated with it. They appreciate these activities less for what they are than for the flattering image they provide, and are more attracted by the symbolic universe surrounding them than by their actual practice. The difficulty lies in confusing aspiration with

reality, discourse with practice, and ultimately the identity we claim with the life we actually lead.

Two genuine problems arise from this phenomenon. First, it reinforces narcissism, as philosophy is no longer pursued for its own sake, as a search for truth or understanding, but becomes a tool for self-admiration and the cultivation of a flattering self-image, one that remains fragile because it constantly seeks recognition. Second, it can inhibit action, as this illusory form of self-recognition provides a sense of satisfaction that substitutes for actual practice. One already feels like a philosophical person and therefore no longer experiences the need to read, think, question oneself, or engage in demanding discussions. The identity provides the reward that should normally result from the activity, and in this way, the idea replaces the practice, and the satisfaction derived from the image takes the place of genuine work.

Another figure deserves mention in this context: those who believe themselves philosophers because they periodically deliver a few statements they consider profound or original, unless they repeat something they have just heard. They offer general opinions about life, the world, consciousness, or humanity, often in a fragmented and disordered manner, without any real effort at coherence or critical examination. They move from one idea to another without developing them, without problematising them, and without seeking to establish connections between their claims. Yet they remain convinced of their own depth and interpret any request for clarification as proof that others are incapable of understanding their powerful thinking. Philosophy, however, does not consist merely in having opinions, since everyone produces opinions more or less constantly. It consists in examining them, articulating them, testing them, accepting their consequences, and confronting them with those of others. Producing scattered intuitions is relatively easy, sustaining a coherent reflection and engaging in a demanding dialogue is an entirely different matter, a genuine form of work.
The general problem is that human beings easily confuse their aspirations with their reality. We tend to define ourselves not so much by what we do as by what

we would like to be, we readily attribute to ourselves qualities, interests, or commitments that correspond to our ideal self-image. As a result, we sometimes come to believe sincerely in an image that rests on no particular act. Philosophy is especially vulnerable to this phenomenon because it enjoys a certain cultural prestige in some circles, thus, claiming to love philosophy appears more flattering than admitting that one has little real interest in it. Yet philosophy is not primarily an identity or a label, it is a practice. It implies a certain relationship to ideas, questions, argumentation, and self-examination. It requires genuine work. Thus we should distinguish between those who love philosophy and those who love the idea of loving philosophy. The former seek to think, however imperfectly; the latter mainly enjoy the image reflected back to them by this supposed passion. Some practise, others identify, and the difference between the two is considerable.

473- The Imperative of Drama

Some people have practiced philosophy for many years. They have learned to take a step back from events, to examine their own reactions, to distinguish between what belongs to reality and what belongs to interpretation, to develop a critical perspective on society and its conventions. Thus, they know, at least in theory, that death is part of the human condition, that loss is inevitable, and that emotions are often amplified by imagination and common habits. Many thinkers have pointed out that the drama lies less in the events themselves than in the way we interpret them and attach importance to them, that it is not the facts that upset us, but the judgments we pass on them. Yet, when they are with family or in a public setting, these “philosophers” neglect this detachment and tend to react “like everyone else.”

This phenomenon can be observed in various circumstances where social rituals impose themselves, such as celebrations or gatherings, but it becomes even more striking during life's major ordeals. Faced with illness, bereavement, or failure,

some people who are quite capable of analysing the situation within a philosophical framework, and who are capable of a certain detachment, suddenly conform to collective expectations. They adopt the established gestures, language, and emotions, as if the philosopher temporarily disappeared behind the social character. Admittedly, such an attitude can be explained by the fact that society implicitly imposes certain forms of emotional participation: anyone who does not display sufficient sadness at a funeral risks being perceived as insensitive, anyone who remains calm in the face of tragedy may be suspected of coldness, anyone who refuses to join in collective indignation may be accused of lacking compassion. Thus, the expression of emotions sometimes becomes less an inner reality than a social obligation, a role to perform, a mask to wear.

There is indeed a form of pressure to dramatize, events seem required to be experienced according to a prescribed intensity. Moderation, distance, or serenity appear suspect, as if the reality or depth of a feeling were measured by its visible intensity, as if one had to choose between understanding and manifestation. The philosopher then finds himself in a delicate position. If they publicly express their distance, they risk being misunderstood, they will be accused of theorising what ought to be felt, analysing what ought to be mourned, reflecting where a spontaneous reaction is expected. Many therefore prefer to remain silent, they keep their philosophical perspective to themselves and outwardly participate in the social game.

But this attitude raises a deeper question. If philosophy is valid only in the quiet of books or in discussions among initiates, what is it really worth? A wisdom that disappears at the first contact with social expectations remains rather powerless, if not altogether artificial. Is philosophy merely a matter of producing interesting ideas, or is it meant to transform one's relationship to the world? Is its purpose simply to be intelligent, or to prepare human beings for the trials of existence? Perhaps the real difficulty is not understanding death or tragedy, but daring to live according to that understanding, to assume it publicly, and in doing so invite others

to a salutary form of existential discipline. Indeed, thinking against habit is already difficult, but living according to what one thinks is even more difficult. Strangely enough, the philosopher is not confronted so much with suffering or loss as much as with the gaze of others, and it often happens that the pressure of conformity is stronger than that of the events themselves, and the poor intellectual finds himself quite powerless.

474- The Illusion of Self

Very often, what people say about themselves is either illusory or exactly the opposite of reality. There is a tendency to mistake their desires for facts simply because they are struggling against some aspect of themselves they dislike, an image one wishes to conceal or reverse. Moreover, the more a person feels compelled to talk about themselves, the more they seek to project themselves into the eyes of others, and the less confidence we should place in what they say about themselves. Such individuals believe too readily in their own narratives, they work excessively on their image and seek to persuade others in order to persuade themselves.

When a person speaks about themselves, it is tempting to take their words as a faithful description of who they are. After all, why should one not believe them? Yet such trust is often misplaced, because what we assert about ourselves frequently reflects less an observation than a wish, we do not so much describe what we are as what we would like to be. Certainly, the idea that we know ourselves better than anyone else is appealing, since after all, we have access to our own inner life in a way that no one else does, we are the privileged witnesses of our own existence. But in assuming this, we forget the crucial role of bad faith, the myths we have spent years constructing, all those memories we have pushed aside or gradually reconstructed in order to weave and smooth out our personality, to make life with ourselves more bearable, and all those little secrets that are better

hidden, or even forgotten. Besides, how can we resist the temptation to embellish, whether slightly or considerably, our symbolic visage?

Thus, some people present themselves as particularly generous while being deeply inhabited by resentment, others describe themselves as open-minded while systematically rejecting anything that contradicts their convictions, while still others proclaim their humility with such insistence that it ultimately reveals a subtle form of pride. Often, the image displayed does not merely contradict reality, it constitutes its negative image. The more difficult or painful a trait is to acknowledge, the more it tends to be compensated for by an opposite affirmation, as if to drive away the demons that inhabit us, a phenomenon that stems in part from the fact that human beings have difficulty tolerating certain truths about themselves. They therefore construct a narrative that is more acceptable, more flattering, or more coherent, more fitting their ideal perspective, a mechanism often unconscious. Thus, the injunction “know thyself” remains a challenge that few truly meet, and desire gradually comes to replace observation. And let us not forget that the endemic narcissism of human beings is not simply admiration of one's own image: it is expressed above all through a quest for visibility, if not approval, and for that reason it is almost impossible to speak without subtly bending one's discourse in order to appear more acceptable, more attractive, or more worthy in the eyes of others.

