

DE CAELO

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Important TITLES (listed in order of first publication): *Mathesis or Simple Joys* (1934), *Open Concepts in the History of Philosophy in Descartes, Leibniz and Kant* (1936), *Outline for the History of How Something New is Possible* (1940), *Two Introductions and a Transition to Idealism* (1943), *Twenty-Seven Steps of Reality* (1969), *Romanian Philosophical Expression* (1970), *Creation and Beauty in Romanian Expression* (1973), *Eminescu or Thoughts on the Complete Man of Romanian Culture* (1975), *Parting from Goethe* (1976), *The Romanian Sense of Being* (1978), *Six Diseases of the Contemporary Spirit* (1978), *Stories about Man* (1980), *Becoming in Being* (1981), *Letters on the Logic of Hermes* (1986), *Journal of Ideas* (1991).

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AN ESSAY ON KNOWLEDGE AND THE
INDIVIDUAL

FOREWORD

Of all the things you are tempted to say when you reveal a new work, namely the consistency of the ideas contained therein with those stated previously, the extent to which certain contradictions are only apparent, the meaning of the orientation you serve, and all the rest, it seems appropriate to say only that we did not want to write this work in the way we wrote it. In accordance with a steadfast urge, we would have preferred to avoid, at least for now, some "big issues." However, it is difficult to write about matters of inner life — as we did in an early work — without encountering such problems; and it is impossible to avoid them when, as we attempt here, one begins a debate about our moral states.

We have therefore decided to focus on these. If the theoretical views that precede the notes on ethical issues were to be considered merely the expression of a well-known idealism, the injustice done would not trouble us too much; we will try on other occasions to develop the philosophical outline that we have briefly set out in the opening chapters. However, if the individualism that emerges from the last chapters, those on which we place emphasis, were to be found to be a rehash of a type of individualism that has been outdated since the beginning of this century, then the injustice would be saddening. Democratic individualism, which tends to atomise societies and, despite its professed optimism, only succeeds in making them foolish, is clearly outdated by everyone. However, there is still room for a deeper moral impulse, one that can make you believe in the individual without that guilty and sterile individualistic pride.

The moral situation of contemporary man in his world, of us in our world, is debated in these pages. They serve no other purpose than the individual. Moreover,

they may not even serve that purpose, for it is not through essays, but through sermons and deeds that you inspire the individual. But the right to preach is given to you by grace, and the right to act is given to you by clear thinking. In order to think clearly and thus be able to truly act, we sometimes speak aloud, loud enough so as not to deceive ourselves.

AUTHOR

INTRODUCTION TO HEAVEN

Usually, history is made to preserve the past, not to compromise it. Isn't this how the historian of science proceeds in every case? What inspires him above all else is a determined horror of untruth, a concern not to let people believe that they have only years of superstition and absurdities behind them. That is why he will carefully examine the past, weigh every meaning and implication, and the doctrine he will prefer to highlight will be the one that seems to him, better than any other, to foreshadow the future. How satisfying it is for the historian when he encounters — or thinks he encounters — Pythagoras' assertion that the earth is not flat, but spherical! How uplifting for humanity that a kind of heliocentric system was conceived as early as the time of Aristarchus!

But the history of science, viewed as a succession of approximations of the truth, is perhaps not the most felicitous expression of the past. And is it the most instructive? One could conceive, for example, of a history of the heavens full of meaning, a history which, instead of distorting the conceptions of the past towards the truth, would emphasise error. For does not error also have meaning? Indeed, it often has so much meaning that it becomes obligatory, just as historians rightly note that it was obligatory, due to a complex set of circumstances, for Ptolemy to return to the geocentric conception of the world, a conception that had been superseded only momentarily by that of Aristarchus. Error, or what is called error, is often more appropriate than what is called truth. Would it not be useful, then, to highlight the former? But without hesitation, without timidity, without thinking that we are compromising the past.

A history of the sky that emphasises error could possibly begin with the Egyptians' views of the cosmos. A modern scholar summarises these views as follows:

"In the beginning there was the *Nun*, a primordial liquid mass, in whose infinite depths floated, mixed together, the seeds of all things. When the sun began to shine,

the earth flattened and the waters separated into two distinct fields. One gave birth to the rivers and the ocean; the other, hanging in the air, formed the vault of heaven, the waters above, on which the stars and gods began to float, carried by an eternal flow."

The historian would not, of course, dwell at length on this cosmological conception; he would emphasise the finite nature of the Egyptian universe, the materiality of the vault of heaven, the idea that the stars float, they are not suspended (perhaps some Egyptians even imagined that rain was born from the overflowing of the "waters above"), and he would move on without hesitation to the Greeks. For they too believed in the finiteness of the world, as well as in the materiality of the vault of heaven. Did they not imagine the earth, from the earliest known times, since the days of Homer, as a disc surrounded by waters, that is, by the ocean, and covered by the vault of heaven?

This is how man awoke: living inside a bell. Whether higher or lower, whatever that bell may have been, it did not cease to envelop the world for centuries. For Thales, for example, the world was a hemisphere, just as it had been for most of his predecessors. And if Anaximander breaks the bell that makes up this hemisphere in some places, it is not to free man from the grip in which his scientific imagination had placed him, but only to let the lights of the sphere of fire beyond the vault filter through here and there. For in this way, says Anaximander, the things of the sky must be understood. The sun, the moon, the stars are but holes that allow the eye to catch the rays of the whirlwind beyond.

In his study of concepts relating to the heavens, the historian could now move on to a somewhat more scientifically expressed "error", to the system of errors developed by Pythagoras. It is certainly interesting that he seems to have been the first to claim that the earth is spherical. But this statement should not be understood as a truth in itself, but as a conception more appropriate than any other to Pythagoras' entire cosmological system, a system in relation to which only an episodic thesis can be called true or false. And in its entirety, the Pythagorean system still conceives of the Earth as spherical, yet immovable and standing at the centre of the universe, while

The stars, embedded in the surrounding blue sphere, moved with it from East to West. There was therefore no difference in nature between the present conception and that of his predecessors. Man remained enclosed under the vault of heaven. The explanation, however, became somewhat more scientific, in the sense that the universe, now being a whole sphere and not a simple hemisphere, could, through its movement, better explain that of the stars, a movement caused by the sphere in which the stars were embedded. Moreover, through the rotation of the large sphere, the Pythagoreans could only explain the movement of the stars

"fiksi"; therefore, in order to account for the movements of the other stars, they were forced to imagine other spheres, seven in number, concentric with the first, which, although they took part in its movement, also had their own movement, around axes passing through the centre of the earth, but with a distinct inclination. And the seven heavens are not arranged, said the Pythagoreans, without a certain order, but correspond to the seven musical notes, so that if a sphere is farther away, its sound is sharper. Their movement is therefore not only a mathematical phenomenon, but also a musical one.

What a curious state Pythagoras' man must have felt himself in! Enveloped by the seven spherical heavens, prisoner of a world seven times locked, he contemplated, from his immobility, the dizzying movement of the overlapping vaults. If only he had been able to grasp the sonic harmony of the vaults, which to the eye seemed to move disharmoniously, each concerned only with its own movement. But the ear perceives only interrupted harmonies, while the vaults resound incessantly. And then, let us imagine that Pythagoras' man could hear. Did this mean extra freedom? No, it was extra slavery: sight conspired with hearing to make man aware of the order that surrounded him, that is, of his own imprisonment.

