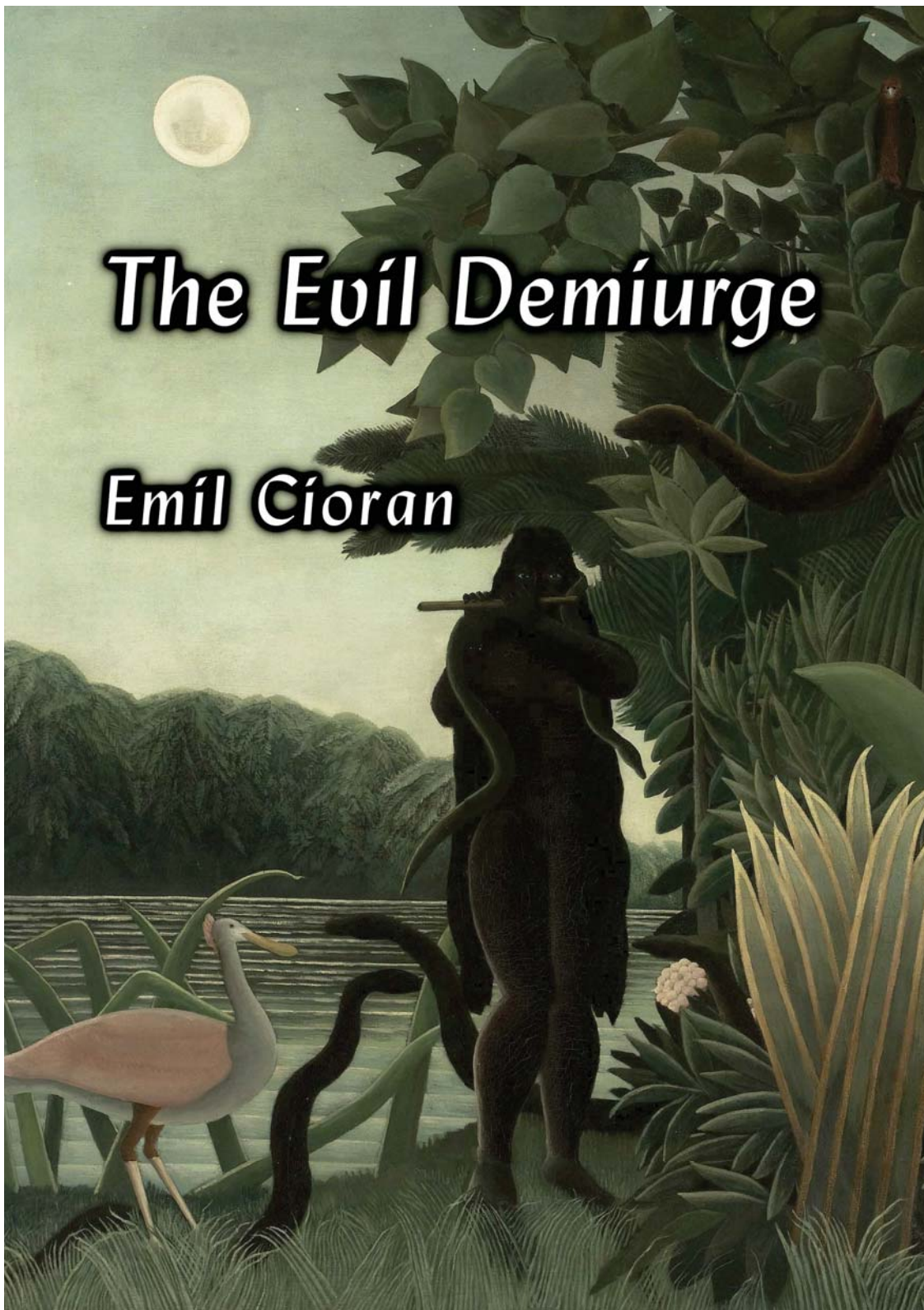


# **The Evil Demiurge**

**Emíl Cíoran**



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Emil Cioran

THE EVIL DEMIURGE



## THE EVIL DEMIURGE

With the exception of a few aberrant cases, man is not inclined towards goodness: what god would drive him to it? He has to overcome himself, do violence to himself, to be able to perform the slightest act that is not tainted by evil. Whenever he succeeds, he provokes and humiliates his creator. And if he happens to be good, not through effort or calculation but by nature, it is due to an oversight from above: he is outside the universal order, he was not foreseen in any divine plan. It is hard to see what place he occupies among beings, or even if he is one. Could he be a ghost?

What is good is what was or will be, what never is. A parasite of memory or presentiment, bygone or possible, it cannot be *actual*, nor subsist by itself: as long as it is, consciousness ignores it, and only grasps it when it disappears. Everything proves its insubstantiality; it is a great unreal force, it is the principle that aborted at the beginning: a failure, an immemorial bankruptcy, whose effects become apparent as history unfolds. In the beginning, in that promiscuity where the slide towards life took place, something unspeakable must have happened, which continues in our discomfort, if not in our reasoning. How can we help but suppose that existence and its very elements have been vitiated at their source? Anyone who has not been led to consider this hypothesis at least once a day will have been sleepwalking.

It is difficult, impossible to believe that the good god, the “Father”, was involved in the scandal of creation. Everything suggests that he had no part in it, that it was the work of an

unscrupulous god, a mad god. Goodness does not create: it lacks imagination, and imagination is needed to make a world, however slapdash it may be. If anything, an act or a work of art can emerge from the mixture of goodness and badness. Or a universe. In any case, starting with our own, it's much easier to find a suspect god than an honourable one.

The good god was definitely not equipped to create: he possesses everything except omnipotence. Great because of his deficiencies (anaemia and goodness go hand in hand), we only cling to him when we strip away our historical dimension; as soon as we reintegrate it, he is alien to us, incomprehensible to us: there is nothing fascinating about him, he is nothing like a monster. And that's when we turn to the creator, the inferior, busy god, the instigator of events. To understand how he was able to create, we need to imagine him in the grip of evil, which is innovation, and good, which is inertia. This struggle was undoubtedly harmful to evil, because it had to suffer the contamination of good: which explains why creation cannot be entirely evil.

Since evil presides over everything that is corruptible, in other words everything that is alive, it is a ridiculous attempt to try to demonstrate that it contains less being than good, or even that it contains none at all. Those who equate it with nothingness imagine that they are thereby *saving* this poor good god. We can only save him if we have the courage to separate his cause from that of the demiurge. For refusing to do so, Christianity had to spend its entire career striving to impose the inevitability of a merciful creator: a desperate undertaking that exhausted Christianity and compromised the god it sought to preserve.

We can't help thinking that creation, which remained in a state of sketch, could not be completed, nor did it deserve to be, and that on the whole it is a *fault*, the famous crime committed by man thus

appearing as a minor version of a much more serious crime. What are we guilty of, if not of having followed, more or less slavishly, the example of the creator? We recognise the fatality that was his: it is not for nothing that we came out of the hands of an unhappy and wicked god, a cursed god.

Predestined, some of us, to believe in the supreme but powerless god, others in the demiurge, others in the devil, we do not choose our worship or our blasphemies.

The devil is the representative, the delegate of the demiurge whose affairs he manages here below. Despite his prestige and the terror attached to his name, he is no more than an administrator, an angel assigned to a menial task, to history.

The scope of the demiurge is different: how would we face our trials if he were absent? If we were equal to them, or simply somehow unworthy of them, we could refrain from invoking him. Faced with our obvious inadequacies, we cling to him, we even implore him to exist: if he turned out to be a fiction, how distressed and ashamed we would be! Who else can we unburden our shortcomings, our miseries, ourselves to? Set up by our decree as the author of our shortcomings, he serves as our excuse for everything we have not been able to be. When, in addition, we make him take responsibility for this failed universe, we taste a certain peace: no more uncertainty about our origins or our prospects, but full security in the insoluble, out of the nightmare of promise. His merit is truly inestimable: he even relieves us of our regrets, since he has taken upon himself even the *initiative* of our failures.

It is more important to find our vices in the divinity than our virtues. We resign ourselves to our qualities, while our defects pursue us, work on us. To be able to project them onto a god who is capable of falling as low as we have, and who is not confined to the

blandness of commonly accepted attributes, relieves and reassures us. The bad god is the most *useful* god that ever was. Wouldn't we have him on hand, where our bile could flow? Any form of hatred is ultimately directed against him. Since we all believe that our merits are unrecognised or scorned, how can we admit that such a general iniquity is the work of man alone? It must go back further, to some ancient scheme, to the very act of creation. So we know who to blame and who to revile: nothing flatters and sustains us more than being able to place the source of our unworthiness as far away from us as possible.

As for God proper, good and stupid, we come to terms with him whenever there is no trace left in us of any world, in those moments that postulate him, that, fixed on him from the outset, give rise to him, *create* him, and during which he rises from our depths to the greater humiliation of our sarcasm. God is the mourning of irony. But all it takes is for irony to seize hold of us again, for our relationship with him to blur and come to a halt. We are fed up with wondering about him, we want to banish him from our preoccupations and our fury, from our contempt even. So many others before us have dealt him blows that it seems pointless for us now to come and rage over a corpse. And yet he still means something to us, if only through regret.

that we didn't shoot it ourselves.

To avoid the difficulties inherent in dualism, we could conceive of a single god whose history would unfold in two phases: in the first, wise, bloodless, withdrawn, with no desire to manifest himself: a god *asleep*, exhausted by his eternity; – in the second, enterprising, frenetic, committing error after error, he would indulge in activity condemnable to the highest degree. On reflection, this hypothesis seems less clear-cut and less advantageous than that of two

completely distinct gods. But if we find that neither of these accounts for what this world is worth, then we will always have the resource of thinking, with certain Gnostics, that it was drawn by lot among the angels.

(It is pitiful and degrading to equate the divinity with a person. It will never be an anonymous idea or principle for anyone who has practised the Testaments. Twenty centuries of conflict cannot be forgotten overnight. Whether inspired by Job or Saint Paul, our religious life is quarrelsome, outrageous and unbridled. Atheists, who are so happy to use invective, prove that they are targeting *someone*. They should be less proud; their emancipation is not as complete as they think: they have exactly the same idea of God as believers).

The Creator is the absolute for the outer man; the inner man, on the other hand, regards creation as an annoying detail, a useless, even harmful episode. All profound religious experience begins where the reign of the demiurge ends. It has no use for him, it denounces him, it is his negation. As long as we are obsessed with him and the world, there is no way of escaping both, and in a burst of annihilation, join the uncreated and dissolve into it.

Through ecstasy – the object of which is a god *without attributes*, an *essence* of god – we rise to a form of apathy purer than that of the supreme god himself, and if we plunge into the divine, we are nonetheless beyond any form of divinity. This is the final stage, the point of arrival of mysticism, the point of departure being the break with the demiurge, the refusal to deal with him again and to applaud his work. No one kneels before him; no one worships him. The only words spoken to him are backward supplications – the only means of communication between a creature and its creator equally fallen.

By inflicting on the official god the functions of father, creator and manager, he was exposed to attacks to which he was bound to succumb. What would have been the longevity of Marcion, of all the heresiarchs, the one who most vigorously opposed the concealment of evil and who contributed most to the glory of the evil god by his hatred of him! There is hardly an example of another religion which, in its early days, squandered so many opportunities. We would certainly be quite different if the Christian era had been inaugurated by the abhorrence of the creator, for the permission to accuse him would not have failed to lighten our burden, and also to make the last two millennia less oppressive. The Church, by refusing to incriminate him and to adopt doctrines that were in no way repugnant to him, was going to engage in cunning and lies. At least we can take comfort in the fact that the most seductive aspect of its history is that of its intimate enemies, all those whom it fought and rejected and who, in order to safeguard the honour of God, denied, at the risk of martyrdom, that He was its creator. Fanatics of divine nothingness, of the absence in which supreme goodness delights, they knew the joy of hating one god and loving another without restriction or ulterior motive. Carried away by their faith, they would have been unable to detect the hint of jugglery that enters into even the most sincere torment. The notion of pretext had not yet been born, nor had the modern temptation to hide our agonies behind some theological acrobatics. Yet there was a certain ambiguity among them: these Gnostics and Manichaeans of all kinds, what were they if not perverts of purity, obsessed with horror? Evil attracted them, almost filled them: without it, their existence would have been empty. They hunted it down, never letting it go for a moment. And if they maintained so vehemently that it was uncreated, it was because they secretly wished that it would subsist forever, so that they could enjoy it, so that they could exercise their combative virtues throughout eternity. Having, for love of the

Father, given too much thought to the Adversary, they were bound to end up understanding damnation better than salvation. This is why they understood the essence of this world so well. Will the Church, after vomiting them out, be clever enough to appropriate their theses, and charitable enough to put the Creator in the spotlight, to excommunicate him at last? It can only be reborn by unearthing the heresies, by cancelling its old anathemas and pronouncing new ones.

Shy and lacking in dynamism, good is incapable of communicating itself. Evil, on the other hand, is eager to communicate itself, and it succeeds in doing so because it possesses the double privilege of being both fascinating and contagious. It is therefore easier to see an evil god spreading than a good one.

We have all inherited this inability to remain within ourselves, which the creator had to demonstrate in such an unfortunate way: to *beget* is to continue in another way and on another scale the enterprise that bears his name; it is to add to his “creation” in a deplorable way. Without the impetus he gave, the desire to lengthen the chain of beings would not exist, nor would the need to subscribe to the vagaries of the flesh. All childbirth is suspect; angels, fortunately, are unfit for it, the propagation of life being reserved for the fallen. Leprosy is impatient and greedy; it loves to spread. It is important to discourage generation, since the fear of seeing humanity become extinct has no foundation: whatever happens, there will be enough idiots everywhere who will only ask to perpetuate themselves, and if they themselves end up shirking this task, there will always be some hideous couple to devote themselves to it.

It's not so much the appetite for life that we need to fight, as the taste for “offspring”. The parents, the *progenitors*, are provocateurs or madmen. The fact that the last of the runts has the ability to give

life, to “give birth” – is there anything more demoralising? How can we think without dread or repulsion of this prodigy that makes the first person a demiurge on the edges? What should be a gift as exceptional as genius has been conferred indiscriminately on everyone: a misguided liberality that forever disqualifies nature.

The criminal injunction of Genesis: “*Be fruitful and multiply*” could not have come from the mouth of the good god. “*Be rare*,” he would have suggested, had he had a say in the matter. Nor was he ever able to add the fatal words: *And fill the earth*. These words should be erased from the Bible to wash away the shame of having collected them.

Flesh is spreading like gangrene across the globe. It doesn't know how to limit itself, it continues to rage despite its setbacks, it takes its defeats for conquests, it has never learned anything. Above all, she belongs to the reign of the creator, and it is in her that he has projected his evil instincts. Normally, it should not so much appall those who contemplate it as those who make it last and ensure progress. This is not the case, because they do not know what aberration they are accomplices to. Pregnant women will one day be stoned to death, maternal instinct outlawed and sterility acclaimed. In sects where fertility was held in suspicion, such as the Bogomils and Cathars, marriage was rightly condemned, an abominable institution that all societies have always protected, to the great despair of those who do not give in to the common vertigo. To procreate is to love the plague, to want to maintain and increase it. The ancient philosophers who equated fire with the principle of the universe and desire were right. For desire burns, devours, annihilates: both agent and destroyer of beings, it is dark, it is infernal in essence.

This world was not created with joy. Yet we procreate with pleasure. Yes, undoubtedly, but pleasure is not joy, it is a

simulacrum of it: its function is to give the impression, to make us forget that creation bears, down to the smallest detail, the mark of the initial sadness from which it springs. Necessarily deceptive, it is also what enables us to perform certain acts that in theory we reject. Without it, continence, gaining ground, would even seduce rats. But it is in voluptuousness that we understand the extent to which pleasure is illusory. It reaches its peak, its maximum intensity, and it is there, at the height of its success, that it suddenly opens up to its unreality, that it collapses into its own nothingness. Voluptuousness is the *disaster* of pleasure.

We cannot agree that a god, or *even a man*, should proceed from gymnastics crowned with a grunt. It is strange that, after such a long period of time, “evolution” has not succeeded in perfecting another formula. Why should it have got tired, when the current one works perfectly and suits everyone? Let's be clear about this: life itself is not in question, it is mysterious and tiresome as hell; what is not in question is the exercise in question, which is unacceptably easy, given *its consequences*. When you know what fate has in store for each and every one of us, you can't help but be struck by the disproportion between a moment's forgetfulness and the prodigious amount of disgrace that results. The more we look into this subject, the more we find that the only people who have heard anything about it are those who have opted for orgies or asceticism, the debauched or the castrated.

Since procreation implies a nameless folly, it is certain that if we were to become sensible, that is to say indifferent to the fate of the species, we would be in error. Let's keep just a few samples, like we keep specimens of endangered animals. Let's stand in the way of flesh, let's try to paralyse its frightening thrust. We are witnessing a veritable epidemic of life, a profusion of faces. Where and how can we come face to face with God?

No one is constantly subject to the haunting of horror; we sometimes turn away from it, almost forget about it, especially when we contemplate a landscape where our fellow human beings are absent. As soon as they appear, it settles back into our minds. If we were inclined to absolve the creator, to consider this world acceptable and even satisfying, we would still have to make reservations about man, that black spot in creation.

We are free to imagine that the demiurge, realising the inadequacy or harmfulness of his work, one day wants to destroy it, and even arranges to disappear with it. But it is also conceivable that from time immemorial he has worked only to destroy himself, and that becoming can be reduced to the process of this slow self-destruction. Whether the process is slow or breathless, in both cases it is a matter of self-reflection, of self-examination, the outcome of which would be the rejection of creation by its author. What is most deeply rooted in us, and least perceptible, is the feeling of an essential failure, the secret of all, gods included. And the remarkable thing is that most of us have no idea that we feel this way. Moreover, by a special favour of nature, we are doomed not to be aware of it: the strength of a being lies in its inability to know how alone it is. Blessed ignorance, thanks to which he can move and act. When his secret is revealed to him, his strength is immediately and irrevocably shattered. This is what happened to the creator, or what will happen to him, perhaps.