For all these reasons, the statements people make about themselves always deserve to be examined with caution. Paradoxically, the greater a person's need to speak about themselves, the less their words constitute a guarantee of lucidity, for those who work incessantly on their image often end up believing in their own performance. By repeating a story often enough, it acquires the appearance of truth. Human beings devote a considerable portion of their energy to manufacturing an identity through language: they define themselves, narrate themselves, justify themselves, distinguish themselves from others, highlight certain qualities, and conceal others. Yet this work does not merely aim at

constructing an image, it also aims at protecting it, as any criticism, contradiction, or challenge is liable to be experienced as a threat or an affront that must either be avoided or confronted. What we call “identity” therefore often appears less as a discovery of oneself than as a defensive construction, a fabrication of the self. We spend a great deal of time explaining who we are, but very little time asking whether this explanation is true, or critically examining our own elaborations. This is why self-knowledge probably begins when we cease to believe too easily what we say about ourselves, when we risk a certain detachment, and when we become willing to listen to the criticisms of others.

475- The Manufacture of the Patient

Contemporary psychotherapeutic practices readily present themselves as spaces of liberation, places where the subject can finally speak, understand themselves, reconstruct themselves, and accept themselves. Yet this promise deserves to be questioned, for what is at stake in these settings is not merely the accompaniment of suffering, but also, more discreetly, the production of a subjectivity. They do not simply treat a patient there, they also contribute to defining them. Many approaches tend, without admitting it, to establish a particular and rather problematic figure of the subject: that of an individual who is fundamentally vulnerable, determined by their wounds, traversed by forces they do not master, imprisoned within the explanatory framework of their own history, and perpetually referred back to the determining influence of their past. This representation, under the guise of benevolence, has an ambiguous effect, for it provides relief insofar as it alleviates responsibility, but it also confines, by assigning the individual to a position of passivity, marked by traces that nevertheless can cause him pain or paralyze him. The subject becomes less an actor than a site of impact, the victim of various psychic determinations of which they are never truly the author, inheritances, traumas, and unconscious mechanisms supposedly governing their

life without their knowledge, psychological causalities that reduce freedom to a mere illusion. But in the end, these determinisms and explanatory narratives come to constitute the very identity of the person.

Nevertheless, we must not overlook the liberating function of narrative, for telling one's story does indeed allow us to give a meaningful form to scattered, painful, or incomprehensible experiences. Such narrative thus provides a first step toward distancing oneself from what has been lived: it transforms immediate experience into an object of reflection. The problem, therefore, is not so much the narrative itself as the inability to question or analyze it further, yet a narrative can be a necessary step in self-construction before eventually becoming a limitation that must be overcome. To tell one's life is to answer the question: "What is my story?", when to understand oneself is to ask, "Why is this the story I'm telling?", "What does this narrative reveal and what does it hide?", "What other narratives might be possible?" And we might add that the narrative seeks coherence, whereas understanding accepts contradiction, the narrative seeks identity, understanding accepts transformation, the narrative organizes the past, understanding questions the present, the narrative justifies, understanding exposes.

Within this framework, suffering can strangely acquire a paradoxical status. It is no longer merely something to be understood or overcome, but something that confers a form of legitimacy: being wounded becomes a way of being right, a way of acquiring value. The patient's discourse therefore tends to be validated rather than examined. Yet validating a discourse is not necessarily thinking it through; on the contrary, it often means renouncing the task of challenging its legitimacy and critically examining it. This shift is accompanied by a distancing from reason, for demands of coherence, confrontation of ideas, and the testing of contradictions are often perceived as forms of symbolic violence. Preference is given instead to the expression of feelings, regarded as more authentic, but this hierarchy is not without consequences: it deprives the subject of a fundamental tool, the capacity to judge and genuinely understand themselves. In attempting to protect the

individual, one thus contributes to disarming them. This is not to deny the reality of suffering or the need for a space in which it can be expressed, but it is necessary to ask what such a space actually produces. A discourse that is never questioned tends to become fixed, it becomes narrative rather than inquiry, justification rather than exploration. The subject settles into it rather than being transformed by it, constructing a way of being with which they identify without any critical distance. Another difficulty lies in the often blurred boundary between ill-being and the ordinary conditions of existence. Not all suffering is pathological, as worrying about the future, fear of death, uncertainty, loneliness, feelings of inadequacy, or anxiety in the face of choices are natural companions of the human condition. Yet some approaches tend to interpret these experiences as dysfunctions that should be eliminated, thus such a perspective risks transforming existential realities into symptoms of malaise. Certain tensions, however, cannot be removed without removing a part of existence itself. Anxiety, for example, can never disappear entirely, because it is linked to our finitude, our ignorance of the future, and our freedom; only its excess, its disproportion, is something to be "combated". The question, therefore, is not always how to cure or eliminate, but how to learn to live with what cannot be abolished. A traditional and widely shared form of wisdom consists precisely in reconciling oneself with certain limits of existence rather than treating them as anomalies to be corrected.

This therapeutic phenomenon then presents another risk: by repeatedly telling a story about ourselves, we end up reinforcing it, producing a myth to which we become attached. Each repeated narrative consolidates certain interpretations, selects certain memories, and excludes other possibilities. What began merely as a hypothesis or as a way of making sense of experience gradually acquires the status of evidence. The subject no longer merely tells their story, they inhabit it and defend it, even guard it zealously. In this way, a form of bad faith is constructed, not necessarily conscious or intentionally deceptive, but arising from the very repetition of the narrative itself. The more consolidated this account of oneself becomes, the more difficult it is to question the identity it produced. Yet freedom presupposes precisely the ability to take a step back from the stories we tell about

ourselves. When a narrative ceases to be questioned, it no longer liberates the subject, it becomes a determination that imprisons us within a framework of obligations, a "need", even when we claim it as an existential choice. Any authentic therapeutic practice is therefore confronted with an essential tension: welcoming without complacency, and confronting without crushing, yet this tension is often resolved in favour of comfort. Confrontation is avoided in the name of respect or benevolence, but a thought that encounters no resistance does not develop, it merely repeats itself endlessly, exhausting the subject who carries it. The question, then, is not whether therapy does good, but what effects it has on thought. Does it enable the subject to become more lucid, or merely make them more comfortable and installed with their own narratives? In the first case, it opens a space for transformation, in the second, it organises a more subtle form of alienation, for it is always easier to tell one's story than to understand oneself. Any practice that privileges the former at the expense of the latter risks, under the guise of care, producing precisely what it claims to combat: a subject imprisoned within their own representations, fixed within a rigid contour that prevents any profound questioning of the self, which is precisely what may be called a neurosis.

476- The Fear of Essentialising

Among the many difficulties affecting thought and dialogue today, one of the most discreet, yet also one of the most influential, is the fear of "essentialising", with the prohibition of speech it entails. This fear has now become largely institutionalized, it is even visible in artificial intelligence systems, which tend to issue warnings, make corrections, or offer moral judgments as soon as a general characterization is made about a group or an individual. One chatbot openly admitted to "over-correction" by explaining that "AI guidelines push us to avoid even the shadow of essentialist thinking", showing that a form of preventive censorship is gradually taking root at the very heart of the tools meant to assist human thought. Another

example, in contemporary publishing, are “sensitivity editors”, tasked with censoring passages that might be deemed offensive or stereotypical. This fear is understandable: it aims to avoid stereotypes, abusive generalisations, and simplistic judgments that reduce individuals or groups, a recurrent trait or tendency, to a supposedly immutable nature, generally in a negative way. As such, it is originally a legitimate intellectual precaution. The problem arises when this precaution becomes a systematic reflex, for this fear of reducing a character to an essence then leads to another kind of error: the inability to name phenomena, tendencies, or problems clearly. Thus, the fear of simplifying becomes stronger than the desire to analyze and understand. Any characterisation of a culture becomes suspect, any provisional generalisation appears dangerous, and any criticism of a collective practice or an individual behaviour risks being interpreted as a global condemnation. Yet thinking requires generalisation, as no concept is possible without a certain degree of abstraction. Whenever we speak of an era, an institution, an ideology, a tradition, or a culture, we necessarily identify recurring traits. Of course, such descriptions are never absolute, but they remain indispensable, and refusing all generalisation on the grounds that it might become “essentialising”, in order to avoid “fixating” some identity, amounts to rendering a large part of intellectual work impossible.