It was impossible for the ancients to escape this slavery on a cosmic level — which, incidentally, they adopted and justified in the social order. The feeling of belonging to nature, naturalism — if such a use of the expression is permissible — was the most representative doctrine in Antiquity, despite the desire of some historians to

make the Greeks into humanists above all else. The first philosophers are also called "physicists" or naturalists because they attempt to solve the cosmological problem by discovering the elements that constitute the world. But they could also be called that because they were inspired by the same impulse, characteristic of the Greeks, to accept nature, to seek its meanings, feeling themselves to be constantly subordinate to it. And was not Aristotle, a naturalist from one end of his philosophy to the other, a thinker who understood the world only as a hierarchy and justified man only by integrating him, at his level, into the universal order, the most systematic and authoritative philosopher of Antiquity?

Such a philosophy was perhaps natural for a man who imagined himself imprisoned in so many heavens. For seven heavens, as Pythagoras had wanted, were not enough. A number of movements of the stars remained unexplained, and Eudoxus, in order to account for everything, was forced to increase the number of spheres from seven to twenty-seven. And if that were all! But, correcting Eudoxus, Callippus' astronomical system reaches thirty-four spheres, with Aristotle ending up at fifty-six. His system, incidentally, developed the old thesis of the finiteness of the world. The universe is constituted in the form of an enormous but finite sphere, beyond which there is nothing, not even "space", because in that case there would be a vacuum. At the centre of the universe is the earth, and from a certain radius onwards extends the celestial region, whose bodies are made up of a special matter, ether. The matter of the heavenly worlds was therefore superior to that of the earth. As the middle being in the cosmic hierarchy, man was doomed to live in a sublunary zone without nobility.

After recalling all this, the historian of the heavens would describe the moment when Greek scientific concepts were definitively established. Aristarchus, the author of a heliocentric system that can be suspected of being similar to that of Copernicus, is not followed. Hipparchus had to return to earlier concepts and develop, in accordance with them, a new astronomical system, which Ptolemy finally, in the 2nd century AD, incorporated into his work.

second after Christ, will give it its definitive form, under which it will survive for more than a millennium, until the days of the Renaissance. It should be noted here that the new system finds a different means of explanation than that of the celestial spheres. But is man freed from his slavery to nature? Does nature, finite as it is, cease to overwhelm him with its presence? There seems to be no sign of such liberation. Now, as in Aristotle's time, human beings remain integrated into a cosmic order, about which they can at best give an account. And what better proof is there that the new doctrine does not change the perspective on the heavens than the fact that the Ptolemaic system coexists with the scientific views of Aristotle, who has remained an authority for the same millennial period in many other fields of knowledge, if not in astronomy?

Without fear of being disproved too soon, Virgil was able to describe, in his own way, the origin of the world and of souls through the mouth of Anchises, the pious father of Aeneas, who was in Hell:

Principio caelum ac terras camposque liquentes...*

Everything was animated by a spirit. But "everything" was nothing more than a mass, large, it is true, but not so large that it could not fit into the imagination of the poet, who wrote:

Mens agitat molem, et magno se corpore miscet.**

The world, with all its chaos, was nothing more than a magnum corpus for this disseminator of the ideas of the time.

How long did the concept of a finite cosmos, within which man had his well-defined place, remain intact? Throughout Hellenism and the Middle Ages, historians would follow the process of sedimentation in thought of the ancient concept, whose uprooting

— since centuries will have passed without changing it — will be particularly difficult. And when does this uprooting begin? During the Renaissance, Agrippa von Nettesheim still believes, almost exactly like Virgil, that the sky must be animated, while Cremonini, who writes a *De Caelo* modelled on Aristotle, says of Copernicus's revolutionary doctrine that it is "a modern scientific curiosity". This transition from one conception to another, from one state of ideas to another, is a delicate matter—for each conception brings with it a whole world of ideas, of mental states—and the historian should pay close attention to the moment when one world articulates itself with another.

Although Descartes succeeds, more than anyone else of his age, in freeing the mind from its naturalistic obsession, making it no longer see itself as part of nature, but rather as its co-partner (the two Cartesian substances are strictly distinct), if not yet as its pure legislator, he still speaks of the existence of certain liquid heavens, and it is hard to believe that his words could have any meaning other than the literal one. It is only with Pascal that we encounter one of the first minds to have our modern sense of infinity. A new perspective is projected onto the heavens, a perspective that could never have been imagined by the man under the bell of distant Antiquity or the man clothed in the vaults of Pythagoras' world.

It is a step forward, but not a great leap beyond ancient naturalism. Space has deepened, become infinite, unfathomable; but it has not yet dissolved, it has not yet disappeared. In a sense, man still remains within nature, although he is far from being at its centre. He has remained nature himself. And as space has grown, so he has shrunk, so he has thinned like a reed. This is precisely the proof that the mentality of the man under the bell has not been completely overcome: the new man has shrunk. This means that he has maintained a relationship of comparison with the surrounding universe and that there is a unit of measurement between the latter and himself. He has shrunk to the point of fear, to the point of awareness

of his own insignificance. Oh, if only Pascal had not been a Christian! It was not the fact that man is a thinking being, a thinking reed, not this philosophical pride that must have preserved Pascal's sanity, but his Christianity. For it has rightly been said of Christianity that it is first and foremost an anthropological doctrine, attentive above all to what the human individual is and can be. Ancient naturalism, surviving even into the infinity of the Renaissance and Pascal, imperceptibly opposed Christian anthropologism, which valued and loved man almost exclusively. Without Christianity, Pascal's horror would not have left him.

But Christianity did not ultimately defeat the naturalism of Antiquity, that Aristotelian naturalism which, in part, Catholic doctrine still professes today. It is interesting to note the similarity between the fundamental orientation of Christianity and that of the contemporary scientist; but it is not the Christian, but the scientist (the contemporary philosopher, as has sometimes been said, still lags far behind the scientist in terms of mentality) who will put an end to the conception of a well-hierarchised universe, with several layers of substances above and below man, with a celestial vault and an azure sky above his head.

The history of the sky would have a beautiful chapter to write here, the last of the treatise. Emphasising not what led to today's conception of science, as is usually done, but what was fully integrated into the conception of science of yesteryear, the historian would have arrived, step by step, at his own age, whose spirit would emerge all the more clearly the less it was foreseen and expected. How could man ever have expected to cease — in whatever sense that cessation might have been — to be part of nature? It is true that almost everything that had hitherto seemed to him to be "nature" had gradually dissolved. The vaults of heaven — and in the end even the vault itself had ceased to be material. It had deepened, grown and disappeared. But the optical illusion was caused by something, wasn't it? There had to be something, just to give the illusion — his mind told him. And that something that gives the blue is, for example, at least the air. There is no sky, let alone heavens,

says the scientist of the nineteenth century. But there is something that takes its place and makes the illusion possible.