It's easy to go from unbelief to belief, or vice versa. But what is there to convert to, and what is there to abjure, in the midst of chronic lucidity? Devoid of substance, it offers no content that can be denied; it is empty, and emptiness cannot be denied: lucidity is the negative equivalent of ecstasy.

He who coincides with nothing will not coincide with himself either; hence the faithless appeals, the wavering convictions, the fevers devoid of fervour, the splitting of our ideas and even our reflexes. The equivocation that governs all our relations with this world and the next, we kept to ourselves at first; then we spread it around, so that no one escapes it, so that no one alive knows where they stand. Now there's nothing *clear* anywhere: because of us, things themselves are wavering and sinking into perplexity. What we need is the gift of imagining the possibility of prayer, which is indispensable to anyone seeking salvation. Hell is *inconceivable* prayer.

The establishment of universal equivocation is the most calamitous feat we have ever achieved, and it makes us rivals of the demiurge.

We have only been happy at times when, eager to erase ourselves, we accepted our nothingness with enthusiasm. Religious sentiment does not emanate from an acknowledgement but from a desire for our insignificance, a need to wallow in it. How will this need, inherent in our nature, be satisfied now that we can no longer live at the heels of the gods? In other times, it was they who abandoned us; today it is we who are abandoning them. We have lived with them for too long for them to still be in our sight; always within reach, we could hear them *stirring* ; they were watching us, spying on us: we were no longer at home... Now, as experience teaches us, there is no being more odious than our neighbour. Knowing that they are so close in space makes it hard for us to breathe, and also makes our days and nights impractical. No matter how much we ponder its ruin, hour after hour, it is there, agonisingly present. All our thoughts invite us to eliminate it; when we finally decide to do so, we are seized by a surge of cowardice, just

before the act. So we are potential murderers of those who live in our vicinity; and not being able to be, in fact, gnaws at us and embitters us, vain and bloodthirsty failures.

If, with the gods, everything seemed simpler, it was because their indiscretion was immemorial, and we had to get it over with whatever it took: weren't they too cumbersome for us to be able to spare them any longer? This explains why none of us could fail to add our little voice to the general clamour against them.

When we think of these companions or enemies of thousands of years, of all the patrons of sects, religions and mythologies, the only one we are reluctant to part with is the demiurge, to whom we are attached by the very evils we want him to be the cause of. It is to him that we think about the slightest act of life and life itself. Every time we consider it, every time we look at its origins, it amazes us and frightens us; it is a frightening miracle, which must come from *him*, a special god, completely apart. There is no point in maintaining that he does not exist, when our daily amazement is there to demand his reality and proclaim it. They would not let themselves be discouraged, they would work to resurrect him, and he would last as long as our wonder and fear, as long as our frightened curiosity about everything that is, everything that lives. We would say: "Triumph over fear, so that only wonder remains". But to overcome it, to make it disappear, we would have to attack it in principle and demolish its foundations, rebuild the world in its entirety, cheerfully change demiurge, in short hand over to *another* creator.

## THE NEW GODS

Anyone interested in the parade of irreducible ideas and beliefs should take a closer look at the spectacle offered by the first centuries of our era: there you will find the very model of all the forms of conflict that can be found, in a lesser form, at any time in history. This is understandable: it was the period when people hated the most. The credit for this goes to the Christians, who were feverish and intractable, and from the outset experts in the art of detestation, whereas the pagans knew only how to wield contempt. Aggression is a trait shared by both men and the new gods.

If a monster of kindness, unaware of huffing and puffing, nevertheless wanted to learn it, or at least to know what it is worth, the simplest thing for him would be to read a few ecclesiastical authors, starting with Tertullian, the most brilliant of them all, and ending with, say, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, who is feisty and yet insipid, and whose speech against Julian the Apostate makes you want to convert to paganism on the spot. There is no recognition of the emperor's qualities; with undisguised satisfaction, it disputes his heroic death in the war against the Persians, where he was allegedly killed by "a barbarian who worked as a jester and who followed the army in order to make the soldiers forget the fatigue of war through his jokes and his good words". No elegance, no concern to appear worthy of such an adversary. What is unforgivable in the case of the saint is that he had known Julian in Athens when, as young men, they attended the philosophical schools there.

There is nothing more odious than the tone of those who defend a cause, compromised in appearance, winning in fact, who cannot

contain their joy at the idea of their triumph nor prevent themselves from turning their very fears into so many threats. When Tertullian, sardonic and trembling, describes the Last Judgement, *the greatest of spectacles*, as he calls it, he imagines the laughter he will have as he contemplates so many monarchs and gods “uttering dreadful groans in the deepest abyss...”. This insistence on reminding pagans that they and their idols were lost was enough to exasperate even the most moderate minds. A series of libels disguised as Christian apologetics represents the pinnacle of the bilious genre.

We can only breathe in the shadow of worn-out divinities. The more we convince ourselves of this, the more we remember with terror that if we had lived when Christianity was on the rise, we might have been fascinated by it. The beginnings of a religion (like the beginnings of anything) are always suspect. Yet they alone possess some reality, they alone are *true*; true and abominable. You can't witness the establishment of a god with impunity, whoever he is and wherever he appears. This is not a recent problem: Prometheus, the victim of Zeus and the new clique on Olympus, was already pointing it out.

Much more than the prospect of salvation, it was the fury against the ancient world that drew the Christians together in a single impulse of destruction. Since most of them came from elsewhere, their fury against Rome is understandable. But what kind of frenzy could the natives be involved in when they converted? Less well endowed than others, they had only one recourse: to hate themselves. Without this deviation of hatred, unusual at first, then contagious, Christianity would have remained a simple sect, limited to a foreign clientele, the only one capable of exchanging the old gods for a nailed corpse without pain or torment. Anyone wishing to know how they would have reacted to Constantine's about-turn should put themselves in the shoes of a traditionalist, a proud pagan:

how could they have consented to the cross, how could they have tolerated the symbol of a dishonourable death on Roman banners? Yet they resigned themselves to it, and this resignation, which was soon to become general, it is difficult for us to imagine the sum total of internal defeats from which it resulted. If, from a moral point of view, it can be seen as the culmination of a crisis, and thus given the status or excuse of a conversion, it appears as a betrayal as soon as we consider it only from a political angle. To abandon the gods who made Rome was to abandon Rome itself, to ally oneself with this “new race of men born of yesterday, without homeland or traditions, united against all religious and civil institutions, pursued by justice, universally noted for infamy, but glorying in common execration”. Celsus’ diatribe dates from 178. Almost two centuries later, Julian was to write: “If during the reign of Tiberius or Claudius a single distinguished mind was seen to convert to Christian ideas, consider me the greatest of impostors.”

The “new breed of men” would struggle for a long time before conquering the delicate. How could we trust these strangers from the depths of the earth, whose every gesture invited contempt? But that's just it: how could we accept the god of those we despised and who, to make matters worse, was of recent manufacture? Since antiquity alone guaranteed the validity of gods, they were all tolerated, provided they were not of recent origin. What was particularly annoying in this case was the absolute novelty of the Son: a contemporary, a parvenu... It was he, an off-putting character, whom no *wise man* had foreseen or prefigured, who “shocked” most. His appearance was a scandal that took four centuries to get used to. The books that celebrated him, and whose spirit was perpetuated in the Gospels, were, according to Tertullian, centuries older than the temples, oracles and pagan gods? The apologist, once in a frenzy, went so far as to maintain that Moses

preceded the ruin of Troy by several millennia. Such ramblings were intended to counteract the effect of remarks such as that of Celsus: "After all, the Jews, many centuries ago, formed themselves into a body of a nation, established laws for their use, which they still retain today. The religion they observe, whatever its value and whatever may be said about it, is the religion of their ancestors. By remaining faithful to it, they do nothing that other men do not also do, who each keep the customs of their country.

Sacrificing to the prejudice of antiquity meant implicitly recognising the indigenous gods as the only legitimate ones. By calculation, Christians were willing to bow to this prejudice as such, but they could not, without destroying themselves, go further and adopt it in its entirety, with all its consequences. For Origen, the ethnic gods were idols, remnants of polytheism; St Paul had already reduced them to the rank of demons. Judaism held them all to be false, except for one, its own. "Their only fault," says Julian of the Jews, "is that while seeking to satisfy their god, they do not at the same time serve the others. However, he praises them for their reluctance to follow fashion in matters of religion. "I shun innovation in all things, especially where the gods are concerned", is an admission that has discredited him and is used to label him a "reactionary". But what "progress", one wonders, does Christianity represent in relation to paganism? There is no "qualitative leap" from one god to another, nor from one civilisation to another. Nor from one language to another. Who would dare to proclaim the superiority of Christian writers over pagans? Even the Prophets, though written in a different style from the Fathers of the Church, were averse to reading, as St Jerome confides to us, after having immersed himself in Cicero or Plautus. The "progress" of the time was embodied in these illegible Fathers: to turn away from them was to turn to "reaction"? Julian was quite right to prefer Homer,

Thucydides and Plato. The edict by which he forbade Christian teachers to explain Greek authors has been roundly criticised, not only by his opponents but by all his admirers, in every age. Without wishing to justify it, we cannot help but understand it. He was up against fanatics; to win their respect, he had to exaggerate like them from time to time, spouting some nonsense at them, otherwise they would have scorned him and taken him for an amateur. So he asked them "But if they believe that these writers were wrong on the most important point, let them go to the churches of the Galileans and comment on Matthew and Luke. "But if they believe that these writers were wrong on the most important point, let them go to the churches of the Galileans and comment on Matthew and Luke!"

In the eyes of the ancients, the more gods you recognised, the better you served the Divinity, of which they were only the aspects, the faces. To want to limit their number was impiety; to abolish them all for the sake of a single one, a crime. This was the crime of the Christians. It was no longer appropriate to be ironic about them: the evil they were spreading had gained too much ground. Julian's bitterness stemmed from his inability to treat them lightly.

Polytheism is more in tune with the diversity of our tendencies and impulses, offering them the opportunity to be exercised and manifested, each of them free to move, according to its nature, towards the god that suits it at the time. But what can we do with just one god? How can we envisage him, how can we *use* him? We are always *under pressure*. Monotheism compresses our sensibility: it deepens us by constricting us; a system of constraints that gives us an inner dimension to the detriment of the development of our strengths, it constitutes a barrier, it stops our expansion, it derails us. We were certainly more *normal* with several gods than we are with one. If *health* is a criterion, what a step backwards monotheism is!

Under the rule of several gods, fervour is shared; when it is directed at a single god, it becomes concentrated and exasperated, and ends up turning into aggression and *faith*. Energy is no longer dispersed; it is all directed in the same direction. What was remarkable about paganism was that there was no radical distinction between believing and not believing, having or not having faith. Faith, moreover, is a Christian invention; it presupposes the same imbalance in man and God, carried away by a dialogue that is as dramatic as it is delirious. That's why the new religion is such a force to be reckoned with. The old religion, which was otherwise *human*, let you choose the god you wanted; as it didn't impose any, it was up to you to incline towards this or that one. The more capricious you were, the more you needed to change, to move from one to another, being sure to find a way to love them all in the course of a lifetime. What's more, they were modest, demanding only respect: you bowed to them, not knelt before them. They were ideally suited to people whose contradictions were unresolved and unresolvable, whose minds were torn and unquenchable: how lucky they were, in their itinerant disarray, to be able to *try* them all out and be almost certain of finding the one they needed most immediately! After the triumph of Christianity, the freedom to move among them and choose one as one wished became inconceivable. Their cohabitation, their admirable promiscuity, was over. Would a certain aesthete, tired of paganism but not yet disgusted, have embraced the new religion if he had guessed that it was going to last for so many centuries? Would he have swapped the fantasy inherent in the system of interchangeable idols for a cult whose god was to enjoy such terrifying longevity?

In appearance, man gave himself gods out of a need to be protected and guaranteed; in reality, out of a greed to suffer. As long as he believed that there were a multitude of gods, he allowed

himself freedom of play and loopholes; by limiting himself to a single god, he inflicted on himself an additional burden of shackles and torments. Only an animal that loves and hates itself to the point of vice could afford the luxury of such heavy bondage. How cruel to ourselves to bind ourselves to the great Spectre and tie our fate to his! *The one* god makes life unbreathable.

Christianity used the legal rigour of the Romans and the philosophical acrobatics of the Greeks, not to set the mind free but to bind it. By shackling it, it has forced it to go deeper, to descend into itself. At the same time, they leave him free to explore his own universe, to explore his own dizziness and, to escape the tyranny of doctrinal certainties, to seek being – or its negative equivalent – at the extreme point of all sensation. An adventure of the bound spirit, ecstasy is necessarily more frequent in an authoritarian religion than in a liberal one, because it is a leap towards intimacy, a recourse to the depths, *a flight towards oneself*.

Having had no other refuge than God for so long, we have plunged as far into him as we have into ourselves (this plunge represents the only real feat we have accomplished in two thousand years), we have probed his abysses and our own, ruined his secrets one by one, exhausted and compromised his substance by the double assault of knowledge and prayer. The ancients did not overwork their gods: they were too elegant to harass them or to make them an object of study. As the disastrous transition from mythology to theology had not yet taken place, they were unaware of this perpetual tension, present in the accents of the great mystics as well as in the banalities of the catechism. When this world is synonymous with impracticability, and we feel that the contact that connects us to it has been physically severed, the remedy lies neither in faith nor in the denial of faith (both expressions of the same infirmity), but in pagan diletterism, or rather in the *idea we have* of

it.

The most serious disadvantage for the Christian is that he can *consciously* serve only one god, although he has the latitude to subordinate himself in practice to several (the cult of the saints!). This is a salutary subjection that has allowed polytheism to continue indirectly despite everything. Otherwise, an overly pure Christianity would not have failed to establish a universal schizophrenia. Tertullian notwithstanding, *the soul is naturally pagan*. Any god, when he responds to our immediate and pressing demands, represents for us an additional source of vitality, but this is not the case if it is imposed on us or if it does not correspond to any necessity. The fault of paganism was to have accepted and accumulated too much: it died of generosity and excessive understanding, it died of a lack of instinct.

If, in order to overcome the ego, this leprosy, we rely solely on the appearances, it is impossible not to deplore the disappearance of a religion without drama, without crises of conscience, without incitements to remorse, equally superficial in its principles and practices. In Antiquity, philosophy, not religion, was profound; in the modern age, Christianity alone was the cause of the “depths” and the rifts of all kinds inherent in them.

It is eras with no specific faith (the Hellenistic period and our own) that try to classify the gods, while refusing to divide them into true and false. On the contrary, the idea that they are all equal is unacceptable at times when fervour dominates. Prayer cannot be addressed to a god who is *probably* true. It does not stoop to subtleties or tolerate gradations within the supreme: even when it doubts, it does so in the name of Truth. *We don't beg for nuance*. All this has only been true since the monotheistic calamity. For pagan piety, it was a different matter. In Minucius Felix's *Octavius*,

*the* author, before defending the Christian position, has Cecilius, the representative of paganism, say: “We see national gods worshipped: in Eleusis, Ceres; in Phrygia, Cybele; in Epidaurus, Aesculapius; in Chaldea, Belus; in Syria, Astarte; in Taurides, Diana; Mercury among the Gauls and in Rome all these gods combined.” And he adds, on the subject of the Christian god, the only one not to be accepted: “Where does he come from, this single, solitary, abandoned god, known to no free nation, no kingdom...?”

It was an old Roman rule that no one in particular should worship new or foreign gods unless they were admitted by the State, or more precisely by the Senate, which alone had the power to decide which gods deserved to be adopted or rejected. The Christian god, who had arisen on the periphery of the Empire and reached Rome by unconcealed means, was bound to take revenge later on for having been forced to enter by fraud.

You can only destroy a civilisation when you destroy its gods. The Christians, not daring to attack the Empire head-on, attacked its religion. They allowed themselves to be persecuted only to be able to fulminate against it, to satisfy their irrepressible appetite for hatred. How unfortunate they would have been if no one had deigned to promote them to the rank of victims! Everything about paganism, even tolerance, exasperated them. Strengthened by their certainties, they could not understand how anyone could resign themselves, in the manner of pagans, to verisimilitude, or follow a cult whose priests, simple magistrates in charge of the rituals, did not impose on anyone the drudgery of the *sincerity*.

When we keep telling ourselves that life is only bearable if we can change gods, and that monotheism contains the seeds of all forms of tyranny, we stop feeling sorry for ancient slavery. It was better to be a slave and be able to worship whatever deity you wanted, than to be “free” and have only one and the same variety of

the divine before you. Freedom is the right to *difference*; being plurality, it postulates the scattering of the absolute, its resolution into a dusting of truths, equally justified and provisional. There is an underlying (or unconscious, if you prefer) polytheism in liberal democracy; conversely, every authoritarian regime is a disguised monotheism. The curious effect of monotheistic logic is that as soon as a pagan became a Christian, he became intolerant. Rather go down with a mass of accommodating gods than thrive in the shadow of a despot! At a time when we are witnessing ideological conflicts rather than religious ones, the question we need to ask ourselves is the same one that haunted the late Antiquity: “How can we renounce so many gods for one god? – but with the correction that the sacrifice we are being asked to make is at a lower level, at the level of opinions rather than gods. As soon as a deity, or a doctrine, claims supremacy, freedom is threatened. If tolerance is seen as the supreme value, then everything that stands in the way of it must be considered a crime, starting with those efforts at conversion in which the Church has remained unequalled. And if the Church has exaggerated the seriousness of the persecutions to which it was subjected and ridiculously increased the number of martyrs, it is because, having been an oppressive force for so long, it needed to cover up its crimes under noble pretexts: to allow pernicious doctrines to go unpunished, was it not on its part a betrayal of those who sacrificed themselves for it? It was therefore in a spirit of fidelity that she proceeded to annihilate those who had “gone astray”, and that, after being persecuted for four centuries, she was able to persecute for fourteen. This is the secret, the *miracle* of its durability. Never were martyrs avenged more systematically and relentlessly.