One frequent consequence of this fear is excessive caution, where every statement is immediately accompanied by a series of reservations, exceptions, and nuances. While these are sometimes necessary, when they become systematic, they end up obscuring the point, diluting or drowning every proposition. Discourse loses its clarity, as in trying so hard to avoid simplification, one ultimately becomes unable to say anything definite. This attitude also creates a confusion between description and condemnation, yet describing a dominant tendency does not amount to claiming that it is immutable or prescriptive. Suggesting that a practice is widespread does not mean that it is categorical and irreversible, identifying a problem within a society does not imply that an entire population is defined by that problem. Nevertheless, the fear of essentialisation often leads people to treat any analysis as an accusation, or even as an aggression. Thus, excessive caution can

become a form of blindness. Certain realities become difficult to examine because any attempt to name them is immediately suspected of hidden motives. And the discussion no longer concerns the phenomenon itself, but the legitimacy of the person who dares to speak about it, as the debate shifts from the content to the supposed intentions of the speaker.

Another consequence is even more subtle: by refusing all general characterisations, we deprive human groups of their own critical capacity. Cultures, traditions, and institutions are certainly not homogeneous blocks, they always contain tensions, debates, and currents of reform. Recognising that a problem exists within a given milieu is not a denial of its diversity, on the contrary, it means taking seriously the criticisms that emerge from within that milieu itself, which is generally the case. The true alternative, therefore, is not between essentialising and remaining silent, it lies in learning to distinguish a tendency from an essence, a description from a condemnation, and a critique from a prejudice. A mode of thought incapable of generalising becomes powerless, just as a mode of thought incapable of nuance becomes unjust. The fear of essentialising remains legitimate as long as it functions as a form of vigilance, it becomes problematic when it turns into an implicit prohibition against thinking, a kind of censorship concerning what we are allowed to say. At that point, dialogue gains neither precision nor accuracy, it simply loses its ability to name reality clearly under the guise of moral virtue, respect for complexity and fighting prejudice.

This difficulty does not concern only cultures, peoples, or institutions, it also applies to individuals. Here again, the fear of essentialising rests upon a legitimate intuition: a human being can never be reduced to a unique character trait, a given action, or a specific period of life. Yet this caution once more becomes excessive when it forbids any characterisation whatsoever. If we can no longer say that a person is authoritarian, cowardly, generous, arrogant, or manipulative because they might act differently under certain circumstances, then it becomes practically impossible to speak about individual character or describe a personality. Identifying

a dominant tendency is not the same as imprisoning someone within an immutable essence. To say that an individual is habitually irritable does not mean that they are condemned to remain so forever, nor that they possess no other qualities. It simply means recognising a recurrent disposition in their behaviour, something that may indeed invite them to work on themselves. The fear of essentialising thus leads to a strange impasse: in the name of human complexity, we give up trying to understand people and challenge them to confront themselves. Psychology, education, and criticism all become difficult when every characterisation is perceived as a definitive condemnation. Paradoxically, by forbidding the description of the present, we also forbid any possible change, for in order to bring about transformation, one must first be able to identify what poses a problem. As a result, the fear of essentialisation ultimately weakens our ability to describe what is.

In summary, we reject the idea that describing something necessarily means freezing it, as some forms of speech have precisely the function of transforming what they name. A characterisation can produce an effect of awareness, introduce critical distance, make visible what previously remained implicit, and thereby possibly generate transformation. In this sense, discourse is not merely descriptive, it is also performative, as it acts upon its object. Naming a dominant tendency does not necessarily imprison an individual or a group within an identity, it is not merely a diagnosis; it can also create the conditions for transformation. Description is therefore not external to the reality it describes, it is one of its constituent elements and participates in its coming into being. Essentialisation freezes because it claims to say what a thing is once and for all, whereas critique, understood in its performative sense, describes things and beings as they are, as they appear, so that they may become otherwise. We should therefore be careful not to suppress the speech that seeks to characterise phenomena, individuals and situations in order to understand them, and not suppressing the speech that seeks to bring to light what habit, fear, or conformity would rather keep silent.

That said, on a more ironic note, it is striking to observe that this wariness of "essentialization" manifests itself in a highly selective manner. The very same people who vigorously denounce any characterization when it seems unfavorable to them, or when it concerns a group with which they identify, willingly accept, or even embrace, general descriptions as long as they are flattering. They are delighted to be described as open-minded, creative, resilient, or kind, without the slightest concern about any form of essentialization. This shows that it is not so much the generalization itself that is problematic, but rather the value judgment it conveys.

477- Excess as Identity

I am often reproached for being too direct, too quick, too critical, too untimely, even violent. Some advise me to slow down, to handle people more gently, to give exchanges time to settle before addressing disturbing questions, before rushing in. My excess lies for one in the intensity of my intuitions, but above all in their prematurity: I tend to articulate too early what the other person is not yet able to think, bypassing what Lev Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development, the threshold where a person can still be challenged without being lost or shocked. It is not so much the vigor of the thought that poses a problem, but rather the discrepancy in pace, which sometimes overwhelms the other person or disturbs them too much. But I must admit that a certain degree of restraint is difficult for me, except perhaps in more pedagogical contexts, where I am better able to calculate my effects and temper myself, for something has always pushed me toward precipitation. From the moment I wake up, ideas rush in, questions arise, contradictions and absurdities in others, and even in myself, draw my attention. I write, I react, I question, I leap at whatever comes my way, a kind of intellectual intoxication that seems to precede any deliberate process.

I have often presented this disposition as an inner necessity. I readily claim that I cannot do otherwise, that this energy both carries me and carries me away, and invitations to “wisdom” even tend to displease me. But perhaps this explanation deserves to be questioned, for saying that one cannot do otherwise is a convenient formula, one that transforms a way of being into destiny, a habit into necessity, a choice into fatality. Yet I spend my time inviting others to question the narratives they construct about themselves. Why should my own narrative escape such examination? There is no doubt a measure of bad faith in this way of understanding and describing myself, for it is always tempting to transform one’s flaws into a vocation or an existential choice. In my case, impatience becomes passion, intransigence becomes exigency, relational difficulty becomes fidelity to oneself. To say the least, it is not impossible that I too participate in this work of self-justification that I observe and criticise in so many others. After all, it is more flattering to think of oneself as the victim of an excess of thought than as simply incapable of moderating certain impulses.

On the other hand, it would be just as artificial to pretend that this disposition does not exist, for it produces very real effects, what I often call our personal “demon”, something tenacious, some internal “power” that does not easily let itself be dismissed. This persistent inclination leads me to ask questions that others avoid, to address disturbing subjects, to pursue lines of reasoning where many prefer to stop, to speak without filters. It obviously brings me difficulties, and I know that this way of being exhausts some of those who interact with me, that it generates tensions and conflicts, and contributes, to some extent, to my isolation. But here again an ambiguity appears: when I speak of this rejection, am I regretting it, or drawing a certain satisfaction from it? It is always pleasant to think of oneself as different, misunderstood or excessive. After all, the image of the troublesome or excluded philosopher has its own prestige.