And then comes the scientist of the twentieth century, who says: there is not even that. The blue, the blue colour of the sky, cannot be explained by any matter, but by radiation phenomena. "It would be futile to object," continues our contemporary, "that the property attributed to radiation is conceived in the same way as the quality attributed to matter when, in the past century, it was said that air, taken in a slightly greater thickness, is blue. Everyone is well aware that noun chains have been weakened and that only the bonds of language still chain us to immediate realism... The immense vault of the sky appears azure to us; but this entire azure is no longer a true substantial property for us... The azure of the sky has no more existence (author's emphasis) than the vault of the sky."

Has something completely new happened in the history of the sky? This time, yes. All the substances that were or seemed more real in nature have ceased to exist; at least they have ceased to exist for scientific thought. Nature has become de-substantialised, one might say. It has retained its proportions, its physical and mathematical constituents, the relationships between things, but there is nothing else, or anything else, apart from these. The blue of the sky acquires a mathematical interpretation — says the same author a little further on — and it is nothing apart from this mathematical interpretation.

But here the historian would stop for good. What does it really mean that the sky is nothing, absolutely nothing? It means that the intellect has not chosen the right object of knowledge. If realities such as the sky are nothing, and our knowledge must nevertheless be something, it is forced to turn to other regions, to another world of facts. But where?

And the historian of science would stop here, slightly dissatisfied, because he does not like philosophy very much.

SPORNICA KNOWLEDGE

So what does "fact" mean in terms of thinking?

Ever since we all became positivists, long before the nineteenth century, the first thing we demand of a thought is that it correspond to facts. If someone theorises on a certain subject, people listen for a while, then ask: very well, but do these theories account for the facts? Referring to things, to examples, to facts is the supreme criterion. You can express thoughts as profound and as complete as you like; you can construct systems that hold together as well as you like; if you do not explain the "facts", the thoughts you present will have no foundation.

But what are these facts? And to what extent does referring to them validate the principles? Here is something, for example, which by all appearances represents a fact: the incongruity of the hands; that is, the difference, known to everyone, between the right and left hands (the space of one is not that of the other, the glove of one is not that of the other), despite their perfect similarity and symmetry. Well, the banal fact of the incongruity of the hands, although the same, served a thinker, namely Kant, to illustrate three different theories in succession. The incongruity is commented on and "explained" by Kant in 1768, 1770 and 1783. On the first occasion, the philosopher shows, in a work of only a few pages, that incongruous but perfectly similar objects, such as the right and left hands, can only be explained by admitting that, apart from the space made up of things and as a basis for it, there really is an absolute space; for the right hand is, in all respects, exactly like the left, except that the edges of one are not the edges of the other, that is, the space of one is not the space of the other; there must therefore be — reason tells us — an absolute space, which makes possible the distinct and relative spaces of the hands, and this object of our thought must be real, for the difference between the hands is also real. — A little later, in 1770, when

The philosopher wrote his famous Dissertation, the incongruity of the hands continued to be a problem, but it was not solved by the hypothesis of an absolute space which, although something completely real, was still an object of thought, but by a new kind of space, which this time is an intuition; for the difference between incongruous things cannot be described by any rational characteristics, everything attributed to the right hand also being attributed to the left, so that it can only be done within the framework of an intuition, namely that of space. — Finally, in the Prolegomena written in 1783, the solution to the same problem is an extension of the 1770 solution, but this time the emphasis no longer seems to be on the intuitiveness of space, but on its ideality. Space, Kant says here, is not a real object, nor even a real property inherent in things themselves, but something ideal, a condition of human sensibility. For those who doubt this, the philosopher gives the example of the incongruity of the hands, and it seems as clear as daylight that every sane person must accept the ideality of space if they want to account for the existence, within this space, of extended objects that do not differ in any way and yet seem to differ in some way.

Here, then, are three theories that succeed, at least in appearance, in explaining the same fact. But which theory explains it better? And when is the fact proven? In 1768, when it leads to the conception of space as an object of thought, or in 1770, when it leads to the conception of space as intuition? In 1768, when it makes the philosopher affirm that space is something real, or in 1783, when, thanks to him, space is declared ideal?

If three different theories can explain the same fact, it actually means that they do not explain it at all. And, in turn, if the same fact validates three different theories, it actually means that it does not validate them in the slightest. Who is to blame?

Kant's case is not unique. It has also occurred with other thinkers — in relation to other facts, of course, than the incongruity of the hands. Not to mention the possibility that several thinkers, not just one, may explain the same thing differently

thing, a possibility that has occurred so often in the history of thought that it seems to have become a characteristic of philosophy: for each philosopher explains the same things in his own way, it seems. And is not the same world the object of so many different Weltanschauungen?

The fact that philosophers differ among themselves in their explanations of things is not necessarily a bad thing. The world has become accustomed to such divisions, and has even begun to believe that the philosopher's destiny is to always say something different from what has been said before him. But the fact that this can happen even in the case of scientific explanations is something that should cause real concern. In this case, everyone has the right to say that there must be some error somewhere, because it is not permissible for a science to explain the same fact in more than one way, except perhaps by renouncing its pretensions to "positivity". And the philosopher who has taken it upon himself to clarify and justify the claims of certainty of that activity of the human mind which constitutes science cannot but be disturbed by the realisation that the very certainty he has been striving to justify ceases to be true certainty. Who, then, is to blame?

Everyone agrees — the philosopher observes, and he himself agrees with everyone else on this point — that theories must account for facts. How else could a theory be born, if not through the need to explain a series of phenomena or at least one phenomenon in the world of things? Therefore, in this sense, we are all positivists: any theory is an explanation, and any explanation is an explanation of something, something prior to the theory since it gives rise to it. However, where we all cease to agree is when we begin to see what that something is. The answer to such a question can only be ambiguous: that something is, in generic terms, the world as it is, therefore as the mind finds it; or that something is the world as we make it, therefore as the mind consciously or unconsciously prepares it.

Usually, thinking decides on the first way of looking at things. Indeed, for it, the quality of being a fact — a fact that can be framed in a general explanation — is not acquired, but is possessed by things from the outset. They appear to us on their own and ready-made. Our mind emerges in their midst, notes their presence, and tries to "take cognizance" of them. Knowledge is therefore taken, not made. How, then, can we explain the fact that the mind can take more knowledge about one and the same thing? Very simply: by not taking true knowledge. If the spirit contemplates the thing in its own way, as it is, in what might be called its estimation, then there is no question of it gaining true knowledge, which is one. Why, then, do philosophers not understand each other? Because they have not yet reached the true estimation of things. Why do even scientists often give different explanations? For the same reason, because they deal with opinions, not estimates. The world is as it is before the spirit comes to measure it, weigh it and explain it. If you take things as they are and as they are, then you are bound to learn something. If not, you will approximate the truth, as so many thinkers in history have done, but you will never touch it.