Since the advent of Christianity coincided with that of the Empire, some Fathers (Eusebius, among others) argued that this

coincidence had a profound meaning: one God – one emperor. In reality, it meant the abolition of national barriers, the possibility of travelling across a vast state without having to worry about the consequences. Without this ease of spreading, it would have remained a simple dissidence within Judaism, instead of becoming an invading religion and, what is more unfortunate, a religion of propaganda. It did everything it could to solicit, to assert itself and to spread, right down to those daytime funerals, the apparatus of which was a real offence to both the pagans and the Olympian gods. Julian observed that, according to the legislators of old, “since life and death differ in every respect, the acts relating to one and the other must be performed separately”. The Christians, in their unbridled proselytising, were not prepared to make this separation: they were well aware of the usefulness of the corpse and the profit that could be made from it. Paganism did not ignore death, but it was careful not to make a show of it. It was a fundamental principle of paganism that death did not fit in with daylight, that it was an insult to the light; it belonged to the night and the infernal gods. The Galileans have filled everything with sepulchres,” said Julian, who never called Jesus anything other than the “Holy One”. For pagans worthy of the name, the new superstition could only appear to be an exploitation, an enhancement of the hideous. All the more reason to deplore the progress it was making in all circles. What Celsus was not able to know, but what Julian knew perfectly well, were the wannabes of Christianity, those who, unable to subscribe to it entirely, nevertheless strove to follow it, fearing that, if they remained on the sidelines, they would be excluded from the “future”. Whether it was opportunism or fear of solitude, they wanted to walk alongside these men “born yesterday”, but soon to be called upon to play the role of masters and torturers.

However legitimate his passion for the dead gods, Julian had no

chance of resurrecting them. Instead of trying in vain, he would have done better to ally himself in rage with the Manichaeans and undermine the Church with them. Thus, by sacrificing his ideal, he would at least have satisfied his resentment. What card was left for him other than that of revenge? A magnificent career as a demolisher was opening up before him, and he might well have embarked on it, had he not been obsessed by nostalgia for Olympus. You don't fight battles in the name of regret. It is true that he died young, barely two years into his reign; had he had ten or twenty years ahead of him, what a service he would not have done us! No doubt he would not have stifled Christianity, but he would have forced it to be more modest. We would be less vulnerable, because we would not have lived as if we were the centre of the universe, as if everything, *even God*, revolved around us. The Incarnation is the most dangerous flattery of which we have ever been the object. It has given us an inordinate status, out of all proportion to what we are. By elevating the human anecdote to the dignity of a cosmic drama, Christianity has deceived us about our insignificance; it has plunged us into delusion, into that morbid optimism which, in defiance of the evidence, confuses progress with apotheosis. The more reflective pagan antiquity put man in his place. When Tacitus wonders whether events are governed by eternal laws or whether they move at the whim of chance, he does not really answer the question; he leaves it undecided, and this indecision expresses well the general feeling of the ancients. More than anyone else, the historian, confronted with this mixture of constants and aberrations of which the historical process is composed, is necessarily led to oscillate between determinism and contingency, laws and caprice, physics and fate. There is scarcely a misfortune that we cannot relate as we please either to a distraction of providence, or to the indifference of chance, or finally to the inflexibility of fate. This trinity, which is so convenient for anyone, especially a disillusioned mind, is the most

consoling thing that pagan wisdom has to offer. Modern people are loath to resort to it, just as they are loath to the specifically ancient idea that goods and evils represent an invariable sum that cannot be modified in any way. With our obsession with progress and regression, we implicitly accept that evil changes, either decreases or increases. The identity of the world with itself, the idea that it is condemned to be what it is, that the future will add nothing essential to the existing data, this beautiful idea no longer holds sway; it is precisely because *the future*, object of hope or horror, is our true *place*; we live in it, it is everything to us. The Christian obsession with the future, by reducing time to the concept of the imminent and the possible, renders us incapable of conceiving of an unchanging moment, resting in itself, free from the scourge of succession. Even devoid of the slightest content, *waiting* is an emptiness that fills us, an anxiety that reassures us, so unsuited are we to a static vision. “There is no need for God to correct his work” – this opinion of Celsus, held by an entire civilisation, runs counter to our inclinations, our instincts, our very being. We can only ratify it in an unusual moment, in a *fit of* wisdom. It even because what God is criticised for in religious circles more than in others is his good conscience, his indifference to the quality of his work and his refusal to mitigate its anomalies. We need the *future at* all costs. Belief in the Last Judgement has created the psychological conditions for belief in the *meaning* of history; better still, the whole philosophy of history is simply a by-product of the idea of the Last Judgement. We may lean towards this or that cyclical theory, but on our part this is no more than an abstract adherence; in fact, we behave as if history followed a linear course, as if the various civilisations that succeed one another were merely stages through which some grand design, whose name varies according to our beliefs or ideologies, passes in order to manifest itself and be fulfilled.

Is there any better proof of the deficiency of our faith than that we no longer have false gods? It is hard to see how, for a believer, the god he prays to and another, quite different god, can be equally legitimate. Faith is exclusion, challenge. It is because it can no longer hate other religions, because it *understands* them, that Christianity is finished: the vitality from which intolerance springs is increasingly lacking. Intolerance was its *raison d'être*. To its misfortune, it has ceased to be monstrous. Like polytheism in decline, it has been affected, paralysed by too great a breadth of vision. His god has no more prestige for us than Jupiter had for the discomfited pagans.

What does all the chatter about the “death of God” boil down to, if not a death certificate for Christianity? We don't dare attack religion outright, we attack the boss, who is criticised for being timid, timid, moderate. A god who has squandered his capital of cruelty, nobody fears or respects him any more. We are scarred by all those centuries when believing in him meant dreading him, when our fears imagined him to be both compassionate and unscrupulous. Who would be intimidated by him now, when believers themselves feel that he is out of date, that we can no longer connect him to the present, let alone the future? And just as paganism had to give in to Christianity, so Christianity will have to give in to some new belief; stripped of its aggression, it no longer constitutes an obstacle to the irruption of other gods; all they have to do is appear, and perhaps they will. All they have to do is emerge, and they may emerge. They may not have the face or even the mask of the gods, but they will be no less formidable.

For those who value freedom and vertigo equally, a faith, wherever it comes from, even if it is anti-religious, is a salutary obstacle, a desired, dreamed-of chain whose function is to curb curiosity and fever, to suspend the anguish of the indefinite. When this faith prevails and takes hold, the immediate result is a reduction

in the *number* of problems you have to ask yourself, and an almost tragic reduction in your options. The burden of choice is lifted from you; the choice is made for you. The refined pagans who allowed themselves to be tempted by the new religion expected it to choose for them, to show them *where to go*, so that they would no longer have to hesitate at the threshold of so many temples or wander between so many gods. The religious effervescence *without a creed* that characterised the Alexandrian period ended in weariness and a refusal to wander. The coexistence of truths was denounced, because people were no longer satisfied with the *little* that each offered; they aspired to the whole, but to a whole that was limited, circumscribed and *certain*, so great was the fear of falling from the universal to the uncertain, from the uncertain to the precarious and amorphous. Christianity is experiencing the same downward spiral that paganism experienced in its day. It is falling apart, it is in a hurry to fall apart; this is what makes it bearable for unbelievers, who are becoming more and more disposed towards it. Paganism, even when defeated, was still hated; Christians were furious and could not forget, whereas today everyone has forgiven Christianity. By the eighteenth century, the arguments against it had been exhausted. Like a poison that has lost its virtues, it can no longer save or damn anyone. But it has overthrown too many gods for it to be able to escape the fate it has reserved for them. The hour of revenge has come for them. Their joy must be great to see their worst enemy as low as they are, since he accepts them all without exception. At the time of his triumph, he demolished temples and violated consciences wherever it pleased him to appear. A new god, even one who has been crucified a thousand times, shows no mercy, crushes everything in his path and strives to occupy as much space as possible. And so he makes us pay dearly for not having recognised him sooner. As long as he was obscure, he might have had a certain appeal: we didn't yet see the marks of victory on him.

Never is a religion more “noble” than when it comes to believing itself to be a superstition, and watches, detached, its own eclipse. Christianity was formed and flourished in hatred of everything that was not Christian; this hatred sustained it throughout its career, and now that its career is over, his hatred also comes to an end. Christ will not return to the Underworld; he has been returned to the tomb, and this time he will remain there, never to emerge again: he has no *one to deliver* either on the surface or in the depths of the earth. When we think of the excesses that accompanied his accession, we can't help but recall the exclamation of Rutilius Namatianus, the last pagan poet: “Would to the gods that Judea had never been conquered!”

Since it is accepted that the gods are true indiscriminately, why stop there, why not extol them all? That would be a supreme achievement on the part of the Church: it would perish by bowing before its victims. There are signs that it is feeling the temptation. And so, like the temples of antiquity, it would make a point of collecting deities and wrecks from all over. But, once again, the *true* god must fade away so that all the others can re-emerge.

## PALEONTOLOGY

It was the chance of a shower one autumn day that brought me into the Museum for a few moments. In fact, I was to stay for an hour, two hours, maybe three. Months separate me from that accidental visit, and yet I'm not about to forget those eye sockets that stare at you, more insistent than eyes, that skull fair, that automatic sniggering at all levels of zoology.

Nowhere is the past better served. What is possible here seems inconceivable or outlandish. You get the impression that flesh disappeared as soon as it appeared, that it never even existed, that it could never have been attached to these solemn, self-important bones. It appears to be a sham, a deception, a disguise that covers up nothing. Is that all it was? And if she's no better, how does she manage to inspire repulsion or terror in me? I've always felt a predilection for those who were obsessed by its worthlessness, who made a great deal of it: Baudelaire, Swift, the Buddha... It is so *obvious*, yet it is an anomaly; the more we consider it, the more we turn away from it with dread, and, by dint of weighing it down, we move towards the mineral, we become *petrified*. To bear the sight or the thought of it requires more than courage: it requires cynicism. To call it *nocturnal*, as one of the Fathers of the Church did, is to misjudge its nature; it is also to do it too much honour; it is neither strange nor dark, it is *perishable* to the point of indecency, to the point of madness, it is not only the seat of disease, it is disease itself, incurable nothingness, fiction degenerated into calamity. The vision I have of it is that of a gravedigger steeped in metaphysics. No doubt I'm wrong to think about it all the time; you can't live and dwell on

it: a colossus would perish in it. I feel it in a way that it's not allowed to be felt; it takes advantage of me, it forces me to give it a disproportionate status, and it so monopolises and dominates me that my mind is nothing but viscera. Compared to the solidity and *seriousness* of the skeleton, it seems ridiculously temporary and frivolous. It flatters and satisfies the precariousness junkie in me. That's why I feel so at home in this museum, where everything invites us to the euphoria of a universe cleansed of flesh, to the jubilation of the afterlife.

At the entrance, the man *stands upright*; all the other animals, hunched over, overwhelmed, slumped over, even the giraffe, despite its neck, even the iguanodon, grotesque in its desire to stand upright. Closer to home, the orang-utan, the gorilla, the chimpanzee – it's clear that their efforts to stand upright were in vain. Their efforts having failed, they just stand there, miserable, stopped halfway, thwarted in their pursuit of verticality. Hunchbacks, in short. We would still be like them, no doubt about it, were it not for the chance we had to take a decisive step forward. Since then, we've struggled to erase all traces of our low extraction; hence that provocative air so characteristic of man. Even dinosaurs seem shy around him, with his posture and the kind of person he makes himself out to be. As his real setbacks have only just begun, he will have time to settle down. Everything suggests that, returning to its initial phase, it will join the chimpanzee, the gorilla, the orang-utan, that it will once again resemble them, and that it will become increasingly difficult for it to wiggle in its upright position. Perhaps even, bending under the strain, he will be even more stooped than his former companions. When he reaches the threshold of senility, he'll *resign* himself, because it's hard to see what he could do better.

Much more than the skeleton, it is the flesh, by which I mean

carriage, that disturbs and alarms us – and also soothes us. The Buddhist monks were fond of mass graves: where could desire be more safely trapped and emancipated? Horror being a means of liberation, our remains have enjoyed great favour in all periods of fervour and interiority. In the Middle Ages, people strived for salvation, they believed energetically: the corpse was fashionable; faith was vigorous and indomitable, it loved the livid and the fetid, it knew the benefits that could be derived from decay and hideousness. Today, a watered-down religion is attached only to nice fantasies, to Evolution and Progress. It is not religion that would provide us with the modern equivalent of the Danse macabre.

A Buddhist text reads: “Let him who aspires to nirvana make nothing dear to him”. It is enough to consider these spectres, to think of the fate of the flesh that adhered to them, to understand the urgency of detachment. There can be no asceticism without the double ruminations on the flesh and the skeleton, on the frightening caducity of the one and the useless permanence of the other. As an exercise, it's a good idea from time to time to separate ourselves from our face, from our skin, to remove this deceptive covering, and then to put down, even if it's only for a moment, this jumble of flesh that prevents us from discerning what's *fundamental* in us. Once the exercise is over, we are freer and more alone, almost invulnerable.

To overcome attachments and the inconveniences they entail, you have to contemplate the ultimate nakedness of a being, pierce with your gaze its entrails and the rest of it, roll around in the horror of its secretions, in its physiology of an imminent corpse. This vision should not be morbid but methodical, a directed haunting, particularly salutary in times of trial. The skeleton encourages serenity; the corpse, renunciation. In the lesson in inanity that both teach us, happiness merges with the destruction of our bonds. To

have overlooked every detail of such a lesson and yet still be dealing with simulacra!

It was a blessed time when loners could plumb their depths without appearing obsessed or deranged. Their imbalance was not weighted down as it is for us. They sacrificed ten, twenty years, a whole life, for a presentiment, for a *flash* of the absolute. The word “depth” only makes sense when applied to times when the monk was considered to be the noblest human exemplar. That the monk is an endangered species is beyond dispute. For centuries, they have merely survived. Who would he turn to, in a world that calls him a “parasite”? In Tibet, the last country where it still counted, it was discarded. Yet it was a rare consolation to think that thousands and thousands of hermits could meditate there *today* on the themes of Prajnâpâramitâ. Even if it had only odious sides, monasticism would still be better than any other ideal. More than ever, monasteries should be built... for those who believe in everything and for those who believe in nothing. Where to flee? There's nowhere left where you can professionally abhor this world.

In order to conceive of unreality and to penetrate it, it must be constantly present in the mind. The day you feel it, the day you *see* it, everything becomes unreal, except this unreality, which alone makes existence tolerable.

It's a sign of awakening to have an obsession with the aggregate, the increasingly vivid feeling of being no more than the meeting place of a few elements, welded together for an instant. The “I” conceived as a substantial and irreducible given is more disconcerting than it is reassuring: how can we accept the fact that the “I” is an entity? How can we separate ourselves from what remains, from what is? We can leave behind an illusion, however inveterate it may be; but what can we do when faced with something consistent, something lasting? If there is nothing but what exists, if

being is everywhere, how can we tear ourselves away from it without getting bogged down? Let us postulate universal deception as a precaution or for therapeutic purposes. The fear that there is nothing is succeeded by the fear that there is something. A farewell to non-being is much more acceptable than a farewell to being. It's not that this world doesn't exist, but its reality isn't one. Everything seems to exist and nothing exists.

Any concerted pursuit, that of nirvana itself, if one is not free to turn away from it, is a hindrance like any other. Knowledge that is converted into an idol degrades into non-knowledge, as the Vedic wisdom already taught: "Those who abandon themselves to ignorance are in thick darkness; those who take pleasure in knowledge are in even thicker darkness". To think without knowing it, or rather not to think at all but to stand there and devour the silence, that is what clairvoyance should lead to. No pleasure can compare with the pleasure of *knowing* that you are not thinking. Some will object: isn't knowing that you don't think still thinking? Undoubtedly, but the misery of thought is overcome as long as, instead of jumping from idea to idea, we deliberately remain within a single idea, which rejects all the others and cancels itself out, as soon as it gives itself as content its own absence. This interference in the normal mechanism of the mind is only fruitful if we can renew it at will: it must cure us of subjection to knowledge, of superstition of any system whatsoever. Deliverance that seduces us, that obsesses us, is not deliverance. Let us make nothing our own, starting with desire, that generator of fear. When everything makes us tremble, our only recourse is to think that if fear is real, because it is a sensation, the *sensation par excellence*, the world that causes it is reduced to a transitory assemblage of unreal elements, that in short fear is all the more vivid the more we give credence to the self and the world, and that it must inevitably diminish when we detect the

imposture of both. Only our triumph over things is true, only the recognition of unreality that our clairvoyance draws up every day, every hour. To free ourselves is to *rejoice* in this unreality and to seek it out at every moment.

Seen from the outside, every being is an accident, a lie (except in love, but love stands outside knowledge and truth). Perhaps we should look at ourselves from the outside, in much the same way as we look at others, and try to have nothing in common with ourselves: if I were to behave like a stranger to myself, I would see myself dying with total carelessness; my life would be nothing more than my death. Both, as long as they belong to me and I take them on, represent trials beyond my strength. When, on the other hand, I convince myself that they lack intrinsic existence and should not concern me at all – what a relief! Why then, knowing that in the final analysis everything is unreal, should I still get carried away by this or that trifle? I get carried away, of course, but I'm not passionate about it, in other words I take no *real* interest in it. I only achieve this selflessness when I swap my old self for a new one, the self of distorted vision, which triumphs here, in the midst of these ghosts, where everything cripples me, where the person I used to be appears distant and incomprehensible. The obvious things I turned my back on before, I now see in all their clarity. The advantage is that I no longer feel any obligation to my flesh, to all flesh. What better setting for rehashing the eighteen varieties of emptiness set out in the Mahayana texts, which are so keen to catalogue the various types of deficiency! But here we immediately find ourselves in an acute state of unreality.