I thus find myself facing a contradiction that I do not resolve, perhaps cannot

resolve. I claim the freedom to think, yet I present myself as a prisoner of my own temperament. I criticise identity narratives, yet I willingly tell the story of the man incapable of controlling or stopping himself. I distrust psychological justifications, yet I explain my behaviour through a kind of inner intoxication. Still, one might think that such contradictions are not meant to be eliminated, neither quickly nor slowly, for they belong to the fractured nature of human beings. They also reveal the simple fact that we never examine ourselves with the same lucidity we demand from others, and that we do not claim for ourselves the freedom we recommend to others. And as with any existential peculiarity, it is quite possible that this excess is both a strength and a limitation. A strength, because it pushes me to think, write and question without rest, a limitation, because it can make me impermeable to certain forms of presence, patience or generosity. The question may not be whether I should renounce this excess or celebrate it, but rather to determine to what extent I govern it, or to what extent it governs me, for there is a real difference between inhabiting a passion and being inhabited by it.

In this respect, I feel close to Socrates when he speaks of his daimon. Contrary to a widespread idea, this inner voice did not tell him what he should do, as it intervened mainly to prevent him from acting or speaking in certain circumstances; it was less an impulse than a restraint. I understand this very well, for although something constantly pushes me to question, intervene or react, there is also within me another voice, quieter, which sometimes invites me to hold back, though I do not always listen to it, far from it. Yet it does happen that I hear it, and even obey it, so it would be inaccurate to present my excess as pure fatality. The difficulty is not the absence of restraint, but the balance of power between the impulse and that which attempts to moderate it. Thus, if there is any wisdom here, it does not consist in suppressing intensity, but in learning when it ought to be contained, and in knowing how to do so, while accepting to live, to some extent, like one who is “possessed”, like a “sociopath”, as some of my friends would say.

478- Confronting Inertia

After receiving various questions and objections, and reflecting further on what I have called “my excess”, it now seems to me that it may not be a simple character trait, nor even an identity to which I am particularly attached. For a long time, I may have told myself this story: that of someone too quick, too direct, too intense, driven by a kind of intellectual intoxication that pushes me to intervene, question, write, or provoke. But this examination has led me elsewhere. I discover that I am not so attached to this excess after all, for if I could preserve the intensity of thought, curiosity, and the energy of dialogue while gaining in patience, I would gladly do so. This means something important: I have probably too often confused intensity with excess, whereas the two do not necessarily overlap. Intensity can be concentrated, directed, mastered, tempered; excess overflows, accelerates, forces movement.

The question therefore shifts: the problem may not be that I am excessive, but rather understanding what produces this excess, for it may well be the symptom of something else. It seems to me, in fact, that it reveals above all a difficulty in leaving reality “alone”, a simple ontological inclination that demands action. When a contradiction appears, when confusion settles in, when a blindness manifests itself, to which I am highly sensitive, something in me is immediately pushed to intervene. I do not merely encounter things or beings, I immediately perceive the tensions, the presuppositions, the incoherences they contain, the confinements that hold them. Thus, where others simply inhabit reality quietly and calmly, I spontaneously tend to examine it and to disturb it.

There is undoubtedly an ethical dimension here, for leaving a contradiction intact or allowing an illusion to settle often seems to me to amount to a form of renunciation, as if not intervening were itself a decision, and therefore a form of cowardice. But there is also a more existential dimension: I find more life in what transforms itself, fractures, or reveals itself than in what remains stable and intact. I am drawn more to genesis than to state, to process rather than to finished form. In this sense, my excess does not arise merely from a taste for questioning or

provocation, but from the desire for my discourse to produce an effect. I do not intervene only in order to think, I intervene so that something may move, clarify itself, or awaken. Behind intellectual activity there lies a deeper impatience: a difficulty in bearing the inertia of the world.

This reflection also sheds light on a tension that runs through my practice. On the one hand, I feel close to Socrates: I place great value on examination, clarification, and the recognition of contradictions; I continue to believe that awakening is possible, and therefore desirable. On the other hand, I feel close to Zhuangzi: I love questioning or critique as a game, I enjoy the unpredictable, the light disturbance of obviousness, the simple pleasure of seeing what might happen, another form of intoxication, less confrontational. But the difference appears when nothing happens. For the Zhuangzi in me intervenes, but accepts that the world may remain as it is, that each person follows their own path, and let come what may. Whereas the Socrates in me insists, returns, pursues. Zhuangzi lets disturbance operate naturally, according to the principle of the Dao, when Socrates wants to force his interlocutor to recognise the problem, trying to impose reason. The first displaces, the second demands. But this dual belonging does not explain my excess, it merely places it under tension. For when nothing happens, when the interlocutor closes himself off, resists, or escapes, it is usually the Socrates in me that takes over. Where Zhuangzi would often merely suggest and let the crack introduced into certainties do its work, Socrates pursues, persists, presses again. The first loosens, the second confronts. My excess undoubtedly lies there: not in the hesitation between these two paths, but in my persistent attachment to the idea that questioning must produce something, that it cannot remain without effect. The difficulty is not in questioning, but in accepting that reality may sometimes remain opaque, slow, or immobile, which is possible for me, but more arduous. Nevertheless, some have objected that I seem too readily to grant superiority to restraint, as if excess were merely a flaw to be corrected. This objection deserves to be heard, for intoxication certainly has its own virtues. Without it, many decisive gestures would never take place, as it pushes us to act, to take risks, to break with habit, to confront the unknown; it gives the necessary impulse to undertake, to create, to provoke ruptures, and sometimes even to survive certain situations.

Many important decisions are born of a movement that exceeds measure. But it would be just as simplistic to reduce tranquillity to mere restraint or a kind of blandness, for tranquillity too possesses its own virtues, and they are considerable. It allows one to wait without dissolving into impatience, to let unfold what only time can reveal, to better discern situations and people. Where intoxication pushes one to act, tranquillity sometimes allows one to better understand why one should act, or not act, and when to act. It also permits a better economy of the self: less dispersion, less wear, fewer unnecessary conflicts, and it often makes action more just, more effective, more proportionate. It also offers a particular availability to others, for it renders possible listening, adjustment, and respect for the rhythm of the other. In pedagogical terms, it allows us not to lose our interlocutor, to respect what Lev Vygotsky called the “zone of proximal development”, that threshold where one can still be challenged without being overwhelmed. Tranquility finally possesses a deeper virtue: it introduces an inner distance, it prevents us from immediately confusing our impulses with necessity, our desires with truth, our intuitions with evidence. It does not extinguish thought, it gives it space. But intoxication nonetheless remains necessary, for without it tranquillity risks slipping into inertia, accommodation, or fear of risk, as without tranquillity, intoxication risks becoming agitation, haste, or blindness. The problem is therefore not to choose between the two, but to think their proper relation. Intoxication gives the impulse, tranquillity gives the form, one sets things in motion, the other directs them. Perhaps true wisdom would be paradoxical, consisting precisely in sacrificing neither one nor the other, that is, in preserving the force of the “demon” without renouncing the capacity to govern it.

479- The Myth of the Real

Periodically, when faced with an analysis or the description of a phenomenon, someone objects: “That is not real, it is an intellectual construction.” The formula

often presents itself as decisive, as if it were sufficient to invalidate what has just been proposed. Yet, this objection deserves to be examined in its own right, for what exactly does such a statement mean? It first presupposes that there would be, on the one hand, raw, immediate, pure reality, and on the other, intellectual constructions, artificial or subsidiary. As if thinking necessarily meant moving away from reality, or even betraying it, a presupposition that is highly questionable, though rather widespread, as can be seen in the common negative connotation of the word “interpretation”.