The second hypothesis — that things are as we make them to be — begins by criticising the previous thesis. Indeed, the first is the natural one, that of the naturalism of knowledge. Nothing is clearer than that things exist and you live and become aware of them. However, this clarity of the proposition is accompanied by a series of difficulties that are difficult to overcome. Overlooking the metaphysical objections to which the supporters of the previous thesis are exposed (first of all, the fact that they make metaphysical assumptions, that is, they admit an existence outside and before the mind; secondly — and more seriously — the fact that they admit not only that things exist before the mind, but also that the knowledge which the mind finds, it "takes" from things, ready-made or almost ready-made), we must highlight the fact that the answer we have obtained to our question: how is it possible for a single fact to be explained by many theories?

many theories? It cannot be considered satisfactory. For we have been told: if the mind takes knowledge of the true nature of things, of what they are, of their value, then the knowledge acquired is not only correct, but unique. But what is the criterion that helps us distinguish between knowledge that has attained its value and knowledge that has not yet attained it? How can we choose between three theories that explain the same thing equally well? And suppose we find, in the end, that one of these three theories is better: but how do we know that it is also the true one? How do we know that we will not one day find another that explains the fact even better? And where does the idea come from that today's sciences, that is, today's systems of explanation, are also tomorrow's sciences, when they may be something completely different, systems of explanation much closer than the current ones to the true nature of things? One of two things: either we know something in advance about estimates, or we will never stop in our progress towards them.

To circumvent such blind progress, progress that represents advancement but does not necessarily bring us closer to our goal, several thinkers have set out to revise basic notions and ask themselves whether the things we know are truly part of the world as it is (and according to which estimation, therefore, we have seen ourselves running endlessly) or whether they are part of a world as we make it be — not just anyhow, without doubt, nor willfully, but according to certain promptings of our mind. In such a world, the mind does not know by chance or what is offered to it, but makes a choice in the raw material of knowledge. And if it did only that, its activity would still not be so decisive. But it does something more: it prepares the material of knowledge, measures it, compares it, rounds it off, and only then lets it be formulated as a problem. Only now does the "fact" appear that knowledge must take into account; only this product of its own will the spirit have to explain, not everything it encounters and as it seems to encounter it. Wouldn't it then also be responsible for explaining the sky, with its blue and its vault? But not everything that appears on the horizon of knowledge has the quality of fact; things acquire the quality of fact, and they acquire it

namely through the spirit, since they want to be facts for the spirit. Until the encounter with the spirit, the fact was nothing for knowledge; it was — say the thinkers whose opinion we represent — a zero; from then on, however, it is true material for knowledge: it is the problem. Things must be abolished, in a certain sense, and elevated to the rank of problem. We remain positivists in doing so, that is, we still seek the correspondence of our theories with facts; but it is no longer a question of the facts of the world alone, but of those born of the encounter between the world and the spirit. And thus transfigured, things no longer constitute a phantom world, a world behind which there is another, whose value is also further away and never within the field of knowledge, but one in which facts have a single meaning, one that answers the question that, by its very nature, the spirit knew how to ask when it awoke in the midst of things, awakening them too to their true life, that of serving knowledge.

We would therefore proceed to demonstrate—since the world of knowledge is not the world as it is, but as we make it to be—the manner in which the mind prepares the material of knowledge, so as to elevate it to the status of a debatable fact, classifiable and explainable within the framework of a theory. Before undertaking this, however, the thesis presented must face a doubt that it cannot overcome if it wants its principle to remain intact in its essence. Indeed, what we are asked to admit by this thesis is that the mind intervenes in the world of things when it wants to know them. Before discussing what this interference consists of, we are entitled to ask the fundamental question: how is such a thing possible? If the spirit intervenes in things, it means that it wants to change them, to make them into something else, to alter them. How is it possible in general for a subject, wanting to know its object, to alter it? Then what does it know about the object? If things are no longer as they are, but as we make them to be, can we still say that our knowledge of them is true knowledge? And what is truth? Everyone defines truth as the correspondence between our knowledge and things. But since things are no longer

themselves anymore, but rather certain problems of the mind, what does truth represent? In the search for truth, the norm was set by the object, the criterion was the relationship to the object. Now this term, the object, falls away or, at best, is "altered." What remains of the other term? But what about their agreement, which was supposed to be the truth?

All these questions must have distanced many minds from accepting the thesis that things in the world of knowledge are as the spirit has made them to be. The idea of truth has always been a human ideal which, even when it was not pursued, was respected. To obscure this idea even slightly, to cause the truth to waver, let alone to abolish it, meant and still means, to a large extent, to raise public opposition.

Rightly so? That is something that cannot be said. The concern for truth is undoubtedly one of the things that has honoured mankind, but it is not one of the things that has enlightened it particularly. There is something murky in our idea of truth, something illegitimate that creeps into even the most famous and universally accepted definition of the concept. Not many thinkers have noticed this, but there is one in particular who has shed light on it in the most vivid way possible. Allow us to quote his judgement in its entirety. It reads:

"If truth consists in the correspondence of a piece of knowledge with its object, the object in question must, by this very fact, be distinct from any other; for a piece of knowledge is false if it does not correspond to the object to which it refers, even if it otherwise contains ideas that correspond to other objects. On the other hand, a universal criterion of truth would be one that could be applied to all knowledge, without distinction between their objects. But since such a criterion would abstract from any content of knowledge (from its relation to its object) and since truth concerns precisely this content, it is clear that it is completely impossible and absurd to demand a distinguishing character of truth from this content

present in knowledge and that no sign of truth can be found that is both sufficient and universal. And since the content of knowledge has been called matter above, it is appropriate to say that no universal criterion for the truth of knowledge is to be sought in relation to matter, because such a thing is contradictory in itself."

How many remember that this passage is from Kant, and even from Critique of Pure Reason? There is so much common sense here that is not found in the rest of the philosopher's work. Of course, common sense does not decide matters of philosophy; but when an accurate proposition manages to take on the guise of common sense, its accuracy becomes even more suggestive. In this case, there could be no better illustration of how our mind prejudices us, even when it claims to analyse and define. If truth is a relationship, as she said, then it would be necessary for the relationship to be the same wherever we encounter it. And indeed, the relationship seems to be the same everywhere: it is the relationship of coverage between knowledge and fact. Wherever I have such a thing, I possess, on the basis of the above, the truth. But how do I know when I have such a thing? the philosopher rightly asks. Either — as I have already shown — I know something in advance about the intimate nature of the thing under consideration; or, if I know nothing, then I cannot determine the moment when the coverage is complete.

The truth therefore seems to be — as has already been said, but how many times should it be said again? — a poorly posed question. Of course, the pursuit of truth continues to be useful, even if it has proven to be meaningless in itself, and no one would think of forbidding the scientist from researching reality in the belief, which accompanies such research, that he is deciphering its hidden meanings, in what we have called its estimation. Indeed, the image of truth is useful in that it calls the researcher ever further, forcing him to expand his field of activity, to increase the number of his working tools, to revise and deepen his methods of discovery and proof. But if the researcher is not obliged to fully understand the meanings and fruits of his labour, the philosopher — who, after all, has no other

purpose, after all, than to enlighten himself and others, just as Socrates did his fellow citizens, about what they do and think, to bring out, in other words, the true meaning from their own minds — is, on the other hand, obliged to see that the goals pursued by the scientific researcher are not always commensurate with the results he achieves and that these must be interpreted in their own light, and not in that of the interests that gave rise to them.