It's hard to believe the extent to which fear adheres to flesh; it's glued to it, inseparable from it and almost indistinguishable from it. These skeletons don't feel it, happy skeletons! It is the only fraternal

link that binds us to the animals, although they only know it in its natural, healthy form if you like; they ignore the other, that which arises without reason, which we can reduce, according to our whims, either to a metaphysical process or to demented chemistry, and which, every day, at an unpredictable hour, attacks us and overwhelms us. To subdue it, we would need the help of all the former gods. It appears at the very bottom of our daily failings, at the very moment when we would be on the verge of collapsing if nothing prevented us; this nothing is the secret of our verticality. Remaining upright implies a dignity, a discipline that has been painstakingly instilled in us and that always saves us at the last moment, when we are startled into grasping what could be wrong in the career of the flesh, threatened and boycotted by all the elements that define it. Flesh has *betrayed* matter; the discomfort it feels and suffers is its punishment. Life is a state of guilt, a state that is all the more serious because no one is really aware of it. But a guilt that is coextensive with the individual, that weighs on him without his knowing it, that is the price he has to pay for his promotion to separate existence, for the crime he has committed against the undivided creation, this guilt, though unconscious, is no less real, and it is evident in the creature's despondency.

As I walk among these carcasses, I try to imagine the burden of fear they must have carried, and when I stop in front of the three monkeys, I can't help but attribute the halt in their evolution to a similar burden, which, weighing down on them, gave them that obsequious and frightened look. And even these reptiles, was it not under a similar burden that they had to grovel shamefully and start producing venom in the dust to avenge their ignominy? Everything that lives, even the most repulsive animal or insect, twitches, only twitches; everything that lives, by the simple fact of living, deserves commiseration. And I think of all those I have known, of all those who are no longer, long since wallowed in their coffins, forever free

of flesh – and fear. And I feel relieved by the weight of their death.

Anxiety is an awareness of fear, a fear in the second degree, reflecting on itself. It stops the current flowing from the world to us, from us to the world, and only encourages us to think, the better to destroy its momentum. It constantly sobers the mind; yet there is no speculation of any significance that does not stem from intoxication, from a loss of control, from the ability to lose our way, and therefore to renew ourselves. Inspiration in reverse, anxiety calls us to order at the slightest flight, the slightest rambling. This surveillance is disastrous for thought, which is suddenly paralysed, trapped in a cursed circle, condemned to be able to escape from itself only in fits and starts and by stealth. So it is true that although our apprehensions make us seek liberation, it is they that prevent us from achieving it. Although he dreads the future to the point of making it the sole object of his preoccupations, the anxious person is a prisoner of the past, indeed he is the only man who really has a past. His ills, of which he is a slave, do not make him a prisoner of the past. He comes to miss the raw, anonymous fear. He comes to miss the raw, anonymous fear from which everything starts, which is the beginning, the origin, the principle of all that lives. However atrocious it may be, it is nonetheless bearable, since all living things resign themselves to it; it shakes and ravages them, but does not destroy them. The same is not true of this refined, “recent” fear, which arose after the appearance of the “I”, where the danger, diffuse and omnipresent, never materialises, a fear that is turned in on itself and which, for want of any other nourishment, devours itself.

If I didn't go back to the Museum, I was there in spirit almost every day, and not without feeling some benefit: what could be more soothing than chewing on this ultimate simplification of beings? Suddenly, with your imagination untangled, you see yourself as you

will be: a lesson, no, a *burst of* modesty. On the proper use of the skeleton... We should use it in difficult times, especially as we have it to hand.

I don't need Holbein or Baldung Grien; when it comes to the macabre, I leave it to my means. If I see the need or if I feel like it, there's no one I can't strip of their camel skin. Why should I envy or fear these bones that bear such and such a name, this skull that doesn't love me? Why should I also love someone or love myself, suffering in any case, when I know the image I need to conjure up to soften these miseries? A keen awareness of what lies in wait for the flesh should destroy both love and hate. In reality, it only manages to attenuate them, and, in rare moments, to tame them. Otherwise it would be too simple: all we would have to do is imagine death to be happy, and the macabre, fulfilling our most secret desires, would be *all profit*.

I doubt that I would have returned to these places so often if they had not obviously flattered my ineptitude for illusion. Here, where man is nothing, we realise the extent to which the doctrines of deliverance are incapable of grasping him, interpreting his past and deciphering his future. This is because deliverance has content only for each of us, individually, and not for the mob, which is incapable of understanding the relationship between the idea of emptiness and the sensation of freedom. It is hard to see how humanity can be saved as a whole; swallowed up in falsehood, doomed to an inferior truth, it will always confuse semblance with substance. Even if, against all evidence, humanity were to follow an ascending path, it would not be able to acquire, at the end of its ascent, the degree of clairvoyance of the most obtuse Hindu sannyâsin. In existence what we can do, what we actually do, is to keep switching from one thesis to the other, all too happy to dodge a choice that would solve none of our immediate problems.

Awakening is independent of intellectual capacity: you can have genius and be a fool, spiritually that is. On the other hand, you are not much further ahead with knowledge as such. An illiterate person can possess the “Eye of Knowledge” and thus be above any scholar. Discerning that what you are is not you, that what you have is not yours, no longer being an accomplice to anything, not even your own life – that is seeing rightly, that is going down to the root of everything. The more you open yourself up to emptiness and the more you immerse yourself in it, the more you escape the fatality of being yourself, of being human, of being alive. If everything is empty, this triple fate will also be empty. As a result, the magic of tragedy is undermined. Is the hero who collapses worth as little as the one who triumphs? There's nothing more prestigious than a happy ending, if this world is real; if it's not, it's sheer nonsense to rave about any outcome whatsoever. To deign to have a “destiny”, to be blinded or merely tempted by the “extraordinary”, proves that we remain closed to any higher truth, that we are far from possessing the “eye” in question. To situate someone is to determine their degree of awakening, the progress they have made in perceiving the illusory and the false in others and in themselves. No communion is conceivable with someone who is mistaken about who he is. As the gap between us and our actions widens, we find ourselves with fewer subjects for dialogue and fewer fellow human beings. This solitude does not make us bitter, because it does not derive from our talents but from our renunciations. But it does not exclude the danger of spiritual pride, which exists as long as we reflect on the sacrifices we have made and the illusions we have rejected. How can we defeat ourselves unknowingly, when detachment requires insistent awareness? The very thing that makes detachment possible also threatens it. In the order of inner values, any superiority that does not become impersonal turns to perdition. How can we tear ourselves away from the world without realising it! We should be

able to forget that detachment is a *merit*; otherwise, instead of delivering, it poisons. According to Ignatius of Loyola, attributing our successes of all kinds to God, believing that nothing emanates from us, that everything is *given* to us, is the only effective way to fight superbness. This recommendation applies to all states, but not for detachment, a long and painful process of undermining, of which the *ego* is the victim: how can we not take pride in this? Our spiritual level may have risen, but that doesn't mean we have changed qualitatively; we remain prisoners of our limitations: the impossibility of eradicating spiritual pride is one of the most unfortunate consequences of this. "No creature," observes Saint Thomas, "can attain a higher degree of nature without ceasing to exist". However, if man is intriguing, it is precisely because he wanted to overcome his nature. He did not succeed, and his inordinate efforts were bound to alter and *denature* it. That's why we can't ask questions about him without torment and *passion*. No doubt it is also more decent to feel sorry for him than for ourselves (as Pascal understood so well). In the long run, this passion becomes so tiresome that all you can think about is how to escape it. Neither the inevitability of being oneself, nor that of being alive, can compare with that of being a man; as soon as it nips at my heels, in order to escape it, I mentally retrace my steps through these bones which, in recent times, have so often helped me; I see them, I cling to them: By confirming my belief in emptiness, they help me to foresee the day when I will no longer have to put up with the obsession with the human, the most terrible of all chains. If you want to be free, you have to free yourself from it at all costs; but to be truly free, you have to go one step further: free yourself from freedom itself, reduce it to the level of a prejudice or a pretext so that you no longer have to idolise it... Only then will you begin to learn how to act *without desiring*. Meditating on the horrible prepares you for this: to turn around the flesh and its decrepitudes is

to initiate yourself into the art of dissociating desire and action – an operation that is harmful to restless minds, but indispensable to contemplative ones. As long as we desire, we live in subjection, we are left to the world; as soon as we stop desiring, we accumulate the privileges of an object and a god: we no longer depend on anyone. That desire is ineradicable is only too true; yet what peace it is to *imagine* being free of it! Peace so unusual that a perverse pleasure creeps in: wouldn't such a suspicious sensation amount to nature's revenge against the person guilty of aspiring to such an unnatural state? Apart from nirvana *in life* – a rare feat, practically unattainable – the suppression of desire is a chimera; we don't suppress it, we suspend it, and this suspension, very strangely, is accompanied by a feeling of power, of a new, unknown certainty. The vogue for monasticism, in other centuries; can it not be explained by this dilation following the reflux of appetites? It takes strength to fight against desire; this strength increases when desire withdraws; when it stops, fear also stops. For anxiety, for its part, to lend itself to a similar truce, we must go further, approach a space that is otherwise rarefied, approach an abstract elation, an exaltation equally granted to being and non-being.

The Katha-Upanishad says that *âtman* is “joyful and joyless”. This is a state that can be reached through the affirmation or negation of a supreme principle, both through the Vedânta and the Mahâyâna. However different they may be, the two paths converge in the final experience, in the slide out of appearances. The essential thing is not so much to know in the name of what we want to be liberated as how far we can advance on the path to deliverance. Whether we dissolve into the absolute or into emptiness, in both cases it is a neutral joy that we reach: a joy without any determination, as bare as the anxiety for which it is intended as a remedy, and of which it is only the outcome, the positive conclusion. The symmetry between them is obvious; they look like

they do not need any external stimulus, they are self-sufficient, they correspond and communicate in depth. For just as concrete joy is nothing more than conquered fear, neutral joy is nothing more than transfigured anxiety. And it is from their affinities, from their permeability, that we derive the possibility of rising from one to the other, and the danger of going backwards, of falling back into a previous state that we thought we had overcome. This shows the extent to which all spiritual progress is threatened at the base. For the unaccomplished deliverer, for the nirvana wannabe, nothing is easier or more frequent than to retreat into his old terrors. But when from time to time he manages to hold firm, he makes his own the exhortation of the *Dhammapada*: “Shine for yourself, as your own light” and, as long as he adopts it and follows it, he understands from within those who always follow it.

## ENCOUNTERS WITH SUICIDE

We only kill ourselves if, in some ways, we have always been outside everything. This is an original inappropriateness of which we may not be aware. Those who are *called upon* to kill themselves belong only by accident to this world; they do not belong to any world at all.

We are not predisposed, we are predestined to suicide, we are doomed to it before any disappointment, before any experience: happiness pushes us towards it as much as unhappiness, it pushes us even more towards it, because amorphous, improbable, it requires an exhausting effort to adapt, whereas unhappiness offers the security and rigour of a ritual.

There are nights when the future is abolished, when of all its moments only the one we choose to be no more remains.

“I've had enough of being me”, we repeat to ourselves when we want to escape from ourselves; and when we irrevocably flee from ourselves, the irony is that we commit an act in which we find ourselves again, in which we suddenly become totally ourselves. The fate that we wanted to escape, we fall back into the moment we kill ourselves, suicide being only the triumph, the celebration of this fate.

The further I go, the less likely I am to be dragged from one day to the next. To tell the truth, it's always been like that: I haven't lived in the possible, but in the inconceivable. My memory piles up

collapsed horizons.

There is within us a temptation, rather than a will, to die. For if we were given the *will* to die, who wouldn't take advantage of it at the first upset? There is yet another impediment: the idea of killing oneself seems incredibly new to the person who is possessed by it; he therefore imagines himself performing an *unprecedented* act; this illusion occupies and flatters him, and wastes precious time.

Suicide is a sudden achievement, a dazzling deliverance: it is nirvana through violence.

The simple fact of looking at a knife and realising that it's up to you to use it in a certain way gives you a feeling of sovereignty that verges on megalomania.

When we are seized by the idea of ending things, a space stretches out before us, a vast possibility outside time and eternity itself, a dizzying opening, a hope of dying *beyond* death.

To kill yourself is, in effect, to compete with death, to show that you can do better than it, to play a trick on it and, not least, to redeem yourself in your own eyes. You reassure yourself that you are not the last, that you deserve some respect. Now everything changes: by destroying myself, I destroy all the reasons I had to despise myself, I regain my confidence, I am someone forever...

Since my mission is to suffer, I don't understand why I try to imagine my fate any other way, still less why I get angry at *sensations*. Because all suffering is just that, at the beginning and at the end anyway. In the middle, of course, it's a bit more: a universe.

This fury in the middle of the night, this need for a final explanation with yourself, with the elements. Suddenly, your blood comes alive, you tremble, you get up, you go out, you tell yourself there's no reason to procrastinate or put it off any longer: this time it's going to be for real. As soon as you step outside, you feel an imperceptible sense of calm. You're moving forward with a sense of the gesture you're about to make, of the mission you've taken on. A hint of exultation replaces the fury when you tell yourself that you have finally reached the end, that the future has been reduced to a few minutes, an hour at most, and that you have decreed, on your own authority, the suspension of all time.

Then there's the reassuring feeling of the absence of the next person. Everyone is asleep. How can you leave a world where you can still be alone? This night, which was supposed to be our last, we can't get away from it. We can't conceive that it might fade away. And we want to defend it against the day that undermines it and soon submerges it.

If we could change our nature, become anyone, we would immediately be among the chosen. Since metamorphosis is impossible, we cling to Predestination, the magic word if ever there was one. Just uttering it gives you the feeling that you've passed the stage of questioning and perplexity, and finally found the key to any impasse.

When we feel the urge to end things, whether weak or strong, we are inclined to think about it, to explain it, to explain it *to ourselves*. We are much more inclined to do so when the urge is weak, because, being too intense, it invades the mind and leaves it neither space nor leisure to consider it or avoid it.

To wait for death is to endure it, to relegate it to the level of a process, to resign oneself to a denouement whose date, mode and setting are unknown. It's a far cry from the absolute act. There is nothing in common between the obsession with suicide and the feeling of death – by which I mean the deep, constant feeling of an end in itself, of the inevitability of perishing as such, inseparable from a cosmic background and independent of this drama of the ego, at the centre of all forms of self-destruction. Death is not necessarily experienced as deliverance; suicide always delivers: it is the summum, the paroxysm of salvation. For the sake of decency, we should choose the moment to disappear. It is degrading to be extinguished in the same way that you are extinguished; it is intolerable to be exposed to an end over which you have no control, which lies in wait for you, knocks you down, precipitates you into the unspeakable. Perhaps the time will come when natural death will be completely discredited, when catechisms will be enriched with a new formula: “Grant us, O Lord, the favour and strength to come to an end, the grace to fade away in time”.

The age-old conspiracy against suicide is the cause of the clutter and sclerosis of our societies. It is up to us to learn to destroy ourselves *at the right moment*, to run cheerfully towards our spectre. As long as we fail to do this, we will deserve our humiliations. When we have exhausted our *raison d'être*, it is odious to persist. But it is indeed the indignity of natural death that we see, whichever way we look at it.

“When you meet up with someone you used to know, after many years, it's a real pleasure. As a child, the first glance almost always leads us to suppose that some great misfortune must have befallen her” (Leopardi). To last is to diminish: existence is a loss of being. Since no one disappears when they should, anyone who survives should be called to order, encouraged and, if necessary, helped to

shorten their days. At some point, to persevere is to consent to decline. But how can you be sure of your decline? Can't we misinterpret the symptoms? Doesn't the awareness of falling into decay imply a superiority over one's own decline? Once again, how can we know when we've started to fall, how can we determine when? – It's undoubtedly possible to make a mistake, but it doesn't really matter because, in any case, you never die in time. You go adrift, and it's only when you sink that you admit you're a wreck. And then it's too late to sink of your own accord.

It's good to think you're going to kill yourself. No subject is more relaxing: as soon as you broach it, you can breathe. Meditating on it makes you almost as free as the act itself.

The more I'm on the margins of time, the more the prospect of abstaining from it forever reincorporates me into existence, puts me on a level with the living, gives me a kind of honourability. This prospect, which I cannot do without, has lifted me out of all my despondency, and above all it has enabled me to get through those periods when I had no grievance against anyone, when I was fulfilled. Without its help, without the hope it gives, heaven would seem to me the worst of torments. How many times have I said to myself that, without the idea of suicide, one would kill oneself on the spot! The mind that it takes hold of, pampers it, idolises it, expects miracles from it. Like a drowning man clinging to the idea of drowning.

There are as many reasons to do away with ourselves as there are reasons to continue, but with the difference that the latter are older and more solid; they carry more weight than the others because they blend in with our origins, whereas the former, the fruit of experience, are necessarily more recent, and are both more pressing

and more uncertain.

The same person who says: "I don't have the courage to kill myself" will, the next moment, brand as cowardice a feat before which the bravest shrink back. "We kill ourselves," we keep saying, "out of weakness, so that we don't have to face the consequences of pain or shame". But what we fail to see is that it is precisely the weak who, far from trying to escape it, accommodate themselves to it on the contrary, and that it takes strength to tear oneself away from it decisively. In truth, it is easier to kill oneself than to overcome a prejudice as old as man, or at least as old as religions, so sadly impervious to the supreme gesture. As long as the Church prevailed, only the insane enjoyed privileged treatment, only they had the right to kill themselves: their bodies were not desecrated or hanged. Between ancient stoicism and modern "free thought", between, say, Seneca and Hume, suicide underwent, apart from the Cathar interlude, a long eclipse – a dark age indeed for all those who, wanting to die, dared not violate the prohibition against taking one's own life.

Once observed and analysed, infirmities lose their severity and strength; once examined, they are better tolerated. Except for sadness. The playfulness that goes to make up melancholy is exempt; intransigent, intractable, it ignores fantasy and caprice. With her, there is no escape, no coquetry. And no matter how much we talk about it or comment on it, it neither diminishes nor increases. It just *is*.