To begin with, every perception of reality is necessarily mediated, as all reality is, in a sense, constructed. We never encounter the world in a completely naked, objective, and neutral way. We perceive, select, interpret, and name according to schemas and paradigms that inhabit us, generally in a non-deliberate, instinctive, even unconscious manner. As soon as a phenomenon is identified in an “obvious” way, such as “tree”, “house”, “anger”, “injustice”, or “love”, a conceptual operation has already taken place, a judgment has already occurred, since different people could name them differently. For some, a “tree” becomes an “oak”, a “house” becomes a “refuge”, “anger” becomes “frustration”, “injustice” becomes “necessity”, “love” becomes “dependency”, and so on. To claim that an analysis is an intellectual construction is therefore not an efficient objection, it is the very condition of all thought, of all affirmation.

Moreover, this criticism often rests upon an empiricist illusion: the idea that only immediate presentation is authentic, while the concept would be an artificial, biased superimposition. Yet without concepts, without the act of naming, there is no intelligible experience, as our perceptions remain diffuse, barely intelligible to itself. Raw experience alone does not suffice to produce meaning; it may remain confused, fragmentary, opaque, and at times even contradictory. It is often only by returning to it, naming it, relating it to other experiences or to more general concepts, that we recognise it and that it becomes truly understandable. Suffering, for example, is at first merely a lived experience, it becomes understanding,

consciousness, and self-knowledge only through an operation of shaping and interpretation. Thus, experience is not the opposite of thought, as it is often its raw material, but it must be worked upon in order to reveal its significance. Contrary to common opinion, even seeing is never simply receiving, vision is not passive. To see is already to distinguish, organise, recognise, structure, and integrate new information into our mental space. Cognitive sciences confirm this idea: the human eye does not function like a simple camera passively recording the world, as it selects, hierarchises, reconstructs. The retina captures fragmentary signals, while the brain completes, corrects, interprets, and anticipates. A great part of what we believe we simply "see" is already the result of a work of synthesis. Thus, the person who claims to stick to raw reality constantly mobilises conceptual categories, often without knowing it, even when denying it. We can also identify a certain contradiction here, for the person who states "it is only an intellectual construction" is himself producing an intellectual construction: he opposes reality to intellect by means of an intellectual judgment. His objection does not exempt him from what he criticises, it is itself an example of it, and the formula therefore turns back against itself.

But this remark reveals something else as well: a distrust towards thought itself, as if thinking unnecessarily complicated or obscured what should simply be lived or accepted, as if conceptual elaboration distanced us from truth rather than leading us toward it. This attitude belongs to a form of unacknowledged anti-intellectualism, one that values immediacy over mediation, feeling over analysis, lived evidence over critical examination. Yet an intellectual construction is not necessarily arbitrary or fictitious. A map, for example, is a construction; it is not the territory, but it can still be faithful to it, and it serves us in finding our way, without it we could easily get lost. A scientific theory is a construction, but it can describe actual patterns, structures, and dynamics, allowing us to identify, recognise, and work on this reality. A philosophical concept is a construction, but it can render visible something that otherwise would hardly have attracted our attention, it introduces us to a specificity of reality that until then remained invisible and confused.

The problem, then, is not that an idea is a construction, for all thought is by definition constructed. Admittedly, every concept involves reduction, but this reduction is not a flaw to be corrected, as it is a constitutive condition of thought. The real question is not how to avoid reduction, which is impossible, but how to be aware of it and choose one's concepts with discernment. This "awareness" is precisely what distinguishes a construction that illuminates from one that distorts, for the real issue is whether thought clarifies or obscures, whether it makes reality more intelligible or betrays it.To simply oppose reality to thought, as if one excluded the other, is to forget that it is through thought that reality becomes thinkable, and that it is through conceptualisation that experience becomes conscious of itself, intelligible, and meaningful.

And there is one final irony worth noting: anyone who objects, "It's just an intellectual construct," silently assumes that they, in fact, know what reality is, that they have direct access to it, without mediation or bias, yet it is precisely this certainty that deserves to be questioned. For the conviction that one is closer to reality than another is not an immediate give, it is itself an interpretation, probably the most opaque of all, since it presents itself as self-evident or certain.

480- Tranquillity and Inertia

There is a frequent confusion between tranquillity and inertia. This confusion arises from the fact that both can outwardly manifest themselves through a form of stillness or restraint. One readily imagines that tranquillity is merely a weakened form of agitation, a gentler way of not moving, a simple slowing down of action, until it begins to resemble inertia. Yet beneath this apparent resemblance, the two realities are profoundly different.

Tranquility is not the absence of movement, it is a particular way of inhabiting movement. It does not refuse action, but neither does it rush into it, for it remains

available: it waits, listens, observes, and lets emerge what only reveals itself with time. It does not seek to brutally confront reality, but neither does it turn away from it, as it remains open. Inertia, by contrast, is not a form of calm, but a form of withdrawal. It does not suspend action in order to see better, it rather avoids it, it resembles a kind of anaesthesia. The world continues to present itself, but it no longer truly touches us, nothing provokes an inner response, nothing disturbs, nothing calls, nothing sets things in motion. It is not peace, but a dulling, a numbing of the mind, a weakening of our relation to reality, a withdrawal from the outside, an impoverishment of being.

The difference is essential, for tranquility presupposes an availability to reality, whereas inertia rather expresses a refusal. In one case, the subject is present, but without haste, in the other, the subject is absent, both to himself and to the world, protected by habit, weariness, or the desire for security. One might say that tranquillity accepts the risk of encounter, whereas inertia seeks to protect itself from it. Tranquility can welcome the unexpected without being destabilised, inertia fears the unexpected and prefers to lock itself within the familiar, which engenders a weak attitude, easily destabilized, due to a lack of practice and a lack of energy. Thus, one remains alive even while still, while the other may be dead even while in motion.

Tranquillity is powerful, whereas inertia is powerless. Its strength does not come from doing many things, but from possessing the capacity to act without being enslaved by the impulse to act. It can wait, exercise restraint, endure uncertainty, and yet intervene decisively when the moment calls for it. Inertia is different, as it is not the choice not to act; rather, it stems from a lack of capacity or willingness to decide, leaving one stuck in place. A tranquil person can still assume responsibility when faced with challenges, but without panic or agitation. An inert person, by contrast, often relies on procrastination, avoidance, or conformity in order to evade risk. Both may appear silent, but the silence of tranquillity comes from strength, while the silence of inertia comes from weakness.

This distinction also sheds light on our relation to action. Both tranquillity and inertia involve a form of surrender to reality, but their nature differs profoundly.

The first is an active form of acceptance, the second is a passive submission, neither seeks to force the world, but one arises from lucidity, the other from withdrawal. Tranquillity follows confrontation: it accepts what cannot be changed after one has fully faced it. Inertia often precedes confrontation: it abandons the possibility of action before reality has even been seriously engaged. Tranquillity is power held in reserve; inertia is a power renounced or weakened. This is why tranquillity requires discernment: without wisdom, acceptance can easily become resignation, and calmness can slide into numbness. For the opposite of excess is not always measure, it may be insensitivity. Likewise, the opposite of tranquillity is not necessarily agitation, it may be flight into security, repetition, or daily narcosis, refuge into an exhausting routine.

True tranquillity, then, is not mere restraint. It is a calm vigilance, a presence without haste, an availability without precipitation. Inertia, by contrast, is not rest, but an interruption of our living relation to the world. One lets things come into being, the other withdraws; one remains awake, the other falls asleep. Perhaps this is one of the central difficulties of existence: learning to distinguish living rest from drowsiness, inner peace from anaesthesia, patience from resignation. For it is often easier to numb oneself than to remain quietly available to what comes. Without such wisdom, calmness can easily slide into numbness and inertia, because people may mistake fear of action for acceptance, or lack of courage for inner peace. Only when a person contemplates together the complexity of reality, the need for action and the limits of their own power, yet remains able to face them serenely, does tranquility become true wisdom rather than a form of self-consolation or self-protection.

481- The Ego of Others

When Diogenes proclaimed, "I trample upon the pride of Plato," Plato famously retorted:"Yes, Diogenes, with pride of another sort."