The pursuit of truth has been fruitful, therefore, but it is not the plan of truth that ultimately legitimises the knowledge we acquire. And if no time has been wasted in the pursuit of truth, time has been wasted in believing in truth. Such faith must be corrected if we do not want to create distorted idols, if we want to understand the act of knowledge for what it can give us, and not for what we imagine we obtain through it.

There must be a plan deeper than that of truth, a plan that justifies our knowledge. The thinkers whose opinions we prolong, if not repeat, call this the plan of objectivity. It does not matter whether a piece of knowledge is true or not; what meaning can this have, according to what we have seen above? What matters is whether it is objective or not, whether, therefore, it fulfils the conditions that make it impose itself on any human consciousness at any time. It does not matter, therefore, what the estimate of things may be, for this is a completely gratuitous assumption of our mind; what matters is whether we can utter, with regard to them, propositions that give a coherent account of the appearance under which they appear in the field of any of the knowing consciousnesses.

Thinkers who believe in truth and in the possibility of attaining it — let us call them realists, and the latter idealists — will be quick to point out that objectivity is also on their side, or especially on their side, as it is only one of the characteristics of truth. For true knowledge, they say, is, by this very fact,

objective, that is, it respects all the conditions that make it impose itself at any time on any human consciousness. Then why the need to oppose truth with objectivity?

If truth were to strive for objectivity, then there would undoubtedly be no need to juxtapose these terms, and the simple fact that you are a seeker of truth would prove that you are also a seeker of objectivity. Except that it does not seek objectivity, but assumes it, as it assumes so many other things. Objectivity, in the case of truth, consists in relating to the object. It is not a problem, it does not need criteria and verification. It's simple: I have the object, I also have objectivity. A statement about the object, say the philosophers of the realist school, is accepted by everyone precisely because it exists. But how do we know that it exists? Because everyone accepts this statement — the realist would reply, that it is precisely so that it may fall into the most perfect of possible circles.

It is often said that idealism is the philosophy of lazy people, since it does not strive to seek what things are "outside" consciousness, but rather shapes them itself, according to the laws of consciousness. However, based on the above, it is realism that shows laziness, because as soon as it imagines that it possesses true, adequate knowledge, it considers it to be objective, without making any effort to fully legitimise it. For realism, objectivity is achieved by simply referring to the object, while idealism only begins here, from the duty it feels to clarify the way in which what has been imposed as a certainty on one consciousness can be shared as such with any other. In seeking the conditions for the emergence and transmission of acquired certainty, in showing how certain knowledge, that is, scientific knowledge, is possible, in constituting the system of such certain knowledge — this is what the dignity of idealism consists of. It does, admittedly, abolish the idea of truth, to the indignation of the great and small champions of common sense; it suppresses the entire mythology of the naturalism of knowledge, in order to replace it with the less appealing but all the more justified idea of the objectivity of knowledge, of the soundness of knowledge.

But if truth gives way to objectivity as the analysis of knowledge becomes more precise, the thesis that the world of knowledge is one in which things are as we make them out to be proves admissible in principle. Our research started precisely from the need to raise the doubt that stood in the way of such a thesis, the doubt that the things we know will still be of any interest to our consciousness, since they are not the true ones. But now the thesis seems not only admissible in principle, but also necessary, because it is the only one that raises the real question of knowledge, namely the question of its objectivity. Such a question did not exist in a world where things remained as they were. In that world, the mind sought so-called estimates; if it found them, the rest, namely objectivity, would have come naturally. But it did not find them. It only reached preliminary stages on its path to truth: the knowledge it acquired was provisional, and the sciences that emerged from it were not entirely certain, but yearned for an accuracy that they did not yet know how to discover and could only project into the future. Where, then, did certainty come from?

If there is truth and the possibility of attaining it someday, any current certainty of knowledge dissipates. Fortunately, the world offers us more opportunities for certainty and no truth; for it is only the world as we have made it, precisely in the interest of our certain knowledge. Seekers of truth have no choice but to continue searching; but they are not discoverers of truths; rather, on their way to them, striving to find them, struggling with the things to be known, they have changed them beyond recognition, imbued them with new meanings that are no longer theirs but those of the spirit, and no longer give an account of their truths, but of the certainties of the spirit. Seekers of truth are finders of certainties — this is the journey that every knowing consciousness takes. It sets out to reveal the mysteries of nature and ends up — as has already been said — with problems of geometry.

But things do exist, the realist will insist. Even if the world of knowledge is as we make it to be, and even if within it objective judgements are made rather than

true judgements, it cannot be denied that the substratum of things is an existence, a reality, and therefore everyone is obliged to accept the assertion that things exist, even if they will never learn more than that about their existence. — To which one can respond: In the statement "things exist," what exists is not so much the things themselves as the statement itself. This is also of interest and should be investigated, and the conditions under which a statement such as the one above can be accepted by any knowing consciousness constitute the real problem of knowledge. Do things exist, in other words, is the content of the realistic statement true? It is probable, if not certain. But their existence does not make much sense outside of what I know about them, and I cannot know more about them than the mind, with its laws and rules, wants to teach me.

Does the starry night exist? Apart from what the spirit puts there — relationships, depth, i.e. space, astrophysics —, there is the question of what exactly this existence might be. Perhaps it is not superfluous to think for a moment what the starry night would mean for any other creature besides humans. And the answer is: probably the confused awareness of a luminous, intangible presence. But is that "reality"? And does admitting such a thing mean realism? Then the dog that barks at the moon is also realistic, because it too admits an external reality!

No, an entire doctrine is not built on such a thing. Realism wants more than that, and to the extent that it wants more, it raises idealism against it. It wants a ready-made world, a world foreign to consciousness from beginning to end, which consciousness comes to record as it is. And idealism — or what can be called that by simple opposition to the realist thesis — responds: What does world mean? What governs the world are laws; what governs laws is the mind; what else is the world but the mind in its own exercise?

Undoubtedly, we are talking here only about the world of knowledge. The subject must be active in constructing such a world, precisely in order to make it more objective. For the objectivity of knowledge is a theme, it is the ideal of the intellectual activity of the spirit, and

the latter cannot hope to acquire perfectly objective knowledge unless it forces itself to organise it according to rules derived from principles that are fixed in all knowing minds. Faced with the problem, undoubtedly the most difficult that can be given to a subjective consciousness, the problem of surpassing itself through acts of knowledge that are valid for any other, consciousness will not hesitate to make the universe of things what it needs, so that its propositions about this universe are the propositions of all about the same universe.

Ultimately, our explanations are the same — that is, they end up being the same. —, whether we do them with the intention of discovering truths, or whether we know in advance that they will only give us certainties. The dispute between realists and so-called idealists does not therefore concern the methods that researchers should use to establish the particular disciplines within which they work, and philosophy does not seek to lecture them. But neither does it want to learn from them. It wants to clarify the activity of the mind, whatever form it may take and whatever method it may deem appropriate to achieve its objectives. From the scientist, that is, from the one in whom the mind is active, philosophy takes evidence, not lessons; and in return it tries to give him guidance (which he may not even need), again not lessons. Each learns what he has to learn from his own craft, and if one's craft is to think about the crafts of others, it does not mean that the first, the philosopher, is superfluous or that the others, the scientists, are useless.