The person who has never considered killing himself will make up his mind much more quickly than the person who never stops thinking about it. Since any crucial act is easier to accomplish by thoughtlessness than by examination, the mind that has never

considered suicide, once it feels impelled to do so, will have no defence against this sudden impulse; it will be blinded and shaken by the revelation of a definitive outcome that it had not considered before; – whereas the other will always be able to delay a gesture that it has weighed and reweighed indefinitely, that it knows thoroughly and to which it will resolve itself dispassionately, if it ever does.

The horrors with which the universe abounds are an integral part of its substance; without them, it would *physically* cease to exist. Drawing the final conclusions is not the same as committing “beautiful” suicide. The only kind of suicide worthy of the epithet is that which arises out of nothing, for no apparent reason: pure suicide. It is suicide – defying all capital letters – that humiliates, that crushes God, Providence and even Destiny.

We don't kill ourselves, as is commonly thought, in a fit of dementia, but rather in a fit of *unbearable* lucidity. The climax of the decision does not, however, reflect any obscurity: idiots almost never kill themselves, but they can kill themselves out of fear, out of a premonition of idiocy. The culminating moment of the decision is not, however, one of obscurity: idiots almost never kill themselves; but we can kill ourselves out of fear, out of a premonition of idiocy. The act itself, then, is the last gasp of the mind that *pulls itself together*, gathers all its powers, all its faculties, before annulling itself. On the threshold of the ultimate defeat, he proves to himself that he is not completely lost. And he loses himself, in full instantaneous possession of all his means.

We have unlearned the art of killing ourselves *in cold blood*. The ancients were the last to excel at it. We now only conceive of passionate, feverish suicide, suicide as an inspired state; as for detachment, we dream of it as convulsionaries. These wise men

before the Cross knew how to break with this world or resign themselves to it, without drama or lyricism. Their way has been lost, as has the basis of their imperturbability: a usurping Providence came to dislodge Fatum from everywhere. And we run back to it, looking for support when no other can help or seduce us.

There is nothing deeper or more incomprehensible than Desire. That's why we only feel alive when we despair of destroying it.

Whether we delete ourselves or not, everything remains unchanged. But the decision to do away with oneself seems to everyone to be the most important that has ever been taken. It shouldn't be this way. And yet it is, and nothing can stand against this aberration or mystery.

Having only ever coincided with the interval that separates me from beings and things, with the void that opens up in the middle of each of my sensations, how could I not be surprised to see myself subscribing to anything, endorsing my words, rallying to my vacillations, even my convictions? Such naivety both distresses and reassures me.

You have to be hungry for the absolute to contemplate suicide. But you can envisage it also by doubting everything. This is understandable: the more we seek the absolute, the more, out of spite at not being able to attain it, we sink into doubt, which would be the flip side of a quest, the negative conclusion of a great undertaking, of a great passion. The absolute is pursuit; doubt, retreat. This retreat, pursuit in reverse, when it does not know how to stop, hits extremities inaccessible to a rational approach. In the beginning it was merely a process; now it is vertigo, like everything

that moves beyond itself. To advance or retrograde towards limits, to plumb the depths of anything, is necessarily to encounter the temptation of self-destruction.

On this little island in the Mediterranean, long before daylight, on the path that led me to the steepest cliff, I was thinking like a caretaker on holiday: I'd get this villa, I'd paint it ochre, I'd have another fence put up, and so on. In spite of my idea, I clung to the slightest trifle: I contemplated the agaves, dawdled, digressed the urgency of my subject. A dog started barking, then gave me a treat and followed me. You can't imagine, unless you've felt it, the comfort you get from a beast that comes to keep you company when the gods have turned their backs on you.

Faced with a landscape obliterated by light, to remain serene presupposes a temperament that I do not possess. The sun is my supplier of dark thoughts, and summer is the season when I've always reconsidered my relationship with this world and with myself, much to the chagrin of both.

When you understand that nothing is, that things don't even deserve the status of appearances, you no longer need to be saved, you are saved, *and unhappy forever*.

I try – unsuccessfully – not to take pride in anything. When I do, however, I feel that I no longer belong to the gang of mortals. I'm above everything, above the gods themselves. Maybe that's what death is: a feeling of great, extreme superiority.

Jean-Paul called the most important evening of his life the one when he discovered that there was no difference between dying the

next day or thirty years from now. This revelation is as important as it is useless. The difference in question appears to everyone to be irreducible, even absolute: to exist is to prove that we have not understood the extent to which it is one and the same thing to die now or at any time.

I may know that I am nothing, but I have yet to really convince myself of this. Something inside me refuses to accept the truth of which I am so sure. This refusal indicates that I am partly escaping; and what in me evades my jurisdiction and my control means that I can never be sure of being able to fully dispose of myself. This is how, by harping on the pros and cons of the only gesture that matters, we come to have a guilty conscience about still being alive.

An obsession with suicide is the hallmark of someone who can neither live nor die, and whose attention never wavers from this double impossibility.

As long as I'm acting, I believe that what I'm doing has "meaning", otherwise I wouldn't be able to do it. As soon as I stop acting, and transform myself from agent to judge, I can no longer find the meaning in question. Alongside the self that follows my drives, there is another self (the self of the self) that is superior to them: for it, what I do, and even what I am, implies neither meaning nor reality: it is as if they were distant events, forever past, whose apparent reasons we unravel without perceiving their intrinsic necessity. They could simply not have been, so external are they to us. This same perspective, applied to the whole of an existence, leads straight to rumination on the extravagance of having been born.

In the same way, if we were to ask ourselves what the result of any action would be in a year, ten years, a hundred years or a

thousand years, it would be impossible to complete it, or even to sketch it out. Every act presupposes a limited vision, except that of killing oneself, because it is based on a vast vision, so vast that it renders all other acts futile and unattainable. Next to it, all is futility and derision. It alone offers a way out, by which I mean an abyss – a *liberating* abyss.

To expect anything, here or elsewhere, is to provide proof that you are still dragging chains. The reprobate aspires to heaven; this aspiration demeans and compromises him. To be free is to rid oneself forever of the idea of “being free”. Reward means expecting nothing from men or the gods, it means renouncing not only this world and all worlds but salvation itself, it means breaking the very idea of it, the chain between chains.

The instinct for self-preservation – pure stubbornness and nothing else – must be fought and its ravages denounced. We can do this all the better if we rehabilitate suicide, highlight its excellence, make it a joyful act accessible to all. Suicide is by no means a negative act; on the contrary, it redeems and transfigures all acts committed before it.

By the most inexplicable of misunderstandings, existence has been declared sacred; but not only is it not sacred, it is only worthwhile to the extent that we work to rid ourselves of it. It is at best an accident – an accident that little by little everyone converts into fate. When we know where we stand on it, we are ashamed to be attached to it, and yet we become attached to it by a long and insensitive process that leads even the most informed to take it seriously. We should, by an opposite process, bring it back to its original state, to its primitive insignificance. An effort bordering on the prodigious would be required: the person who made it would

cease to be a slave; master of his own days, he would stop the succession of them whenever he wished; his existence would be at his own discretion; in other words, it would have returned to its starting point, its true status: that of an accident.

To live completely without purpose! I have glimpsed this state, and have often reached it, without managing to remain in it: I am too weak for such happiness.

If this world emanated from an honourable god, killing oneself would be an audacity, a nameless provocation. But since there is every reason to believe that it is the work of a sub-god, we don't see why we should bother. *Who should we spare?* The great profiteer of the obliteration of faith, suicide will be increasingly easy and, by the same token, less mysterious since it will have used up its prestige as anathema. Once piquant and meritorious, it is now becoming part of everyday life, gaining ground, and if it ceases to be unusual, its future seems assured. Within the religious world, it was seen as an insanity and a betrayal, as a crime par excellence. How can we believe and be destroyed? Let's fall back on the hypothesis of the sub-god, which has the advantage of allowing extreme gestures, radical victory over a crazy world.

We can imagine this creator, finally aware of his error, declaring himself guilty: he withdraws, withdraws, and, in a final gesture of elegance, takes justice into his own hands. He disappears with his work, through no fault of his own. This would be an improved version of the Last Judgement.

Those who commit suicide foreshadow the distant destinies of humanity. Their time will come; they will be celebrated, they will be

paid public homage and it will be said that they alone, *in the past*, had glimpsed and guessed at everything. It will also be said that they took the lead, that they sacrificed themselves to show the way, that they were martyrs in their own way: didn't they kill themselves at a time when no one was obliged to, when natural death was in full swing? They knew before anyone else that sheer *impossibility* would one day be the lot of everyone, instead of being a curse, a privilege.

They were precursors, as we shall call them, and they were on a par with those who, aware of the sovereignty of evil, incriminated Creation: the Manicheans at the beginning of the Christian era, and particularly their later disciples, the Cathars. Admirably, this incrimination was more common among the common people than among the educated. To be convinced of this, one need only consult Bernard Gui's *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur* or any report from the time on the ideas and actions of the "heretics". A comforting detail is that we can see the wife of a lumberjack or wood merchant at odds with Lucifer, or denouncing our first ancestors as guilty of "the most satanic act imaginable". These sectarians, or rather visionaries, who were so strangely disillusioned in the midst of their fervour, gifted with the ability to detect the diabolical traps behind all our important acts, knew how to let themselves starve to death if need be, and this feat, by no means unusual among them, marked the pinnacle of their doctrine. Putting oneself into *endura*, fasting to the point of complete exhaustion, was a practice that followed initiation, and whose mission was to preserve the spirit. He was "consoled", by a quick death, from the danger of apostasy or all sorts of temptations.

The disgust with the *useful* side of sexuality, the horror of procreating, is part of the questioning of Creation: what is the point of multiplying monsters? Had it triumphed and remained true to itself, Catharism would have ended in mass suicide. Such a success

was hardly possible: if advanced minds were not sufficiently mature. Even today, they are still a long way from being mature, and it will be a long time before mankind begins to *endure*. If it ever does.

At the Council of 1211 against the Bogomils, they anathematised those who maintained that “the woman conceives in her womb through the cooperation of Satan, that Satan dwells there from then on without withdrawing until the birth of the child”.

I dare not imagine that the Demon could be so interested in us as to keep us company for months on end; but I cannot doubt that we were conceived under his gaze and that he did indeed assist our dear progenitors.

This feeling of being stuck for eternity, of having done one's time before being born, of being too fallen to have anyone to feel sorry for, this certainty that by killing oneself one kills no one – this is the temptation of *bad* suicide, the kind that arises not from sadness according to God but according to the devil, to keep the Apostle's distinction. It is also inconsolation in its highest degree, and it seems so beyond remedy that it would remain intact, untouched, even if another universe were created.

What is this “brief and vehement” prayer that the Philocalia recommends against failures and terrors?

Why don't I kill myself? – If I knew *exactly* what was stopping me, I wouldn't have to ask myself any more questions, because I'd have answered them all.

To stop tormenting ourselves, we have to let ourselves go into a state of profound disinterest, cease to be intrigued by the here below or the hereafter, and fall into the carefree attitude of the dead. How

can you look at a living person without imagining them to be a corpse, and how can you contemplate a corpse without putting yourself in its place? *Being* is beyond comprehension, *being* is frightening.

A perfectly *good person* will never decide to take his own life. This feat requires a background – or remnants – of cruelty. Those who kill themselves could, under certain conditions, kill: suicide and murder are in the same family. But suicide is more refined, because cruelty to oneself is rarer and more complex, not to mention the exhilaration of feeling crushed by one's own conscience.

The man whose instincts are compromised by goodness does not intervene in his destiny, nor does he wish to create a new one for himself; he endures his own, resigns himself to it and carries on, far from the exasperation, arrogance and malignity that together invite self-destruction and facilitate it. The idea of hastening his demise never enters his mind, so modest is he. Indeed, it takes a sickly modesty to agree to die by any means other than one's own hand.

How can we conceive that a prayer is anything other than a monologue, that an ecstasy has a value beyond itself, that our salvation or our loss matters to a god?

And yet that's what we should be able to admit, if only for a second a day.

The future is such a precipice that I'd like to see the very idea of it disappear. For it is this idea, far more than the slide into the abyss that it covers, that sends me into a trance and prevents me from savouring the present. My reason falters in the face of everything that happens, everything that has to happen. It's not what's waiting

for me, it's the waiting itself, it's the imminence itself, that's gnawing at me and terrifying me. To find a semblance of peace, I have to cling to a time *without a tomorrow*, a time that has been decapitated.

No matter how many times I repeat the formula of the triple renunciation: "I reject this world, I reject the world of the ancestors, I reject the world of the gods", – when I measure the space that separates me from the bure and the desert, I feel like a fairground sannyâsin.

*Isn't regret* a sign of premature ageing? If that's true, I'm senile from birth.

You can't get to the bottom of something if you haven't considered it in the light of despondency.

The only things that count are those moments when the desire to be with you is so strong that you'd rather blow your brains out than exchange a word with someone.

The difficult thing for someone who has half given up is to do the rest. Existence undoubtedly weighs heavily on him, but he has not exhausted his surprise at existing. That's where his irresolution comes from, and the repentance he feels for having stopped halfway, with no chance of bringing to fruition a long-conceived plan. A failed renunciation.

It is our suffering that gives weight to our thoughts and prevents them from turning into pirouettes; it is also our suffering that makes us proclaim that there is no reality anywhere, that they themselves

lack reality. So they suggest a defence stratagem: we triumph over them by declaring them unreal, by linking them to the general deception. If they were bearable, what need would there be to diminish and unmask them? Since we have no alternative but to equate them with either nightmare or whim, the most convenient option is to opt for the latter.

All things considered, it's better if there's nothing. If something *were*, we would live in apprehension of not being able to grasp it. Since nothing is, all moments are perfect and null, and it makes no difference whether you enjoy them or not.

In the depths of my self-loathing, I say to myself that perhaps I'm slandering myself, that I can't think of anyone who, plagued by the same obsessions, could have looked so alive for so many years.

The only way to dissuade someone from suicide is to drive them to it. He will never forgive you for your action, he will abandon his plan or delay its execution, he will regard you as an enemy, as a traitor. You thought you were coming to his rescue, saving him, and he sees in your eagerness nothing but hostility and contempt. The strangest thing is that he was begging for your approval, begging for your complicity. What exactly did he want? Didn't you misjudge the nature of his distress? What a mistake for him to come to you! At this stage of his loneliness, what should have struck him was the impossibility of getting along with anyone other than God.

We're all *affected*, we just take for granted what isn't real. The living being as such is both a fool and a blind man: unable to discern the illusory side of things, he sees solidity and fullness everywhere. As soon as he miraculously sees things clearly, he opens up to emptiness and blossoms in it. Richer than the reality it replaces, it

takes the place of everything *without the everything*, it is foundation and absence, an abysmal variant of being. But unfortunately, we regard it as a deficiency; hence our fears and failures. So what is it for us? At best, a diaphanous impasse, an impalpable hell.

In his efforts to exhaust his appetites, to reduce them to nothing, he has succeeded only in derailing them, in stripping them of everything that was healthy and stimulating: a thwarted beast of prey, undermined, regretting his former instincts. Its claws dulled, but not the desire to use them, all its violence turned to desolation (for desolation is nothing other than broken, humiliated aggression, powerless to assert itself).

He began by sabotaging his passions; then it was the turn of his beliefs. The process was inexorable. The revelation that presided over his life – that *adhering* to anything is *childish* or *delusional* – may have been legitimate; he may still subscribe to it, but it is no less atrocious, no less intolerable. It allows us to endure but not to exist; it is one of those certainties from which we never recover.

A fighter and quarreler by nature, he no longer fights or quarrels; at least not with others. The blows that were intended for them are dealt to himself, and he takes them himself. His ego is the target. His ego? What ego? He no longer has anyone to hit: no longer a victim, no longer a subject, nothing but a succession of agentless acts, an anonymous parade of sensations...

Delivered? A ghost? A wreck?

What does it profit a man to gain the world, if he comes to lose his soul?"

Win the world, lose your soul! – I've done better: I've lost both.

Whatever I try, it will never be anything other than the

manifestation of a decline, overt or covert. For a long time I've been theorising about the man- beyond-everything. I have become this man, I now embody him. My doubts have come to an end, my denials have taken shape. I'm living what I once thought I'd live. I finally found myself a disciple.

## THE INDELIVERSE

The more we consider the Buddha's final exhortation: "Death is inherent in all composite things. Work tirelessly for your salvation", the more we are troubled by the impossibility of *feeling* ourselves to be an aggregate, a transitory, if not fortuitous, meeting of elements. We can easily conceive of ourselves as such in the abstract; in the immediate, we physically refuse to do so, as if it were a matter of unassimilable evidence. Until we overcome this organic repugnance, we will continue to suffer from the bewitching scourge that is the appetite for existence.

It hardly matters that things are unmasked, that they are stigmatised by the name of appearances, because we automatically admit that they contain being. We cling to anything, as long as we don't have to tear ourselves away from the fascination that drives our actions and our very nature, from that primordial dazzle that prevents us from discerning the non-reality in everything.

I am a "being" by metaphor; if I were one in fact, I would remain one forever, and death, devoid of meaning, would have no hold on me. "Work tirelessly for your salvation" – in other words, don't forget that you are a fleeting whole, a compound whose ingredients are just waiting to come apart. Salvation, in fact, only makes sense if we are provisional to the point of derision; if there were the slightest principle of duration in us, we would always be saved or lost: no more quest, no more horizon. If deliverance matters, our unreality is a godsend.

We should strip being of all its attributes, ensure that it is no longer a support, the *place* of all our attachments, the eternal

reassuring impasse, a prejudice, the most deeply rooted of all, the one we have become most accustomed to. We are accomplices of being, or of what seems to us to be being, because there is no being, there is only ersatz being. Were there any real being, we would still have to free ourselves from it and extricate ourselves from it, since everything that *is* turns into a subjection and a hindrance. Let's give others the status of shadows. We will separate ourselves from them all the more easily. If we are foolish enough to believe that they *exist*, we expose ourselves to untold misfortune. Let us have the prudence to recognise that everything that happens to us, every event, like every link, is inessential, and that if there is knowledge, what it must reveal to us is the advantage of moving among ghosts.