It has become increasingly common, in contemporary exchanges, to see the term “ego” appear as a convenient tool to qualify and disqualify others, to dismiss, reduce, or reject their words. As soon as someone firmly states a position, offers a precise criticism, or defends an idea insistently, especially if they are at all incisive, some are quick to diagnose an “ego issue” or an “ego wound”, implying a need for recognition or a will to dominate. The term presents itself as psychological, profound, wise, even illuminating, but it functions above all as a disguised moral judgment, and a way to dismiss in advance any argument. No doubt this owes something to the diffuse influence of certain contemporary spiritual or Buddhist schemes, in which the concept of “ego” occupies a central place and is associated with illusion, attachment, or ignorance. This anchoring likely contributes to the “sagacious” aura the term now enjoys in ordinary exchanges. Yet, we often forget that, in its more classical sense, the concept of ego does not merely designate vanity or narcissistic attachment, but an essential psychic function: the one that organises experience, mediates our relation to the world, and ensures a certain coherence of the subject. Its contemporary reduction to a moral figure of illusion or pride largely reflects a spiritualising drift.

Nevertheless, for now let us remain with the New Age version of the concept, since it is the fashionable one. Contrary to the apparent ease of this critical gesture, speaking of another’s ego is never neutral, nor light. The person who uses it as a response does not simply address a statement, they claim to unveil its hidden “device”. They no longer deal with the ideas being expressed, but move back to presumed intentions, affects, and fragilities, thus disagreement leaves the terrain of rational argumentation and enters that of psychological interpretation. This posture is particularly comfortable, because the one diagnosing ego immediately places themselves in a position of superiority: they become the one who sees clearly, who pierces the masks, who reads behind the words, the one who “knows”. They install themselves in a presumed superior lucidity, which grants them a form of moral authority, power, and intellectual clout, a quasi-magisterial posture. To tell someone, “it is your ego speaking”, is implicitly to affirm: “I see what you

yourself cannot see." There is a certain arrogance here, for it is a way of raising oneself above the other, of claiming heightened consciousness, an easy form of ascendancy: "I see clearly through your game, your affects, your mechanisms." When someone diagnoses the ego of another in this way, they often imply that they themselves speak from a purer, clearer, or more objective place. They do not say "I have no ego", but they act as if their own discourse were exempt from it, and this is the fundamental contradiction of such speech. For to claim to see the mechanisms of another without suspecting one's own, already constitutes a subtle form of ego. Not the ego that seeks openly to impose itself, but the one that manifests itself through the superiority of the gaze, the claim to understand another better than they understand themselves. Crude ego wants to be admired, refined ego wants to be recognised as lucid. The first asserts itself, the second interprets, but both seek a form of symbolic ascendancy. True lucidity, however, should include reversibility: if I can read the ego of another, I must admit that my own gaze may also be traversed by his, otherwise psychology becomes less an instrument of truth than a means of domination. Such a posture is problematic, because this denunciation of ego is itself a form of ego, stronger perhaps, but more refined, more subtle, and therefore more difficult to identify. Ego does not manifest itself only in crude self-assertion or excessive persuasion, but also in the discreet pleasure of occupying the preponderant place of the "decoder", in the enjoyment of presenting oneself as an initiate.

Moreover, those who easily denounce the ego of others often seem convinced that they have access to a higher truth, deeper than the words themselves. They do not merely hear what is being said; they claim to know what truly motivates it, as though penetrating the secrets of the soul. Such an attitude is in fact a rejection of dialogue, for the words, arguments, and explanations of others become insignificant, not worth dwelling upon. This posture grants a singular privilege: that of presenting oneself as the holder of hidden knowledge about others. But this claim to depth may itself be an illusion, even a desire for power, for believing one sees behind appearances, feeling inspired, does not guarantee that one assesses

rightly what is said. Sometimes what is called lucidity is nothing more than a more sophisticated form of projection or self-protection.

The use of the concept of ego in argument can therefore stem from a form of fear, a trick, for instead of examining the content of a statement, the discussion is displaced toward the psychology of the speaker. One no longer responds to what is said, one claims to explain why it is said, its motivation. This shift allows one to avoid the risk of being affected by criticism or destabilised by analysis. By reducing the other's words to an ego wound, a need for recognition, or a will to dominate, one neutralises their force without truly confronting them. Thus, what feels like insight may in fact be a disguised defensive mechanism: a way of protecting one's own position, comfort, or certainties. Paradoxically, denouncing the ego of others too quickly often reveals a difficulty in enduring what their words reflect back to us.

Furthermore, if someone habitually denounces the ego of others, they occupy a privileged interpretative position: they are the one who reads, unmasks, and explains. This position grants a certain psychological superiority, but that superiority becomes fragile the moment the interpretative gaze is reversed. To have one's own motives, defenses, or blind spots deconstructed means losing that privileged asymmetry, which can easily be experienced as aggression, as the identity of the accuser largely rests on being the lucid observer, and becoming the one observed undermines that identity. The one who diagnoses suddenly becomes diagnosable, which can produce a strong reaction of irritation, moral indignation, withdrawal or counter-accusation. They need to maintain the asymmetry, as any symmetry is unbearable for them. Thus, those who most readily denounce the ego of others are not the most willing to have their own self deconstructed, for the power to interpret is easier to bear than the risk of being interpreted. To psychologise others in an excellent way of protecting oneself from psychology, as many therapists know.

Another problem is that the accusation of ego often has an undifferentiated character: it functions more as a general suspicion than as a precise analysis, almost as a catch-all category. Like calling someone “mean”, it condenses a plurality of distinct phenomena into a single word without distinguishing or examining them. This vagueness is not innocent: it allows for quick disqualification without rigorous conceptualisation. Vanity, need for recognition, psychic defence, stubbornness, all are merged together, and “ego” becomes a screen-word. It does not describe, it suspects, much like “toxic”, “unhealthy”, or “problematic”, it produces a strong moral effect without analysing what is actually at stake, a strength built upon conceptual poverty. Indeed, the more a word seems profound because it explains everything, the more it risks explaining nothing.

This kind of interpretation also produces a formidable effect: it immunises the speaker against criticism. For the one who psychologises the other no longer truly exposes their own thought, they remain sheltered behind their diagnosis, they become readers without becoming readable, as they do not provide argumentation. Their discourse seems illuminating, but above all it protects their own position. The irony is that this posture reproaches the other for a will to power while itself exerting considerable symbolic pressure. Such an accusation tends to disarm the person on the receiving end, it places them in an almost untenable position. If they respond in their own defense, their reaction will be interpreted as confirmation of their wounded ego; if they remain silent, their silence will be interpreted as an admission of guilt or an inability to justify themselves. This accusation then functions as a hermeneutic trap: it casts suspicion on any response and shields the accuser from any challenge. The diagnosis becomes practically irrefutable, not because it is necessarily true, but because it neutralizes any challenge in advance. After all, how could one prove he is not driven by his ego? It is like trying to prove that you are free of prejudice, an impossible task. To call out the other person’s ego is thus to reduce one’s interlocutor, to freeze them, to imprison them within a given explanation, and under the cover of insight or “benevolence”, a form of essentialising takes place. This does not mean that ego

does not exist, nor that one should never question or attempt to identify hidden motivations. But such critique must be adequately justified, and exercised symmetrically, that is, with the willingness for it to turn back upon oneself, remaining conscious of the reversibility of the charge. Without this, the denunciation of ego becomes less a psychological subtlety than a moral privilege granted to oneself too hastily and too thoughtlessly. And too often, the one who most easily speaks of the ego of others forgets that this ease of denunciation may already reveal quite a lot about their own.