That the world of knowledge is as the spirit makes it to be, and that within this world, facts bear witness more to the powers and measure of the spirit than to the secret virtues of the outside world, is something that concerns only the philosopher. The scientific researcher is free to believe in the fact whose explanation he seeks; he is free to make an idol of it, just as he is free to deify the law that accounts for a fact or a whole series of facts. The philosopher, on the other hand, will know that this is nothing more than a mistake — fortunately without consequences — of perspective. In matters of knowledge,

through the idolatry we display, we are perhaps reviving the primitive states of humanity — and the philosopher will not be slow to notice this. We are still, in the words of positivism, in the theological phase. Positivism itself seems to be, in this respect, in the theological phase, because it hypostasises laws and believes in their absolute reality.

But philosophy must know something else. That in the act of knowing, it is not only the process of acquiring — willingly or unwillingly — certainties that is consumed; but something more than that is at stake: it is perhaps a chapter in the destiny of human knowledge; a destiny that is not to appear in a ready-made world, which his mind can record, admire and leave behind as he found it; but to participate in the unceasing making of the world, to enrich it, if he cannot make it anew, to alter it, if he cannot enrich it. And here let us listen to the poet. Schiller writes:

To repeat, it is true, the intellect is capable of
repeating what has been before,
What nature has built, it builds in its wake. Reason
builds above nature, but only in a vacuum. Only you,
genius, increase nature within nature.

To enhance nature within nature. To enhance nature, not just to record it.
What more beautiful destiny of knowledge could be prescribed for man?

INDIVIDUAL AND ENHANCED KNOWLEDGE

If, moving now from conscious awareness to lived experience, you think about it a little more carefully, you will realise that modern man can feel nothing but hostility towards the sciences of our time. So much science and knowledge, piled up on top of each other. How can you make sense of it all, how can you get to the end of it and, above all, how can you see beyond it? Ask someone today what a particular science is about, for example physics. He will take you to a good specialist library, show you a whole shelf of treatises and answer: Physics means all these detailed treatises plus those that have not yet been written, concerning discoveries that have not yet been made!

The answer may be slightly different, but we feel that, ultimately, this is how things are. Physics, just like any other science, appears to modern man as a collection of hard-won teachings, some certain, others rather approximate, but as solid as possible, classified, arranged and recorded in works, which you only have to study in order to understand what that science is all about. All you have to do is study them — but that is just a way of speaking. For the number of treatises is great, and the teachings contained in them are foreign to you, outside your spirit, just as everything that appears ready-made is outside it.

Modern man feels strongly that scientific truths pre-exist him. They are recorded on certain tables — one cannot help thinking of the tables of the empiricists — where each truth sits quietly in its place, like words in a dictionary, waiting to be found and used by those who happen to need it. Do our sciences, as we usually see them, not represent chapters in a dictionary? Is not the ideal of scientific positivism the compilation of an encyclopaedia of truths?

If truths gave modern man the impression that they pre-existed him only in the sense that they were recorded somewhere in treatises prior to his research, this would still have no significant consequences. After all, this would only represent a serious saving of time, and nothing delights us more than saving time and intelligence, accompanied by an increase in human power. But modern consciousness seems to believe that truths pre-exist in another, more serious sense: that they are inscribed in reality itself, whose laws we merely come to reveal. The sciences would therefore be outside of man, since their truths pre-exist within reality itself. Science—according to this belief mentioned above—would mean nothing more than the revelation of the mechanism of nature itself, a mechanism that certainly does not seem to pre-exist the mind of the researcher, since the nature being researched is also assumed by him to pre-exist. Nature itself is a dictionary, claims modern man; if you grasp its key, then you can unravel the mysteries of the world, mysteries that are nothing other than its order. Knowing something of these rules today, do not imagine that you know them all. The moral of today's man seems to be: get to work, because, apart from what you have discovered, there are many others that you have not yet discovered. Truths are waiting to be brought to light. They wait for you, sometimes hiding from your search, sometimes coming your way, but always surprising you with what is unexpected in them.

How can modern man not be hostile to such sciences? These truths that pre-exist — both in the sense that they are found, in part, ready-made in those imposing and numerous treatises, and in the sense that, for the rest, they can be found in the bosom of nature, that nature which never ceases to amaze us — represent a cold world, a rigid and objective world. Everything is foreign to consciousness, which, overwhelmed by so much novelty, can no longer find itself anywhere. Humiliated and never satisfied, such is modern man. Humiliated, because all this science, which he did not create, but only encountered, surpasses him; unsatisfied because, imagining himself to have reached the end of established sciences, he suspects something else beyond them. Everything is designed to intimidate him; even more

moreover, to worry him. For could not a deeply disturbing, unexpectedly serious truth suddenly emerge? How do we know that the truths we have not yet revealed are as innocent as those we have revealed? Who can say what awaits us, what tragic truth, what new meaning that will cast a wave of light, but also one of panic, over our minds, which until then had been numb? And are we, modern people, when we look at science in the above way, not exactly like the inhabitants of Plato's cave, but with something even more tragic than them awaiting us: not remaining in the darkness full of meaning for the rest of our lives, but quite the opposite, the prospect of coming out into the light, only to see that our interpretation of shadows was too comfortable and too pleasant compared to the frightening meaning that awaits us once we step outside?

The feeling that anything is possible, both practically and theoretically, still characterises, in most cases, the attitude of modern man towards science. In practical terms, it does not seem impossible for us to achieve the most extraordinary inventions; have we not already succeeded in a few? No one prevents modern man from imagining, like a new Jules Verne, all possible inventions: cities suspended in the air, communication with Mars, or the capture of a huge amount of electrical energy in a single seed, manoeuvrable by man. All these are to the glory of man and prove, at first glance, the mastery he has gained over nature. But they tend to turn against man — the process is too well known to dwell on — and then seem to prove his weakness. Creation rises up against the creator — as all historians of today's civilisation, led by Spengler, note. Man's momentary feeling of power turns into a feeling of terror. Everything is possible, that is, the most terrifying invention, the most astonishing killing machine. Wasn't dynamite invented, weren't toxic gases discovered? Doesn't technology as a whole rise up against him? All that man can do is too little compared to what is unleashed against him. If it is glorious for him to sometimes be able to unleash unexpected energies, it is all the more humiliating for him to know that he is unable to control them completely and that it is possible for technology to stupefy him.

humiliating for him to know that he is unable to control them completely and that technology may enslave him. Who knows what else is in store? People today live in fear of the unexpected: they wait for it, feed it, believe in it, and are surprised when it does not occur daily, preparing them for a catastrophe more disturbing than any geological catastrophe, because it is more absurd and more human.