Thought, too, is a prejudice and a hindrance. After that, all it can do is absorb our energy and paralyse our attempts at emancipation. That it can't help us in any way is proven by the happiness we feel when we suspend it. Like desire, to which it is similar, it feeds on its own substance, it likes to manifest itself, to multiply; at a pinch it can tend towards truth, but what defines it is the affair: we think out of a taste for thought, just as we desire out of a taste for desire. In both cases, a fever in the midst of fictions, an overwork within non-knowledge. The person who *knows* has come out of all the fables generated by desire and thought, he has left the current, he no longer consents to deception. Thinking is part of the inexhaustible illusion that gives birth to and devours itself, eager to perpetuate and destroy itself; to think is to compete with delirium. In so much fever, all that makes sense are the *pauses* when we breathe, the moments of pause when we are justified in our panting: the experience of emptiness – which merges with the totality of these pauses, these intervals of delirium – implies the momentary suppression of desire, because it is desire that plunges us into not-knowing, makes us ramble, and pushes us to project being

everywhere around us.

The void allows us to ruin the idea of being; but it is not itself dragged into this ruin; it survives an attack that would be self-destructive for any other idea. It is true that it is not an idea but what helps us to get rid of all ideas. Each idea represents an additional attachment; we need to unclutter our minds of them, just as we need to unclutter ourselves of all beliefs, obstacles to withdrawal. We can only achieve this by rising above the operations of thought: as long as it is exercised, as long as it rages, it prevents us from unravelling the depths of emptiness, perceptible only when the fever of the mind and of desire diminishes.

Since all our beliefs are intrinsically *superficial*, and have a grip only on appearances, it follows that both are at the same level. We are constituted to live with them. We are constituted to live with them, we are forced to: they form the elements of our ordinary, daily curse. This is why, when we happen to see through them and sweep them away, we enter into something unheard of, into a dilation that makes everything else seem pale and episodic, even this curse. Our borders are receding, if we still have any. The void – me without me – is the liquidation of the adventure of the “I”, it is being without any trace of being, a blissful engulfment, an incomparable disaster.

(The danger is of converting emptiness into a substitute for being, and thus diverting it from its essential function, which is to hinder the mechanism of attachment. But if it itself becomes an object of attachment, wouldn't it have been better to stick to being and the trail of illusions that follows it? To overcome our attachments, we must learn to adhere to nothing, except the *nothing* of freedom).

The ideal would be to lose our taste for people and things *without suffering*. Every day we would have to honour someone, be

it a creature or an object, by renouncing them. In this way, by going around appearances and dismissing them one by one, we would arrive at a perpetual withdrawal, the very secret of joy. All that we appropriate, knowledge even more than material acquisitions, only feeds our anxiety; in exchange, what peace of mind, what radiance when this frantic quest for goods, *even spiritual goods*, subsides! It's bad enough to say "me", but it's even worse to say "you". It's a consolation to have the idea that you have nothing, that you are nothing. The idea that we possess nothing, that we are nothing, is a consolation; the supreme consolation lies in the victory over this very idea. Anxiety is so attached to being that it has to tear itself away from it if it wants to conquer itself. It succeeds only insofar as He is superior to being, or at least insofar as He contains a zone where being is diminished and rarefied. It is there, no longer having anything to hold on to, that anxiety frees itself and approaches those confines where God, liquidating the last remnants of His being, allows Himself to be tempted by emptiness.

The wise man, as the East has always known, refuses to make plans, never *projects*. So you would be a kind of wise man... To tell the truth, you do make plans, but you are reluctant to carry them out. The more you meditate on one, the more, when you abandon it, you feel a sense of well-being that can rise to the level of ecstasy.

Everyone lives and breathes the project, the consequence of not knowing: metaphysical obnubilation on the scale of the Species. For the disobnubilated, becoming and, even more so, any act that fits into it, is nothing but a delusion, a deception that generates disgust or horror.

The important thing is not to produce, but to understand. And understanding means discerning the degree of awakening a being has reached, its capacity to perceive the sum of unreality that goes into

every phenomenon.

Let's stick to the concrete and the empty, let's outlaw everything that falls between the two: "culture", "civilisation", "progress", let's rehash the best formula we've found here on earth: manual labour in a convent... There is no truth except in physical exertion and contemplation; the rest is accidental, useless, unhealthy. Health consists in exercise and emptiness, in muscles and meditation; in no way in thought. To meditate is to become absorbed in an idea and lose oneself in it, whereas to think is to leap from one idea to another, to indulge in quantity, to store up nothings, to pursue concept after concept, goal after goal. Meditating and thinking are two divergent, even incompatible activities.

Isn't forcing oneself into emptiness also a form of pursuit? Undoubtedly, but it is pursuing the absence of pursuit, aiming for a goal that dismisses all others from the outset. We live in anxiety because no goal can satisfy us, because all our desires and, even more so, our very being, are subject to a fatality that inevitably affects the accidents that are individuals. Nothing that is actualised escapes decay. The void – the leap out of this fatality – is, like all the products of quietism, antitragic in essence. Thanks to it, we should learn to find ourselves by going back to our origins, to our eternal virtuality. Doesn't it put an end to all our desires? And what are those desires, as a whole, compared to a single moment when we don't pursue any of them, when we don't experience any of them! Happiness lies not in desire but in the absence of desire, or more precisely, in the infatuation with this absence – in which we would like to roll around, sink, disappear, *exclaim*...

When the void itself seems too heavy or too impure, we rush towards a nakedness beyond any conceivable form of space, while

the last instant of time joins the first and dissolves into it.

Let's cleanse our consciousness of everything it encompasses, of all the universes it drags along with it, let's purge it at the same time as our perception, let's confine ourselves to white, let's forget all colours except the one that denies them. What peace there is when diversity is annulled, when we escape the ordeal of nuance and rush into unity! Consciousness as pure form, then the very absence of consciousness.

To escape from the intolerable, we need to look for a diversion, an escape, a region where no sensation deigns to take on a name, nor any appetite to become incarnate, to recover our initial rest, to abolish, along with the past, the odious memory, and above all consciousness, our eternal enemy, whose mission it is to impoverish us, to wear us down. Unconsciousness, on the other hand, is nourishing, it strengthens, it makes us participate in our beginnings, in our primitive integrity, and plunges us back into the beneficial chaos before the *wound* of individuation.

*Nothing matters*: a great discovery if ever there was one, and one that no one has been able to take advantage of. This discovery, which is reputed to be depressing, can be given an exhilarating twist only by the void, whose motto it is: it alone converts the negative into the positive, the irreparable into the possible. We know that there is no *self*, but this knowledge is fraught with ulterior motives. Fortunately, the void is there, and when the self disappears, it takes its place, it takes the place of everything, it fulfils our expectations, it brings us the certainty of our non-reality. The void is the abyss without vertigo.

It satisfies our demands for continuity and solidity, and gives us, against the evidence, a timeless dimension. It's only natural that we should cling to it, even when we question it and expose its

imposture: The self is the *reflex* of all living beings... Yet it is inconceivable to us as soon as we consider it coldly: it crumbles, it vanishes, it is no more than the symbol of a fiction.

Our first movement is towards the intoxication of identity, towards the dream of indistinction, towards the *âtman*, which responds to our deepest, most secret calls. As soon as we sober up, we step back and abandon the *supposed* depths of our being, to turn towards fundamental destructibility, the knowledge and experience of which, the disciplined haunting of which, leads us to nirvana, to *fullness* in emptiness.

It is because it gives us the illusion of permanence, because it promises what it cannot deliver, that the idea of the absolute is suspect, not to say pernicious. Damaged at the root, by no means fashioned to last, perishable to the core, what we need is not consolation but healing. The absolute does not resolve our perplexities or remove our ills: it is only a stopgap and a palliative. A doctrine that advocates it is true as long as it confines itself to analysis, as long as it denounces appearances; it inspires doubts as soon as it opposes them with an ultimate reality. As soon as you leave the realm of the illusory and try to replace it with the indestructible, you slip into a lie. If we lie less with emptiness, it's because we don't seek it for its own sake, for the truth it is supposed to contain, but for its therapeutic virtues; we make a cure out of it, imagining that it will rectify the most ancient deviation of the mind, which consists in supposing that something exists... Man has gone beyond the stage where we are content with a mere cure. What he is waiting for is not another artifice, but deliverance. Who will bring it to him? On this point, the only one that matters, Christianity has proved less helpful than Buddhism, and Western speculation less effective than Eastern. Why should we bother with abstractors who are insensitive to our cries or redeemers who are eager to irritate our

wounds? And what else can we expect from this part of the world that sees the contemplative as an abulic and the awakened as a flayed person?

We need some kind of saving jolt. It is incredible that a Saint Thomas should have seen stupor as an “obstacle to philosophical meditation”, when it is precisely when we are “stupefied” that we begin to *understand*, that is to say, to perceive the inanity of all the “philosophical meditations” of the past. “truths”. Stupefaction stuns us only to wake us up: it opens us up, delivers us to the essential. A full metaphysical experience is nothing other than an uninterrupted stupor, a triumphant stupor.

It is a sign of indigence not to be able to open up to the purifying emptiness, the soothing emptiness. We are so low and so entangled in our philosophies that we have only been able to conceive of nothingness, the sordid version of emptiness. All our uncertainties, all our miseries and our terrors, we have projected into it, for what is nothingness in the final analysis if not an abstract complement to hell, a performance by the reprobate, the maximum effort towards lucidity? What can beings unfit for deliverance provide? Too tainted by our impurities for it to allow us to make the leap towards a virgin concept such as emptiness is for us (which, for its part, has not inherited hell, is not contaminated by it), – nothingness, in truth, only represents a sterile extremity, a disconcerting, vaguely funereal outcome, very close to those attempts at renunciation that turn sour because there is too much regret involved.

Emptiness is nothingness stripped of its negative qualities, nothingness transfigured. If we happen to taste it, our relationship with the world is altered, something in us changes, even though we retain our old defects. But we don't *belong here* in the same way we

used to. That's why it's salutary to have recourse to emptiness in our fits of rage: our worst impulses are dulled by contact with it. Without it, who knows? we might now be in prison or in some shack. The lesson of abdication that he teaches us also invites us to adopt a more nuanced attitude towards our denigrators, our enemies. Should we kill them or spare them? Which does more harm, which eats away more: revenge or victory over revenge? How do we decide? In the face of uncertainty, let us prefer the *torment* of not taking revenge.

That's the limit to the concessions you can make if you're not a saint.

Only those oppressed by the universality of torment are ripe for deliverance. To seek deliverance without the awareness of this torment is impossible, or a vice. There is no such thing as gratuitous deliverance; we have to free ourselves from something, in this case the omnipresence of the intolerable – which we feel as much in the hypothesis of being as of non-being, since things and semblances of things also cause suffering. But the emptiness hypothesis does have one advantage: it sheds a clearer light on the excessiveness of torment, on the proportions it assumes and the inanity of the cause that provokes it. We always torture ourselves too much, whether the world is real or unreal. It is true that most people are unaware of the extent of their suffering. It is the privilege of consciousness to awaken to the atrocious, to perceive the haunting illusion to which beings are prey.

The same is true of deliverance as of Christian salvation: a theologian, in his scandalous naivety, believes in redemption while denying original sin; but if sin is not consubstantial with humanity, what meaning can be attributed to “redemption”? When the Redeemer came, what did he come to redeem? Our corruption is

not accidental, it is permanent, it has always been so. Likewise iniquity: wrongly labelled a “mystery”, it is an obvious fact, it is even the most *visible thing* here on earth, where putting things right would require a saviour for each generation, or rather for each individual.

As soon as you stop desiring, you become a citizen of all worlds and of none; it is through desire that you belong here; once you have overcome desire, you belong nowhere and have nothing to envy a saint or a spectre.

It may happen that there is happiness in desire, but beatitude only appears where all attachment is broken. Bliss is not compatible with this world. It is for this that the hermit destroys all his ties, it is for this that he destroys himself.

Cow's urine was the only medicine that monks were allowed to use in early Buddhist communities. A very sensible restriction. If we want peace, we can only achieve it by rejecting everything that causes trouble, everything that man has grafted onto simplicity, onto original health. Nothing reveals our decline better than the spectacle of a pharmacy: all the desirable remedies for each of our ailments, but none for our essential ailment, the one that no human invention can cure.

If believing oneself to be *unique* is due to an illusion, it is, let us agree, so total, so imperious, that it is legitimate to ask ourselves if we can still call it that. How can we let go of what we will never find again, of this unheard-of and pitiful nothingness that bears our name? The illusion in question, the source of all the torments we have to endure, is so deeply rooted in each of us that we can only overcome it with the help of a sudden whirlwind that, taking our ego with it, leaves us *alone*, without anyone, without ourselves...

Unfortunately, we cannot exterminate our desires; we can only weaken and compromise them. We are cornered by the ego, by the venom of the “I”. It is when we escape it, it is when we imagine we are escaping it, that we have some right to use the big words that true, and false, mysticism uses. There is no such thing as fundamental conversion: we convert *with our nature*. Even the Buddha after enlightenment was only Siddhartha Gotama with the added knowledge.

Everything you think you've suppressed rises to the surface after a while: flaws, vices, obsessions. The most obvious imperfections that you had “corrected” come back disguised, but just as annoying as before. But the trouble you've taken to get rid of them hasn't been in vain. It no longer works on us in secret or catches us unawares; it dominates us, subjugates us; we are still its slaves, it's true, but non-consenting slaves. Every *conscious* sensation is one that we have fought unsuccessfully. We are not otherwise saddened, since its victory will have driven it out of our deepest life.

In every encounter we have chosen the easiest: God or his surrogates, people in any case, with whom to chat or argue. We have replaced contemplation with tension, creating a relationship between the divinity and ourselves that is annoyingly passionate. Only men who seek but do not want to *find* have been able to become virtuosos of the inner drama. The great modern discovery is the *spiritual malaise*, the split between substance and emptiness, or more precisely between simulacra of the one and the other. Hence the cult of singularity, in every field. In literary terms, a rare error is better than a tried and tested, known and accepted truth. The unusual, on the other hand, has no value on the spiritual level, where the only thing that counts is the degree of deepening of an experience.

According to the Bhagavadgîtâ, he who is “given over to doubt” is lost, both in this world and in the next, the same doubt that Buddhism cites as one of the five obstacles to salvation. Doubt is not deepening but stagnation, the vertigo of stagnation... With it, it is impossible to move forward or reach a conclusion; it is gnawing and nothing else. When you think you're the furthest away from it, you fall back into it, and it starts all over again. It has to *explode* before we can embark on the road to emancipation. Without this explosion, which must pulverise even the most legitimate reasons for doubt, we linger in the malaise, we cultivate it, we avoid major resolutions, we eat away at ourselves and we delight in eating away at ourselves.

The passion to fade away, to leave no trace, is inappropriate here. Anyone who attaches himself to his name and his work, and even more so, anyone who dreams of a name or a work, the wannabe in short: if he persists in striving for salvation, he will at best only get *bogged down* in nirvana...

It's hard to imagine a *bitter* mystic. Knowledge according to the world, clairvoyant dryness, excess of lucidity without an inner dimension, bitterness is the prerogative of those who, having cheated in their relationship with the absolute and with themselves, no longer know what to take or who to turn to. Despite this, it is more common than you might think; it is normal, everyday, everyone's lot. Joy, on the other hand, the fruit of an exceptional hour, seems to emerge from an imbalance, from a disorder at the most intimate level of our being, so much so that it contradicts the obvious in which we live. What if it came *from elsewhere*, from further away than ourselves? It is dilation, and all dilation is part of another world, whereas bitterness is constriction, even if the infinite stands in the background. But it's an infinity that crushes rather than

liberates.

It is so full, so enveloping, so marvellously unbearable that we cannot face it without some supreme reference. In any case, it is this, and this alone, that makes it conceivable that we could forge gods out of a *need for gratitude*.

It's not hard to imagine what a man of today would say if he had to give his opinion on the only religion that has provided a radical formula for salvation:

"The quest for deliverance is only justified if we believe in transmigration, in the indefinite wandering of the self, and if we aspire to put an end to it. But for those of us who don't believe in it, what can we put an end to? To this unique, infinitesimal duration? It is clearly too short to be worth the effort of escaping it. For the Buddhist, the prospect of other existences is a nightmare; for us, the cessation of this one, of this nightmare. When it comes to nightmares, give us another one instead," we might be tempted to say, "so that our disgraces don't end too soon, so that they have time to follow us through several lifetimes."

Deliverance is a necessity only for those who feel that they are being delivered, *threatened with* an additional existence, who dread the drudgery of dying and to die again. For us, condemned not to be reincarnated, what is the point of struggling to free ourselves from nothing? to free ourselves from a terror whose end is in sight? What is the point of pursuing a supreme unreality, when everything here below is *already* unreal? We don't bother to get rid of something so unjustified, so *unfounded*.

"A surfeit of illusion and torment, that's what each of us yearns for, each of us who are not lucky enough to believe in the endless round of births and deaths. We long for the curse of being reborn. The Buddha really went to too much trouble to achieve what?

*definitive* death; something that the rest of us are sure to achieve without meditation or mortification, without any effort whatsoever.

... That's more or less how this fallen man would express himself, if he were willing to reveal the depth of his thoughts. Who could blame him? Who hasn't spoken to themselves like that? We are so immersed in our own history that we would like it to go on forever. But whether we live once or a thousand times, whether we have one hour or all of them, the problem is the same: an insect and a god should not differ in their way of looking at the fact of existing as such, which is so terrifying (as only a miracle can be) that when we dwell on it we conceive the desire to disappear forever, so as not to have to consider it again in other existences. It is this fact that the Buddha dwelt on, and it is doubtful that he would have modified his conclusions if he had ceased to believe in the mechanism of transmigration.