In conclusion, one final warning is in order, for in a biased manner, invoking the concept of ego can function as a form of moral blackmail, as a social instrument of domestication. By suspecting an egotistical motive behind every singular gesture, every strong assertion, or every display of originality, it exerts implicit pressure toward conformity, self-effacement, and a sort of behavioral standardization, where intensity becomes suspect, ambition becomes vanity, and excess becomes narcissism. Thus, under the guise of psychological vigilance, this discourse tends to prohibit what goes beyond the norm, what surprises, or what deviates from the norm, fulfilling a normative and disciplinary function, since any originality can indeed be psychologized. Yet not all singularity is necessarily pathological, and not all assertiveness can be reduced to the ego. And in fact, strictly speaking, this criticism of ego can legitimately be leveled at more or less everyone.

482- Enduring Contradiction

I am sometimes accused of not being able to stand contradiction. This type of accusation is convenient, because it gives the person making it an appearance of critical freedom, while disqualifying in advance anything their interlocutor might offer, or fail to offer, as a response. If I reply, I supposedly prove that I cannot bear

contradiction, and if I remain silent, the objection remains intact. Yet such a criticism deserves to be examined precisely, in order to understand its meaning and its expectations.

Ordinarily, according to common sense, not enduring contradiction means avoiding objections, censoring criticism, refusing to answer it, ignoring it, becoming angry as soon as disagreement appears, or seeking to silence one's interlocutor. Yet in general, I do rather the opposite, as a large part of my texts arise precisely from contradiction, remarks, attacks, or disagreements I received, because I do not merely endure such criticisms, I analyse them, work through them, and transform them into material for thought. One must therefore distinguish between two things that are often confused: welcoming or enduring contradiction, and giving contradiction the right to prevail. To welcome an objection does not mean to accept it as valid, it means to encounter it, take it seriously, examine it, and test its presuppositions, implications, and limits. Whoever believes that their criticism should simply be received as self-evident is not asking for dialogue, but for a form of submission.

The paradox is striking, as some people enjoy contradicting others, but endure much less easily when their own contradiction becomes itself an object of examination or is rejected. They want the right to criticise, but not for their criticism to be questioned or criticised in return. They accept disagreement as long as it remains directed at the other, they accept it far less when it turns back upon them. In other words, they endure contradiction as a weapon, but not as a test. Thus, when I am accused of not enduring contradiction, it may be that the problem is reversed. What my critics struggle to endure is that their own disagreement becomes itself an object of examination, a subject of criticism. They no doubt wish for their objection to produce an effect of disqualification, to silence, to force retreat, or at least some self-justification. But if that objection in turn becomes an object of reflection, it loses its privilege: it ceases to be an unquestionable verdict and becomes a phenomenon to understand, and that is precisely what disturbs.

Perhaps what is really expected is that “accepting contradiction” should mean remaining silent, acquiescing, or leaving criticism intact, but that is not how I understand dialogue. For me, an objection is not the end of thought, it is only its beginning. It calls for a response, not in order to neutralise it immediately, but in order to see what it contains, what it reveals, what it conceals, and sometimes what it betrays. If I could not endure contradiction, I would erase it, avoid it, or simply take offence at it. The fact that I use it to write does not prove that I reject it, but rather that I take it seriously, even welcome it with interest and goodwill, since it allows me to clarify my ideas or deepen them. Criticism, insofar as it makes sense and is not merely an unargued rejection, often remains for me a source of inspiration. And indeed, I sometimes even adopt some of the criticisms addressed to me in order to complete or improve my text.

The real question, then, may lie elsewhere: who endures contradiction less well, the one who analyses it, or the one who cannot bear that his own criticism be analysed? And perhaps, deep down, my critic sometimes regrets, without being fully aware of it, my lack of emotional reaction to their remarks, which then seem to fall into a void. They may therefore interpret my distance as a form of arrogance.

483- The Two Powers

Laozi writes, “All things contain Yin within themselves and embrace Yang, and the interaction of these forces brings harmony.” Yin nourishes and sustains, Yang animates and sets things in motion.

The rejection of Socratic questioning often rests upon a fundamental suspicion: any insistent questioning is interpreted as a form of power-taking, somewhat abusive in nature. To question, interrupt, ask for reasons, point out a contradiction, or ironise a discourse, all this is perceived by some as aggression or an attempt at domination. Deconstruction is read as violence, intellectual inquiry as

manipulation. The very idea that dialogue might legitimately be a place of trial, a demanding and interesting challenge, becomes suspect, for one assumes behind every question some hidden and questionable intention: to humiliate, destabilise, impose. But this reading forgets something essential: Socratic questioning imposes no content, it imposes only an exigency, that of reason. It does not tell us what to think, it asks us to think, it does not fill the mind, it puts it to work. Its power is negative: it removes the crutches, exposes the faults, obliges one to speak, to reveal oneself, and to assume one's own words.

And it is precisely this exigency that disturbs, for genuine thought implies a loss of comfort, an exposure of oneself, something that often produces a narcissistic wound or awakens our demons. Many therefore prefer to redefine dialogue as a space of protection rather than a space of examination, preferring to remain within the usual and conventional codes of "good society." It is here that another form of power appears, more discreet, but no less real: protective power, which imposes itself not through challenge, but through preservation. It presents itself as benevolence, care, empathy, respect for sensitivities, or concern for fragilities. It claims that one must not disturb, not push too hard, not place others in difficulty, not unsettle their psychological equilibrium. What matters is no longer truth or coherence, but immediate psychological integrity.

At first sight, this seems generous, yet this posture also exercises power, for it arrogates to itself the role of a tutelary force, charged with watching over the fragility of others, and protecting itself too, it must be said. For one forgets that deciding that another should not be disturbed, or cannot bear disturbance, is already deciding in their place what they can and cannot endure, it is to presuppose their weakness and assign them a limit. Under the guise of protection, one reduces the other to their fragility, without even considering whether such an ordeal might actually suit certain individuals, and in such a somewhat victimization framework, one privileges the delicate, the sensitive. Such a posture is not neutral, for protective power often comes with a strong moralism, where goodness becomes a

higher value than truth, where intention counts more than rigour, and the absence of challenge passes for a sign of decency. But this wisdom is complacency: it spares one from confronting contradiction, avoids conceptual effort, replaces exigency with appeasement, and protects one from the abyssal examination of the self. Moreover, this reveals a visible contradiction: those who denounce questioning as domination exercise domination themselves, but under a supposedly gentle and moral form. Where questioning disturbs in order to liberate, they temper in order to maintain the order of things and reassure. They define the rules of what may be said, the limits of what may be thought, the legitimate forms of exchange, they do not impose a truth, but a climate, and this climate becomes normative. This form of power decides in the place of the other what they can bear, it infantilises under the cover of goodwill, a displayed “kindness” that makes it all the more effective. It does not need to argue, for it rests on quasi-sacred values: respect, compassion, inclusion, safety, thus intellectual challenge easily becomes symbolic violence, exigency becomes harshness, confrontation becomes a lack of empathy. Here two schemas oppose one another: one exposes ignorance in order to make thought possible, the other neutralises unease in order to preserve comfort. The difference is not between power and the absence of power, but between two uses of power: one aims at autonomy through ordeal, the other at dependency through protection, and in our age we often mistake the second for virtue. Hence, what passes for wisdom is often little more than the management of affects, not the labour of thought. For thinking requires accepting discomfort, fracture, embarrassment, sometimes even a form of destabilisation; the soul does not awaken so easily in softness. From our point of view, the problem here is not power itself, since every pedagogical or philosophical relation implies a momentary asymmetry, the problem is rather the invisibility of this often excessive “reassuring” power. Intellectual power exposes itself openly, it questions, while protective power hides behind its “kindness,” which makes it harder to examine, for what is “good” appears ne necessarily just. But a thought that never get disturbed eventually ceases to think at all.