But in theoretical terms, the process of intimidating the modern conscience reaches its peak. Ultimately, inventions are meant to serve man, and even if they cause him concern about the future, they can, in most cases, only satisfy him in the present. It is quite humiliating for us not to know what technology has in store for us in the future, and often not to understand or defend ourselves very well with regard to what has been done so far. But practical science brings so much immediate comfort and well-being that you have to be very lucid to truly feel humiliated. It is wiser to close your eyes — and enjoy the benefits. Everything is possible, you tell yourself, so why not enjoy what you have now? But what about in theory? The quest for understanding has led to quite satisfactory results so far, since several comprehensive explanations have been found for natural phenomena. Others will be found, and our system of knowledge will be rounded out. But who knows what awaits us here? Will we not one day discover an absolute truth that threatens our moral being, just as no relative truth ever did?

Let us give a single example to illustrate the fear — hidden or open — under which the ordinary man of today lives when he looks at his theoretical science and its prospects. Let us suppose that the man we are talking about is still a Christian. He is a Christian, but he also believes in science, in its power to prove, in its capacity for progress. How many examples of this kind do you encounter in the nineteenth century, a century that is much less atheistic than it appears on the surface? And our Christian awaits clarification from science. Not in religious matters: here he has no need for the truths of science: but simply for understanding the phenomena of the universe.

the physical one. However, can science not also intervene in matters concerning the phenomena of the moral universe? Christians know this, and this is where their concern begins. What would he do, for example, if one day he found out, in the most positive way possible, that it is absurd to believe in the immortality of the soul? Most Christian philosophers had told him, however, that without the immortality of the soul, holy teaching loses much of its meaning. And how many debates there have been in the history of theology to secure this point of doctrine. Then, his own spiritual life would be shaken by such a scientific discovery. He knows he should not hesitate, since his faith must transcend the satisfaction of reward or the fear of punishment; but he cannot, humanly speaking, help but feel this way. Hence his fear that science will find a meaning to spiritual life that will eliminate survival.

And even more: what if the same almighty science decides, at some point, that there is not much point in talking about the soul either? Imagine a Christian who does not admit that the soul exists beyond the mechanism of nature; a Christian who believes that everything is embedded in the physical world and explained by it, so that it is superfluous to see anything in the moral world other than a superficial phenomenon or the crowning glory of the physical world. No, such a thing is unimaginable. And because he is still a good Christian, all his trust in science turns into fear: the fear that science will progress so much that it will destroy the foundations of his moral life. Isn't it terrible to live and harbour the thought that everything you hold dear could suddenly be destroyed by the discovery of a single meaning? And today's man lives in such terror. The meanings we do not know, the meanings we may finally come to know, are just as many dangers to our existence. How can you avoid them, since you yourself have created them? It is now too late to successfully fight science and all the evil it wants to bring you.

The world around us has organised itself, the reality outside our consciousness has taken on meaning, and all of this seems to impose itself on you as soon as you start looking for it. You could choose not to look for it, to close your eyes, to lie to yourself. But you, modern man, are honest. You

will not lie to yourself. You will let fear grow without measure. The more you feel alone, the more it will grow. And you are alone, since the world is foreign to you, since everything in it is set in stone. There is no need for you anymore. It is a terrible suffering to be alone, but this is your fate, a supernumerary being, brought into the world to take note of it and that is all. It is as if there is a conspiracy against you, things conspiring to confuse and isolate you. In the midst of this unfolding that you do not participate in, you know only one thing: that everything is possible. And if everything is possible, humble yourself and wait.

And all this for what? Because, perhaps, the fundamental question of knowledge is not being answered properly. Often we do not even ascend to such a question, but philosophise on the margins of it, presenting and unravelling everything that emerges from it and only that. And the question — to clarify the ideas in the previous chapter — is: if understanding means finding or assigning meanings.

Most people — and we must admit that they are often among those who do not even explicitly ask themselves the question — answer, consciously or unconsciously: to find. Some, more lucid, try to show that the answer is: neither to find meanings nor to assign them, but to choose (as if you could choose from anywhere other than the material found). Finally, the third group responds: to understand means both to find and to create meanings, since our mind uses, but also transforms, the material of knowledge, processing it.

The three attitudes do, however, have one thing in common: the recognition that the meanings we find, choose or process, whatever they may be, are ultimately the meanings of the world itself. The difference between the three positions may seem great, and indeed it is. The first presupposes a ready-made world, not only as reality, but also as meaning. The laws that operate within reality belong to reality. Those who do not look for them there will not find them at all; on the other hand, those who look for them there will find them in their entirety. According to this thesis, you would no longer need to wander the paths of reason in an effort to discover

truth. If you return to experience, you will find there everything you need to understand nature and its phenomena. — The second thesis also presupposes a world that is ready-made as reality, but no longer grants that its meanings can be taken exactly as they appear to us and in all their multiplicity. Our mind must intervene at least to the extent of weighing, assessing and choosing. You find meanings within reality, but you do not find everything you need there; or, more precisely, you find more than you need: all that remains, therefore, is to choose the criteria by which you accept or reject a meaning encountered in the outside world, and then the sciences will be constituted. Finally, the third thesis, stemming from a more developed critical spirit, believes that reality offers the mind only material, which it must know how to elevate to the rank of knowledge. Those who do not seek meanings within reality will not find them at all; but those who seek them there will not find them entirely, for there is a long way between experience and knowledge. And then — this thesis argues — is not experience itself permeated by certain rational elements? Do we experiment at random, or do we do so according to certain norms and with interests that belong only to our minds? This, then, is the extent to which it could be said that the meanings of reality are not entirely found within it, but are, in part, imposed by the human mind.

If, therefore, the three theses differ quite seriously from one another, the agreement on one point is all the more meaningful. We have seen that this agreement consists in affirming that, however they are acquired, meanings about reality end up giving an account of reality itself. Even if the positivists agree: consciousness does not find knowledge, but processes the material presented to it — once the laws of reality are determined, they do not believe any less that these laws are the laws of things. This conviction leads most people to accept as dogma the truths found in scientific treatises, because, according to them, these are not truths of

people, but of things. Therefore, once determined, they are presented to us ready-made in the treatises written so far.

And there are still treatises that have not yet been written! What sense would it make to think about them if it were not assumed that laws pre-exist the mind? And the three theses above believe this to be the case. The last two admit, perhaps, that there is no ready-made knowledge; but there is, they say, a ready-made world, whose meanings are or tend to be, in the last resort, any of the meanings of our mind.

So, does understanding mean finding, or at most rediscovering, meanings? But we have seen what state of mind such a conviction brings to modern man. It intimidates him at first, eventually paralysing him with the fear of the unexpected that it instils in his soul. And then, if the world is organised before our emergence, not only does it overwhelm us as an object of knowledge, but it also dominates us as an existence. Since all meanings are nature, we ourselves are nature. The only privilege we have, above other natural beings, is to know our place within it. Otherwise, our knowledge cannot lift us beyond nature, for it is itself nothing more than one of its forms of manifestation. We end up falling into a naturalism that is not at all conducive to human dignity. How insignificant is knowledge when it does not lift you out of nature, but integrates you into it; and how humiliating, when it does not dominate its object, but allows itself to be overwhelmed by it.