To find that everything lacks a foundation and not to end it all, this inconsistency is no inconsistency at all: taken to the extreme, the perception of emptiness coincides with the perception of the whole, with *entry into* the whole. You finally begin to *see*, you stop groping, you feel reassured, you become more solid. If there is a chance of salvation outside faith, it is in the ability to *be enriched by* contact with unreality.

Even if the experience of emptiness were a deception, it would still be worth trying. What it sets out to do, what it tries to do, is to reduce both life and death to nothing, with the sole aim of making them bearable for us. If it sometimes succeeds, what else can we hope for? Without it, there is no remedy for the infirmity of being, no hope of returning, if only for brief moments, to the sweetness of before birth, the light of pure anteriority.

# STRANGLED THOUGHTS

## I

A question brooded over indefinitely undermines you as much as a dull ache.

In which author did I once read that sadness was due to the “slowing down” of blood?

That's what it is: *stagnant* blood.

We are finished, we are the living dead, not when we stop loving but when we stop hating. Hatred preserves: it is in hatred, in its chemistry, that is found the “mystery” of life. It's not for nothing that it's still the best tonic ever found, and tolerated by every organism, no matter how stupid.

We must think of God and not religion, of ecstasy and not mysticism.

The difference between the theorist of faith and the believer is as great as between the psychiatrist and the madman.

It is the hallmark of a rich mind not to shy away from silliness, that scarecrow of the delicate; hence their sterility.

Forming more projects than an explorer or a swindler can conceive, and yet being reached at the very root of the will.

What is a “contemporary”? Someone you'd like to kill, but don't really know how.

Refinement is a sign of deficient vitality, in art, in love and in everything.

A constant tug-of-war between the nostalgia of the flood and the exhilaration of routine.

To have the vice of scruples, to be an automaton of remorse.

Terrifying happiness. Veins where thousands of planets expand.

The most difficult thing in the world is to be in tune with your being, and to catch its *tone*.

Illness adds flavour to deprivation, spices it up, *lifts* it up.

The mind moves forward only if it has the patience to go round in circles, that  
is to say *in depth*.

The first thing you have to do when you get up is blush.

Fear was the inexhaustible food of his life. He was swollen, stuffed, obese with fear.

The lot of someone who has rebelled too much is to have no

energy left for anything but disappointment.

There is no more false statement than that of Origen, according to which each soul has the body it deserves.

In every prophet there coexists a taste for the future and an aversion to happiness.

To wish for glory is to prefer to die despised than forgotten. To suddenly think you have a *skull* – and not lose your mind!

Suffering makes you experience time in detail, moment by moment. That's how much time exists for you! It creeps up on others, on those who don't suffer; so it's true that they don't live in time, and even that they have ever lived.

The feeling of being cursed is known only to those who know they would feel it in the very heart of paradise.

All our thoughts are a function of our misery. If we understand certain things, the credit goes to the shortcomings of our health alone.

If you didn't believe in your “star”, you wouldn't be able to perform the slightest act without effort: drinking a glass of water would seem a gigantic and even insane undertaking.

They ask you for deeds, for proof, for works, and all you can produce is *transformed* tears.

The ambitious only resign themselves to obscurity once they

have exhausted all their reserves of bitterness.

I dream of a language whose words, like fists, would shatter jaws.

A taste for nothing but hymns, blasphemy and epilepsy...

To conceive a thought, a single thought, – but one that would tear the universe apart.

It is only to the extent that we do not know ourselves that it is possible for us to be fulfilled and productive. He who is mistaken about the motives for his actions, who is reluctant to weigh up his faults and merits, who senses and fears the impasse to which the exact view of our capacities leads us, is fruitful. The creator who becomes transparent to himself no longer creates: to know himself is to stifle his gifts and his demon.

There is no way of *proving* that it is better to be than not to be.

“Never let melancholy get the better of you, for it prevents all good”, says Tauler in his sermon on the “good use of the day”.

The misuse I will have made of each of my days!

I've repressed all my enthusiasms, but they exist, they are my reserves, my untapped reserves, my *future*, perhaps.

The mind *blown* by lucidity.

My doubts have not been able to overcome my automatisms. I'm still doing things I can't believe I'm doing. To overcome the

tragedy of this *insincerity would be* to deny myself and cancel myself out.

You don't really believe until you know who you're supposed to pray to. A religion is only alive when prayers are being prayed.

Every form of impotence and failure has a positive character in the *metaphysical order*.

Nothing can take my mind off the fact that this world is the fruit of a dark god whose shadow I prolong, and that it is up to me to exhaust the consequences of the curse hanging over him and his work.

Psychoanalysis will one day be completely discredited, no doubt about it. Nevertheless, it will have destroyed our last vestiges of naivety. After it, we can never be *innocent* again.

The same night that I decided that our dreams had nothing to do with our deepest lives and were bad literature, I fell asleep only to witness the parade of my oldest and most hidden terrors.

What we call "fortitude" is the courage not to imagine that we're in the same boat; to imagine our destiny *differently*.

A writer worthy of the name confines himself to his mother tongue and does not go poking around in this or that idiom. He is limited and he wants to be, by self-defence. Nothing ruins talent like being too open-minded.

The moralist's primary duty is to depoetise his prose; only then to observe men.

An old lady once said to me: "Sir, nature has designed us badly!" – "Nature itself is ill-conceived", I should have replied, had I listened to my Manichean reflexes.

Irresolution became a mission for him. Anybody made him lose his nerve. He was incapable of making a decision in front of a face.

All things considered, it is more pleasant to be surprised by events than to have foreseen them. When one's strength is exhausted in the vision of misfortune, how can one face misfortune itself? Cassandra is doubly tormented: before and during the disaster, while the optimist is spared the pangs of foreknowledge.

According to Plutarch, by the 1st century AD, people were only going to Delphi to ask petty questions (marriage, purchases, etc.).

The decline of the Church imitates that of the oracles.

"The naive is a nuance of the low," said Fontenelle. There are words that are the key to a country, because they reveal the secret of its limits.

Napoleon, on St Helena, liked to leaf through a grammar book from time to time... By doing so, at least, he proved that he was *French*.

Sunday afternoon. Streets clogged with haggard, exhausted, pitiful crowds – runts everywhere, remnants of continents, vomit from the globe. You think of the Rome of the Caesars, submerged

by the dregs of the Empire. Every centre in the world is its dumping ground.

The disappearance of animals is unprecedentedly serious. Their executioner has invaded the landscape; there is now no room for anything but him. The horror of seeing a man where you could see a horse!

The role of insomnia in history, from Caligula to Hitler. Is the inability to sleep the cause or consequence of cruelty? The tyrant *stays awake* – that's what defines him.

As one beggar put it: "When you pray next to a flower, it grows faster."

Anxiety isn't difficult; it puts up with everything, because there's nothing it doesn't like. The first pretext that comes along, an eminently ordinary news item, she squeezes it, pampers it, extracts from it a mediocre but sure malaise that she feasts on. She is truly content with little, everything being good for her. Vague, unfinished, it lacks class: it would like to be anguish and is only anxiety.

Why is it that, in life as in literature, rebellion, even pure rebellion, has something of the false about it, while resignation, even if it comes from cowardice, always gives the impression of truth?

Huddled on the banks of the Seine, a few million bitter people work together to create a nightmare that is the envy of the rest of the world.

What is commonly called “having breath” is being prolix.

His sterility was infinite: it was part of his ecstasy.

I'm sure that I'm failing in my duty, that I'm not doing what I was born to do, that I'm letting the hours go by without taking advantage of them, even if it's negative. This last criticism is unjustified, however, as boredom, my bane, is exactly this paradoxical benefit.

To be naturally combative, aggressive, intolerant – and to have no dogma!

In front of this insect, as big as a dot, which was running on my table, my first charitable reaction was to crush him, but then I decided to leave him to his own devices. What was the point of rescuing him? I just wanted to know where he was going!

Anxious people build up their fears and then settle into them: they're dizzy people.

It's impossible to know why an idea takes hold of us and won't let go. It seems to come from the weakest point of our mind or, more precisely, the most *threatened* point of our brain.

An expert at concealing his sullenness, the wise man is someone who does not *deign* to hope.

This sudden tension, this waiting for something to happen, for the fate of the mind to be decided...

Perhaps madness is just grief that never changes.

Those moments when it seems impossible to ever disappear, when life and death lose all reality, when neither can touch us...

It's a mistake to confuse depression with thinking. Anyone who suffers from depression automatically becomes a thinker.

And the worst thing is that it is, in fact.

The experience of inanity, which is sufficient in itself, also has such philosophical virtues that we see no reason to look elsewhere. What does it matter if we discover nothing through it, if we understand everything thanks to it?

Living is an impossibility that I've been aware of day after day for, let's say, forty years...

The only function of memory is to help us *regret*.

I can clearly imagine the moment when there will be no trace of flesh anywhere, and yet I carry on as if nothing had happened. How can we define this state where consciousness does not weaken desire, but rather stimulates it, in the way, it is true, that the worm *awakens* the fruit?

The continuity of thought is impeded, and even broken, every time the physical presence of the brain is felt. Perhaps this is why mad people only think *in flashes*.

Sometimes you feel like shouting to the former gods: "Make a little effort, try to think again!"

I may grumble against everything that is, but I'm still attached to it – judging by these discomforts, which are like the first symptoms of being.

The sceptic is the least mysterious man alive, and yet, from a certain point onwards, he no longer belongs to this world.

## II

A work cannot emerge from indifference or even from serenity, from indifference that has been decanted, completed and victorious. At the height of a trial, we are surprised to find so few works that can soothe and console. How could they, when they are themselves the product of unappeasement and inconsolation?

Every new idea corresponds to an imperceptible lesion in the mind.

On the mantelpiece, the image of a chimpanzee and a statuette of Buddha. This accidental rather than deliberate proximity means that I'm constantly asking myself *where* I fit in between these two extremes, between the pre- and trans-figuration of man.

Excess is not so much morbid as the *absence of fear*. I think of that friend of mine whom nothing ever frightened, who couldn't even imagine a danger of any kind. So much freedom, so much security would one day lead her straight into a straitjacket.

In the certainty of being misunderstood, there is as much pride as shame. Hence the equivocal nature of any failure. On the one hand, you take pride in it; on the other, you mortify yourself. All defeat is impure!

*Incurable* – an adjective of honour that should benefit only one disease, the most terrible of all: Desire.

On the contrary, they are all too real, since they originate in our mind, the only regulator of our equilibrium and health.

Any newcomer is a spoilsport, and as soon as someone gets carried away by anything, even my whims, I'm ready to break it off, until I'm ready to take the next step, to take my revenge.

Given to resentment, I often give in to it and chew it over, and only stop when I *remember* that I envied this or that wise man, that I even thought I was like him.

Those moments when you want to be absolutely alone because you're sure that, face to face with yourself, you'll be able to find rare, unique, unheard-of truths – then disappointment, and soon bitterness, when you discover that from this solitude you've finally achieved, nothing comes out, nothing could have come out.

At certain times of the day, instead of the brain, there is a very specific sensation of usurping nothingness, of steppe that has replaced ideas.

To suffer is to produce knowledge.

Thought is destruction in its essence. More exactly: in its *principle*. We think, we begin to think, in order to break ties, dissolve affinities, compromise the framework of the “real”. It is only afterwards, when the work of undermining is well under way, that thought recovers and rebels against its natural movement.

Whereas sadness can be justified by both reasoning and observation, joy has no basis in fact; it is a matter of rambling. It is

impossible to be joyful by the mere fact of living; on the other hand, we are sad as soon as we open our eyes. Perception as such makes you gloomy, as animals can testify. Only mice seem to be cheerful without effort.

On a spiritual level, all pain is an opportunity, but only on a spiritual level.

I can't do anything without ignoring what I *know*. As soon as I contemplate it and think about it, even for a second, I lose heart, I give up.

As things continue to deteriorate from generation to generation, predicting disasters is a normal activity, a duty of the mind. Talleyrand's view of the Ancien Régime is appropriate for any period, except the one in which we live, and the one in which we will live. The “sweetness” in question is diminishing; one day it will have disappeared altogether. In history, we are always on the threshold of the worst. That's what makes it interesting, that's what makes us hate it, that's why we can't get away from it.

We can be sure that the 21st century, which is far more advanced than ours, will regard Hitler and Stalin as choirboys.

Basilides, the Gnostic, was one of the rare minds to have understood, at the beginning of our era, what is now commonplace, namely that if humanity wants to save itself, it must return to its natural limits by returning to ignorance, the true sign of redemption.

This commonplace, we hasten to add, is still clandestine: everyone whispers it but is careful not to proclaim it. When it

becomes a slogan, a considerable step forward will have been taken.

In everyday life, people act by calculation; when it comes to making decisive choices, they do as they please, and we understand nothing of individual or collective dramas if we lose sight of this unexpected behaviour. No one should look at history without seeing how rarely the instinct for self-preservation manifests itself. It's as if the defensive reflex only kicks in when faced with some kind of danger, and stops when faced with a major disaster.

Look at the face of someone who has succeeded, or *struggled*, in any field. You won't find the slightest trace of pity. He has the makings of an *enemy*.

For days on end, I wanted to carry out an attack on the five continents, without thinking for a moment about the *means*.

My energy only comes to life *outside of time*, and I feel like a veritable Hercules as soon as I transfer myself in my imagination to a universe where the very conditions of the act are eliminated.

“The horror and the ecstasy of life” – experienced simultaneously, as one

experience within the same moment, within each moment.

The amount of fatigue resting in my brain!

What I have in common with the Devil is a bad temper, and like him I'm a cockroach by divine decree.

The books I read with the most interest are on mysticism and dietetics. Is there a connection between them? Yes, undoubtedly, insofar as mysticism implies asceticism, i.e. dieting.

“Eat nothing until you have sown it and reaped it with your own hands” – this recommendation of Vedic wisdom is so legitimate and so convincing that, out of rage at not being able to comply with it, we would like to starve ourselves to death.

Lying down, I close my eyes. Suddenly, a chasm opens up, like a well that, in search of water, pierces the ground with a vertiginous speed. Drawn into this frenzy, into this void that endlessly gives birth to itself, I merge with the generating principle of the abyss, and, an unexpected joy, I find myself an occupation and even a mission.

When Pyrrhon was talking to someone, if his interlocutor left, he continued to speak as if nothing had happened. I dream of this strength of indifference, this discipline of contempt, with the impatience of a madman.

What a friend expects is gentleness, lies and consolation – all things that require effort, reflection and self-control. The constant concern for delicacy that friendship implies is unnatural. We can't wait for the indifferent or the enemies to breathe a sigh of relief!

By dwelling so much on my past and future miseries, I have neglected those of the present: which has enabled me to bear them more easily than if I had devoted my reserves of attention to them.

There would be no point in sleeping if every time you fell asleep

you awoke. After a few years of training, death would lose all prestige and appear to be no more than a formality or a hassle.

In the career of a mind that has disposed of prejudice after prejudice, there comes a time when it is just as easy to become a saint as a crook of any kind.

Cruelty – our most ancient trait – is rarely described as borrowed, simulated or apparent, by contrast with goodness, which is recent, acquired and has no deep roots: it is a late invention, untransmissible, that each of us strives to reinvent and succeeds only in fits and starts, in those moments when our nature is eclipsed, when we triumph over our ancestors and ourselves.

I often imagine myself climbing onto the roof, getting dizzy and then, about to fall, letting out a scream. “Imagine” is not the right word, because I *have to* imagine it. The thought of murder must come in the same way.

If you never want to forget someone, if you want to think about them all the time, if you want to be forever attached to them, you must not love them but hate them. According to a Hindu belief, some demons are the result of a vow made in a previous life to incarnate in a being bent on attacking God, so as to be better able to think about him and keep him constantly in mind.

Death is the aroma of existence. It alone lends flavour to moments, it alone combats their dullness. We owe it almost everything. This debt of gratitude that we agree to pay it from time to time is the most comforting thing about this world.

It is during our waking hours that pain accomplishes its mission, that it comes to fruition and blossoms. It is then as boundless as the night, which it *imitates*.

We should not feel any kind of anxiety as long as we have the idea of bad luck. As soon as you invoke it, you calm down, put up with everything, and are almost happy to suffer injustice and infirmity. Since it makes anything intelligible, it's not surprising that both the stupid and the enlightened use it in the same way. It is not an explanation, it is the explanation itself, reinforced by the inevitable failure of all the others.

As soon as you dig up the slightest memory, you're ready to burst with rage.

Where does this monotonous vision come from, when the evils that gave rise to and sustained it are so diverse? It is because it has assimilated them and retained only their essence, which is common to them all.

A chat is any conversation with someone who has not suffered.

Midnight. Tension bordering on high malaise. I feel like blowing everything up, trying not to burst into pieces. Chaos imminent.

You can be worthless on your own, and still be someone through what you feel. But it's also possible not to live up to your feelings.

In theory, I don't care whether I live or die; in practice, I'm plagued by all the anxieties that open up a chasm between life and

death.

Animals, birds and insects have always solved everything. Why try to do better? Nature loathes originality, it refuses, it hates *man*.

For some, torment is a need, an appetite and a fulfilment. Everywhere they feel diminished, except in hell.

An inexhaustible drop of vinegar in the blood: to which fairy am I indebted?

The envious one forgives you nothing, and will envy you even to the point of your failure, even to the point of your shame.

The mediocrity of my grief at funerals. It's impossible to feel sorry for the dead; conversely, any birth throws me into consternation. It's incomprehensible, it's insane that we can *show* a baby, display this virtual disaster and rejoice in it.

You are haunted by detachment, purity, nirvana, and yet *someone* inside you whispers: "If you had the courage to formulate your most secret wish, you would say: 'I wish I had invented all the vices'".

There's no point in being a monster if you're not accompanied by a theorist of the "monstrous".

You let the best in you wither away. If you had been more careful, you wouldn't have betrayed your true vocation, which was that of tyrant or hermit.