Yet in order to deepen these two forms of power, each with its own legitimacy, let us analyse them through the Chinese philosophical prism of yin and yang. Yang-

power is explicit, frontal, affirmative, conflictual, visible. It imposes, commands, confronts, and cuts. It is the power of declared authority: the master, the judge, the philosopher who pushes, questions, and destabilises. Yin-power, by contrast, is indirect, enveloping, protective, implicit, and diffuse. It does not openly command; it guides, contains, protects, moralises. It acts in the name of care, balance, and preservation. In this sense it is protective power. The value of this distinction is to show that power does not always take the form of constraint. The yin form may be more difficult to identify because it presents itself as gentleness, even though it imposes itself in its own way, more subtly. But one must not be mistaken: gentleness does not abolish power, it only modifies its form, more psychological perhaps, but potentially just as violent when necessity seems to demand it. Where yang imposes through force or authority, yin governs through solicitude, caution, and protection. One strikes, the other envelops, but both orient and both impose. The yin form is for example what we find in the power of seduction or rhetoric, which can be highly effective.

We should remember that in Chinese thought, yin and yang do not represent good and evil, nor weak and strong, they are relational polarities, reversible and interdependent. Thus protective power may be yin, but it can become extremely coercive, just as frontal power may be yang, yet still supportive. Nevertheless, “soft” power is often more difficult to criticise than “hard” power, because the latter is visible, whereas the former can remain discreet and seem morally superior, since empathetic and conciliatory. But as soon as one refuses its protection, as soon as one contests its moral framework or implicit authority, it can become brutal, accusatory, even aggressive. If it is contested or refused, gentleness becomes injunction, empathy becomes control, solicitude becomes explicit power. Protection, when thwarted, often reveals its reverse side: a will to maintain its hold over the framework and over beings at all costs.

In a similar way, frontal, affirmative, conflictual power can transform itself into a power of withdrawal, listening, or availability when needed, strategically. For

instance, when it encounters genuine resistance, or understands that further insistence would become sterile or destructive, it may then restrain itself and suspend its own movement. Yang becomes yin when it renounces forcing, when it recognises its own limit, confrontation may yield to listening, insistence to withdrawal, force to patience, not out of weakness, but because authentic power knows how to delay. Where immature power always wants to push further, a mature one knows when to suspend its gesture. In this sense, the difference is not between protective and non-protective power, but in how protection operates. Yang protects through separation and confrontation, yin protects through inclusion and absorption. Thus the philosopher who confronts his interlocutor is yang-protective: he wounds in order to liberate, while the consoling person is yin-protective: they contain in order to stabilize. Yin protects through preservation, yang protects through intervention, by inciting to action; they do not differ in finality, only in modality of action.

484 – Sense and Truth

In ordinary language, we often invoke truth as the ultimate horizon, as if every statement or thought must necessarily aim at it, grasp it, or submit to it. Yet this idea of truth is problematic, not because it is useless or absurd, but because it carries with it an entire imaginary of the absolute, the exclusive, and the definitive. To say that an idea is “true” often amounts to granting it an almost sacred status, as if it should bring questioning to an end and quiet all doubt, whereas living thought does not tolerate closure very well.

Thus, through the practice of philosophy, we do not seek “truth” so much as what “makes sense”, an important distinction. For what makes sense does not need to claim ultimacy, it accepts being partial, situated, limited. An idea can make sense without being universal, without being definitive, without excluding its opposite or

diversity itself, a principle which seems far more faithful to the reality of our existence, made as it is of tensions, contradictions, and multiple perspectives, much like the reality of the world. And contrary to common belief, even science distrusts the concept of truth, because it knows that its theories are provisional, revisable, always exposed to refutation or improvement. It advances less through final certainties than through coherent, operative, and fruitful models, though always insufficient. It knows that what it produces is never more than a temporary state of knowledge, destined to be corrected, surpassed, or reformulated.

The problem with “truth” is that it often tends to rigidify, it freezes what, by nature, ought to remain in motion, it carries within itself a claim to certainty, as if provisional hypotheses were somehow insufficient in themselves. Yet very often, we think through trials, approximations, and partial intuitions, we move forward through fragile and revisable constructions, which do not need to be absolute in order to be effective. Moreover, truth has something religious about it, as it demands adherence or rejection, functioning according to a binary logic, true or false, and thereby it excludes, whereas reality resists such simplification. Two opposing ideas can sometimes both make sense at once, not necessarily because they are of equal value, but because they illuminate the same phenomenon in different ways. Dialectics presupposes precisely this tense coexistence, this plurality of meanings that cannot be reduced to a final verdict.

Furthermore, the one who claims to be “in search of truth” is not always as innocent as they pretend, for this quest often carries an implicit pretension: that one already possesses something of it, or at least stands closer to it than others. The seeker of truth easily sees himself as chosen, initiated, inspired, the one who sees further or more deeply. He occupies a singular, almost sacerdotal position, one that grants him a particular authority. Thus truth does not only produce conceptual rigidity, it also produces symbolic hierarchy, where some arrogate to themselves the privilege of declaring what is true, adopting a superior position, while others are relegated to error, ignorance, or illusion.

The criterion of meaning is more flexible, it allows us to evaluate speech not according to its supposed adequation to some ultimate reality, but according to its coherence, its explanatory power, its generosity, its capacity to illuminate a situation or to open thought. A statement may be imperfect, incomplete, debatable, and yet deeply meaningful. And in dialogue, this distinction becomes decisive, because speech does not only have a descriptive function: exchange is also performative. What one says, even if false or clumsy, reveals something of one's being, one's structure of thought, one's affects, or one's contradictions, another very manifest form of truth, of singular nature. An error can be more philosophically interesting than a well-formatted truth, an incoherence can reveal more than a perfectly correct discourse.

To seek truth exclusively risks missing this living, existential dimension of dialogue, since the exchange then becomes secondary, merely a means to reach some supposedly true content. Yet dialogue itself is often the essential site of the work. It is not only what is said that matters, but how it is said, why it is said, and what it exposes. Replacing truth with the search for meaning does not mean abandoning rigour, it means shifting the centre of gravity: leaving behind the heaviness of the definitive for the suppleness of the thinkable, certainty for coherence, the absolute for the intelligible. Perhaps, in philosophy, it is less a matter of attaining truth than of producing forms of meaning capable of putting us to work.

Nevertheless, as a counterpoint, let us briefly examine the work of the policeman, who operates within a different paradigm, for whom truth is indeed satisfying. It constitutes his aim, because he works within a practical, legal, and factual framework. He must establish facts: who did what, when, how, and with what evidence. His work requires reducing ambiguity, stabilising narratives, distinguishing true from false in order to make decisions possible. Truth here is instrumental, as it serves to close an investigation, assign responsibility, and restore order, thus the policeman needs an efficient truth, sufficiently solid to conclude and act. The philosopher, by contrast, works otherwise, what interests him is not

only knowing what happened, but how it becomes thinkable, what concepts we use to understand it, what presuppositions organise our judgment. Where the policeman closes, the philosopher opens, where one seeks resolution, the other problematises. The policeman needs an identifiable truth because his role is to decide, whereas the philosopher distrusts such fixity, because it risks concealing the complexity of reality, since once a truth is established, the danger is to believe that thought is finished. The policeman seeks truth to put an end to uncertainty, the philosopher interrogates truth to prevent uncertainty from being artificially closed. The policeman works in the register of determination, the philosopher in that of meaning, and this is why the criterion of meaning suits him better, because it keeps alive what “truth” so often tends to freeze. More radically still, the policeman assumes that truth is already there, hidden, waiting to be discovered, whereas the philosopher suspects that what we call truth is often already a construction, a selection, an interpretation. The first one is realistic, the second is critical, the first one wants to know, the second wants to understand.