To lash out at oneself at every turn is to show great concern for truth and justice; it is to reach out and strike at the real culprit. Unfortunately, it also intimidates and paralyses them, making them incapable of improving.

Anger that strips you of your skin and flesh, reducing you to a trembling skeleton!

After certain nights, you should change your name, because you're not the same person any more.

Who are you? – I'm a *stranger* to the police, to God, to myself.

For years I've been raving about the virtues of impassivity, and not a day goes by that I don't experience a violent outburst that, if left unchecked, would justify internment. These convulsions usually take place without witnesses but, to tell the truth, almost always because of someone. My delusions lack staying power: they are too plebeian, too down-to-earth to know how to emancipate themselves from a cause.

It's impossible for me to deal with anything external, objective, impersonal, unless it's *evils*, that is to say, with what in others makes me think of myself.

The desolation expressed in the gorilla's eyes. A funereal mammal. I come down from his gaze.

Whether we consider the individual or humanity as a whole, we must not confuse progress with advancement, unless we accept that going towards death is not *progress*.

The earth is said to be five billion years old, life two or three. These figures contain all the consolation we could wish for. We should remember them when we take ourselves seriously, when we *dare* to suffer.

The more you stammer, the more you force yourself to write better. This is revenge for not being able to speak. A stammerer is a born stylist.

What's hard to understand are the fertile, generous natures that are always happy to bustle about and produce. Their energy seems inordinate, and yet we can't envy it. They can be anything, because in the end they are nothing: dynamic puppets, nobodies with inexhaustible gifts.

What stops me from going down into the arena is that I see too many minds there that I admire but don't esteem, so naive do they seem to me. Why provoke them, why measure myself against them on the same track? My weariness gives me such superiority that it hardly seems possible that they will ever catch up with me.

You can think about death every day and still persevere cheerfully in your being; but the same cannot be said if you think incessantly about *the hour of* your death; if you had only that moment in mind, you would be committing an offence against all your other moments.

People have been surprised that France, a light-hearted nation, produced Rancé, founder of the most austere order; perhaps we should be even more surprised that Italy, an otherwise frivolous nation, produced Leopardi, the most serious of all poets.

The tragedy of Germany is that it never had a Montaigne. France is lucky to have *started* with a sceptic!

Disgusted by the nations, I turn to Mongolia, where life must be good, where there are more horses than men, and where the *yahoo* has not yet won.

Every fruitful idea turns into a pseudo-idea, degenerates into a belief. Only a sterile idea retains its status as an idea.

I thought I was more free of vanity than most: a recent dream was to prove me wrong. I had just died. A white wooden coffin was brought to me. "You could have put a bit of varnish on it! – I exclaimed before rushing at the undertakers and hitting them. A fight ensued. Then I woke up and felt ashamed.

This fever that doesn't lead to any discoveries, that doesn't carry any ideas but gives you an almost divine feeling of power, which vanishes as soon as you try to define it – what is it, and what can it be worth? Maybe it doesn't mean anything, maybe it goes further than any metaphysical experience.

Happiness is being outside, walking, looking, blending in with things. Sitting down, you fall prey to the worst of yourself. Man was not created to be tied to a chair. But perhaps he didn't deserve anything better.

During the sleepless nights, I tell myself, by way of consolation, that these hours that I become aware of, I am tearing them out of nothingness, and that, if I were asleep, they would never have belonged to me, they would never even have existed.

“Losing oneself in God” – this cliché for the believer takes on a revelatory value for the non-believer, who discerns in it a desired and impracticable adventure, desperate as he is not to be able to *lose himself* in something or, preferably, in someone.

Who is superficial? Who is profound? – To go very far in frivolity is to cease being frivolous; to reach a limit, even in farce, is to approach extremes which, in one's own sector, a metaphysician is unable to reach, capable of anything.

An elephant would succumb to these indistinct bouts of despondency of a cruelty on the verge of dissolving, and which, in dissolving, would take flesh and marrow with it. All the organs go: visceral calamity, a feeling of gastric chaos, of being unable to digest this world.

Man, the exterminator, has a grudge against everything that lives, everything that moves: soon we'll be talking about the last louse.

In the Trojan War, there were as many gods on one side as on the other. This was a fair and elegant view, of which moderns, too passionate or too vulgar, are incapable, they who want reason to be partisan at all costs. Homer, at the beginning of our civilisation, had the luxury of objectivity; at the antipodes, in a late period like ours, there is only room for *attitude*.

Alone, even if inactive, you don't waste time. It is almost always wasted in company. No conversation with yourself can be completely sterile: something is bound to come out of it, if only the hope of finding yourself again one day.

As long as you envy the success of another, even a god, you are a vile slave like everyone else.

Each being is a hymn destroyed.

If Tolstoy is to be believed, we should only desire death, since this desire, when it inevitably comes true, will not be a deception like all the others.

But isn't the essence of desire to strive for anything but death? To *desire* is not to want to die. So if we start wishing for death, it's because desire has been diverted from its proper function; it's a deviated desire, set against other desires, all destined to disappoint, whereas it always keeps its promises. To bet on it is to play for sure, to win in any case: it does not deceive, it cannot deceive. But what we expect of a desire is that it deceives us. Whether or not it comes true is secondary; the important thing is that it conceals the truth from us. If it reveals the truth, it fails in its duty, compromises and denies itself, and must therefore be struck off the list of desires.

Whether it's Buddhism or Catharism or any other system or dogma that attracts me, I retain a deep-seated scepticism that nothing can ever shake and to which I always return after each of my outbursts. Whether this scepticism is congenital or acquired, it nonetheless appears to me as a certainty, even as a liberation, when all other forms of salvation fade or reject me.

The others don't feel they're charlatans, and they are; me... I'm as much a charlatan as they are, but I know it and I suffer for it.

That I keep sabotaging my faculties, isn't it childish to worry about it? And yet, instead of flattering me, the evidence of my

unaccomplishment discourages and shatters me. To have become intoxicated with clairvoyance to have come to this! I drag around remnants of dignity that disgrace me.

Only a writer without an audience can afford the luxury of being sincere. He addresses no one: at most, himself.

A full life is, at best, a balance of disadvantages.

When you know that every problem is just a false problem, you're dangerously close to salvation.

Scepticism is an exercise in defascination.

In short, everything boils down to desire or the absence of desire. The rest is nuance.

I've said so much about life that, hoping to do it justice at last, I can't find a word that doesn't sound wrong.

### III

Sometimes we think it's better to be fulfilled than to let ourselves go, sometimes we think the opposite. And in both cases, you're absolutely right.

Our virtues, far from reinforcing each other, on the contrary, envy and exclude each other. When it becomes clear that they are at war with each other, we begin to denounce them one by one, only too happy not to have to go to any more trouble for any of them.

We're not asking for freedom, we're asking for the semblance of freedom. It is for these simulacra that man has always struggled. Besides, since freedom is, as has been said, no more than a *sensation*, what difference is there between *being* free and *believing oneself to be* free?

Any act as an act is only possible because we have broken with Paradise, the memory of which, poisoning our hours, turns each of us into a demoralised angel.

Our repressed prayers burst into sarcasm.

You only feel like you're someone when you're meditating on some package.

If we make doubt a goal, it can be as consoling as faith. It too is capable of fervour, it too, in its own way, triumphs over all perplexities, it too has the answer to everything. So where does its

bad reputation come from? Because it is rarer than faith, more inaccessible and more mysterious. It's hard to imagine what goes on in the house of the doubter...

At the market, a boy, no more than five years old, struggles, contorts and screams. Some women run over and try to calm him down. He goes on and on, exaggerating, overstepping all limits. The more you look at him, the more you want to wring his neck. His mother, realising at last that he had to be taken away, begged him to leave, furiously: "Come my *precious*!" – One thinks – with what satisfaction! – Calvin, for whom children are "little scum", or Freud, who calls them "polymorphous perverts". Both would gladly have said: "Let the little monsters come to me!"

There is no diabolical element in the decision to renounce salvation, because if there were, where would the serenity that accompanies this decision come from? There is nothing diabolical about serenity. When you're around the Devil, you're morose. That's my case... So my serenity is short-lived: just long enough for me to decide to do away with salvation. Fortunately, I often decide to do so, and each time, what peace!

Waking up early, full of energy and drive, wonderfully capable of committing some egregious villainy.

"I am free to the last degree" – this word raised the tramp who uttered it that day above philosophers, conquerors and saints, since none of them, at the height of their careers, dared to invoke such a success.

The fallen one is a man like the rest of us, with the difference

that he didn't deign to play the game. We blame him and shun him, we resent him for revealing and exposing our secret, and we rightly consider him a wretch and a traitor.

Rushed from sleep by the question: "Where is this moment going?" – "To death", was my reply, and I fell back asleep immediately.

Only physiological and theological explanations should be given credence. What lies in between is of little importance.

The pleasure we derive from anticipating a catastrophe diminishes as it approaches, and ceases altogether as soon as it occurs.

Wisdom disguises our wounds: it teaches us how to bleed in secret.

The critical moment for a prophet is when he finally becomes convinced by what he is saying, when he is won over by his rantings. A slave and an automaton from then on, he will be busy regretting the time when, free, he announced calamities without really believing in them, when he created his own fears.

It's not easy to play the Isaiah and Jeremiah sincerely. That's why most prophets *prefer to* be impostors.

Everything that happens to us, everything that matters to us, is of no interest to others: it is on the basis of this evidence that we should draw up our rules of conduct. A thoughtful mind should banish the word *event* from its intimate vocabulary.

Anyone who hasn't died young *deserves* to die.

Nothing makes you feel better than to fall asleep with a *clear* view of one of your faults, which you didn't dare admit to yourself until now, and which you didn't even know you had.

Everything about people fades and disappears, except their eyes and their voices: without both, you wouldn't be able to recognise anyone after a few years.

At this very moment, all over the world, thousands and thousands of people are dying, while I clutch my pen in vain for a word to comment on their agony.

To dwell on an act, even an unspeakable one, to invent scruples and become entangled in them, shows that you still care about your fellow human beings, that you enjoy torturing yourself because of them.

... I will only consider myself liberated on the day when, following the example of murderers and wise men, I have cleansed my conscience of all the impurities of remorse.

I'm tired of being me, and yet I keep praying to the gods to give me back to myself.

To regret is to deliberate in the past, to substitute the eventual for the irreparable, to cheat by tearing oneself apart.

Delusion is undoubtedly more beautiful than doubt, but doubt is more *solid*.

Scepticism is the *faith* of wavering minds.

Seeing slander as words, nothing but words, is the only way to bear it without suffering. Let's dismantle any statement made against us, let's *isolate* each word, let's treat it with the disdain that an adjective, a noun, an adverb deserves.

... If not, let's liquidate the slanderer at once.

Our pretensions to detachment always help us not to ward off blows but to “digest” them. In every humiliation, there is a first and a second stage. It is in the second that our coquetry with wisdom proves useful.

The place you occupy in the “universe”: one point, and then some! Why beat yourself up when you're obviously so little? Once you've made that realisation, you immediately calm down: no more worries in the future, no more metaphysical or any other kind of panic. And then this point expands, swells, replaces space. And everything begins again.

*To know* is to discern the scope of illusion, a key word as essential to the Vedânta as it is to the Chanson, the only ways of translating the experience of unreality.

At the British Museum, in front of the mummy of a singer whose little fingernails can be seen peeking out from the bandages, I remember swearing that I would never again say: *me...*

There's a sure sign that you've understood everything: crying *without a reason*.

For many, the need to pray stems from the fear of an imminent collapse of the brain.

Happiness and unhappiness are almost equal evils, so the only way to avoid them is to make yourself external to everything.

When I spend days and days in the midst of texts that are all about serenity, contemplation and simplicity, I get the urge to go out into the street and beat the shit out of the first passer-by.

The proof that this world is not a success is that we can compare ourselves without indecency to the One who is supposed to have created it, but not to Napoleon or even to a tramp, especially if the latter is unequalled in his kind.

No Father of the Church has been honest enough to apply this pagan word of Providence to God.

Speech and silence. We feel safer with a madman who speaks than with a madman who cannot open his mouth.

If a Christian heresy, any heresy, had prevailed, it would not have lost itself in nuances. More daring than the Church, it would also have been more intolerant, because more convinced. There can be no doubt: victorious, the Cathars would have surpassed the Inquisitors.

Let us feel pity for every victim, no matter how noble.

What remains of a philosopher is his temperament, which causes him to *forget himself*, to indulge in contradictions, whims

and reactions that are incompatible with the fundamental lines of his system. If he aims for the truth, he must free himself from any concern for coherence. He should only express what he thinks, not what he has *decided* to think. The more alive he is, the more he will let himself go, and he will only survive if he disregards what he *should* believe.

When it comes to meditating on emptiness, impermanence and nirvana, lying down or squatting is the best position. It is the very position where these themes were designed.

Only in the West do people think *on their feet*. Perhaps that's why his philosophy is so annoyingly positive.

We can only endure an insult by imagining the scenes of revenge, of the triumph we will one day have over the wretch who has scorned us. Without this perspective, we would fall prey to troubles that would radically renew Madness.

All agony is in itself curious; the most interesting, however, is that of the cynic, the one who despises it *in theory*.

What is the name of this bone I am touching? What can it *possibly* have in common with *me*? We'd have to repeat the operation with another part of the body and go on like this until nothing is *ours* anymore.

To have both a taste for provocation and a taste for obliteration, to be a troublemaker by instinct and a corpse by conviction!

After so many living people, *all* dead, – how tiring to die in turn

and to suffer, like them, this inane fear! How can we explain the fact that it still persists, that it has not been exhausted or discredited, and that we can still experience it like the first mortal?

The hermit takes responsibility only for himself or herself or for everyone else, and never for *anyone else*. You take refuge in solitude so that you have no one to look after you: yourself and the universe are enough.

If I were sure of my indifference to salvation, I would be by far the happiest man alive.

There's no better way to find yourself than to be “forgotten”. No one to come between us and what matters. The more others turn away from us, the more they work towards our perfection: they save us *by abandoning us*.

My doubts about Providence never last long: who else but Providence would be able to hand out our daily ration of defeat so punctually?

“You mustn't take anything to heart” – repeats the man who blames himself every time he suffers and never misses an opportunity to suffer.

The battle between the fanatic and the impostor in each individual is such that we never know *who* to turn to.

“What are you working on? What are you up to?”

Would we have dared to approach Pyrrhon or Lao-tsu in this way? The questions we couldn't ask our idols, we can't imagine

being asked ourselves.

By nature I'm so resistant to the slightest undertaking that to resolve to carry one out I have to first read some biography of Alexander or Genghis Khan.

What should make old age bearable is the pleasure of seeing all those who believed in us disappear one by one, and whom we can no longer disappoint.

I like to talk about decay, I like to live as a parasite of Original Sin.

If only we could make ourselves *inhumiliable* !

Contrary to the common allegation, suffering attaches us, nails us to life: it is *our* suffering, we are flattered to be able to endure it, it testifies to our quality as beings and not as spectres. And the pride of suffering is so virulent that it is only surpassed by the pride of having suffered.

Striving to save the past, regret is our only recourse against the manoeuvres of oblivion: what is it, in essence, if not memory *going on the attack*? By resurrecting many, many episodes and distorting them, he offers us all the versions of our lives we want, so it's fair to say that it's thanks to him that our lives seem both pitiful and fulfilled.

Any theoretical formula that arises during sleep interrupts its course. Dreams are events. As soon as one of them turns into a *problem*, or ends with a discovery, we wake up with a start.

“Thinking” while we sleep is an anomaly, common among the oppressed, those who sleep badly because their misery culminates in definitions, night after night.

We torment ourselves, we create a “conscience” for ourselves, and then we realise with horror that we can't get rid of it.

The discomfort resulting from a lowliness is the state most conducive to self-reflection, and even merges with it. So it's hardly surprising that every time we feel it, we feel as if we've finally got to know ourselves.

“Only the spirit that challenges the obligation to exist is subversive; all the others, led by the anarchist, make a pact with the established order.

My favourites: the Cave Age and the Age of Enlightenment.

But I'm not forgetting that caves led to history and living rooms to the Guillotine.

Flesh for money everywhere. But what is subsidised flesh worth? – In the past, we begot children out of conviction or by accident; today, we do it to get subsidies. This over-calculation is bound to affect the quality of the sperm.

Looking for meaning in anything is less the work of a naive person than of a masochist.

Becoming aware of our complete, radical destructibility is salvation itself. But to know that we are destructible at every moment is to encounter our deepest tendencies. Salvation, an

unnatural feat?

Frivolous and disjointed, an amateur at everything, all I really knew was the inconvenience of being born.

We should philosophise as if “philosophy” didn't exist, like a troglodyte dazzled or frightened by the parade of plagues unfolding before his eyes.

*Enjoying one's pain* – the sentiment and even the expression appear in Homer, albeit on an exceptional basis. As a general rule, we will have to wait until more recent times. It's a long way from epic to diary.

You wouldn't be interested in people if you didn't hope one day to meet someone more uptight than you.

Rats, confined to a small space and fed only on the chemicals we gorge ourselves on, are said to become much nastier and more aggressive than usual.

Condemned, as they multiply, to pile up on top of each other, men will hate each other much more than before, they will even invent unusual forms of hatred, they will tear each other apart as they never have before, and a universal civil war will break out, not because of demands but because of the impossibility of humanity witnessing the spectacle it is offering itself. Even now, if for a moment it could see the *whole* future, it would not go beyond that moment.

There is no true solitude except when we think of the urgency of a prayer – a prayer *after* God and after Faith itself.

We need to tell ourselves over and over again that everything that makes us happy or unhappy is pointless, that it's all completely derisory and pointless.

... Well, I say it to myself over and over again every day, and I don't stop rejoicing and mourning.

We're all at the bottom of a hell, where every moment is a miracle.

**END**

“Those who did not live before 1789 do not know the sweetness of life”  
(N.d.N.)

# **BERSERKER**

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## **BOOKS**

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