The act of knowing is said to be the noblest of human acts. Is it not precisely because, in the sense mentioned above, it enriches known nature? Is it not because, as we have said, instead of reproducing it, it carries it forward? And it would be too little to call it an act of reproduction; for it is not such either in the sense that it mirrors nature, giving us a faithful copy of it, nor in the sense that it perpetuates it, causing the seed of life to bear fruit from itself. An act of perpetuation does not enrich nature, but perfects it: it is still nature. Knowledge, in

, is our first freedom from nature. Is it not natural, then, that it should signify our very human dignity?

But man does not always enjoy freedom. He likes certain forms of subjugation, such as subjugation to objects. He feels better being dominated than dominating: at first out of comfort, then out of superstition. But what at first seemed to him the most prudent assumption turns against him, just like a reckless one. The world is foreign to him; even the science in other people's treatises is foreign to him. Obviously, he appropriates this science in a way, demonstrating its truths again. But he demonstrates on the inventions of others, on dead things, not on his own inventions. That is why his pedagogy is so unsatisfactory. When you look at the sciences as ready-made — and how widespread this way of looking at them is in the contemporary world — you forbid yourself any intellectual enthusiasm, any freedom. How can minds that have nothing left to say learn anything? With what impetus? With what interest? And little by little, man becomes subjugated to the object that commands and intimidates him. Faced with a world of ready-made realities and knowledge, a world that at first seemed comfortable to accept, man now feels fearful and anxious. Subjugation to the object began as a prejudice and ended up as a danger.

What is admirable about scientists is precisely that they are not intimidated by their science. You admire the idealism of the scientist, the conviction that he can take things from the beginning, that he can take them further, that he can enhance — not find or rediscover — truths. They are not positivists, although they often claim that their truths are those of things themselves (they do so in order to find an end to their thinking, which, in principle, should be endless). The positivist is the uncritical admirer, the one who believes that the sciences meet in reality or are detached from reality, not that they impose themselves on it.

The truly active scientist therefore testifies that understanding means putting rather than finding meanings. And with him, the positivist also begins to believe it.

philosopher. How reassuring such a conviction is, but at the same time how heavy a responsibility! It is reassuring first of all because it removes fear, it removes that "everything is possible" from the theoretical plane, at least, if not from the practical one. Not everything is possible, but only what is within us or, rather, what we are capable of achieving. If there is a danger, then it is not that of surprising ourselves with who knows what ruinous meaning, but the danger of not prescribing enough to things and to ourselves, so that our gesture is elevated to the rank of ethics and our assumption to that of legal knowledge. But what is truly reassuring is that, through this new way of seeing things, we achieve a reconciliation between man and his knowledge. Now we are no longer detached from science; it is no longer foreign to us, because it appears ready-made, it no longer pre-exists us. A feeling of familiarity connects us to them: a certain intimacy. And doesn't this give rise to a new pedagogy? Stop being hostile to science, because it no longer overwhelms you; regard them as your own wisdom, unfolded and, above all, unfolding — this is a way of teaching that is not always the one used today and that would be useful precisely today, when human knowledge seems to be completely out of proportion to human consciousness.

Knowledge is, however, commensurate with our consciousness; and it is precisely from this that its responsibilities arise. If understanding means assigning meanings, nothing authorises us to believe that we can arbitrarily assign our own meanings. On the contrary, we must assign those meanings that could be assigned by any consciousness faced with the problems that everyone is now facing. And this is precisely what we have seen means objectivity.

What is anarchic here? And yet there is talk of anarchy. It is said: how is it possible for my own consciousness to prescribe laws to the world? How is it possible for truth to be relative to man, science to consciousness, the cosmos to the individual? Are we not falling into the most anarchic of individualisms possible, and is this not the anarchy of the modern world, an anarchy that

begins with Descartes' consciousness and ends with Kant's idealism?

But the sin of the modern spirit is not that it listens too much to its philosophers. Some would say that it does not listen enough. The objection of anarchic individualism unjustly troubles the conscience of modern man. In fact, he should not even take it into account: for no one serves the ideal of universality better than precisely those who strive to give meaning, not to find it. His norm is objectivity, and through this no one avoids anarchy more than he does. Was this not the case — to give the best-known example — at the beginning of the seventeenth century? The world was then emerging from the domination of scholasticism. Aristotle was no longer an authority, Christian dogmas no longer dominated philosophy. What an incomparable opportunity for anarchy! How could the human mind not be intoxicated by a freedom that was now complete! And yet man did not deceive himself. Instead of wandering in the world of arbitrariness, instead of sinning through subjectivity, the man of the seventeenth century — Descartes or another — set out to investigate whether he could prescribe a method for himself. Left alone, therefore, man seeks methods. Instead of blindly accepting authority, he seeks rules that he can critically impose on himself. Instead of dogmatism, he seeks elements of objectivity within himself. Does this mean anarchy? Perhaps. The anarchy of introducing laws where superstition previously reigned; the anarchy of seeking and weighing what others believe to be ready-made.

There can be no anarchy where responsibility awakens. And the doctrine that believes that understanding means awakening meanings in our minds brings with it a serious responsibility: only those meanings that satisfy the conditions of objectivity should be awakened. Subjectivity is — as philosophical idealism shows — the bearer of objectivity. It is true that the question that remains unanswered within realism, namely: what is the criterion of truth? could also be asked here. For, let us admit it, there is no perfect criterion of objectivity. You cannot know for sure whether a piece of knowledge is entirely objective or not, just as you could not know whether it

is entirely true. A scientific theory that presents certain characteristics of objectivity may prove to be insufficient, not wrong, and then new meanings must be brought in, which encompass the old ones and give them a greater appearance of objectivity, without perhaps even now achieving perfect objectivity, which remains an ideal.

But, compared to the doctrine of truth, that of objectivity has at least three features of superiority. First, it does not believe in any kind of ready-made things. For the doctrine of objectivity, unlike that of truth, there are no ready-made laws functioning within reality that the intellect can determine and appropriate. For it, there is no ready-made knowledge, no ready-made world. Everything is elaborated, knowledge about the world is increasingly refined, and with it, the world itself. Our knowledge of the world enhances it, in the sense that it gives it structure, imposes balance on it, configures it; in a word, it makes it what it is: the world. Secondly, objectivity surpasses truth in that it has at least a norm, even if it does not have a universally applicable criterion. It is the norm given to it by its prototype, mathematical knowledge. Objectivity has an ideal: the realisation of the mathematical type of knowledge. The doctrine of truth has only one prescription: the adequacy between an intellect, whose virtues of transcendence we do not know, and a thing, which we never know what it is.

What is the norm of truth, and according to what prototype is it corrected? Will it be said, somehow, that it is still according to mathematics? But then it must be admitted that the adequacy between intellect and object succeeds only when the object is the creation of the intellect, as in mathematics. And why should the intellect be asked to find meanings rather than to create them — as objectivity does in its effort to give an account of the spirit of the "world" — since only in the latter case was success complete? Because it therefore knows what it wants, that is, to be mathematical, thus learning from the prototype how to correct itself

in its unfolding, the doctrine of objectivity also knows what it must prescribe. The doctrinaires of truth are far from knowing this much. — Finally, to the extent that one can speak of a criterion of objectivity, it still has a superiority over that of truth: however difficult the former may be to achieve, it is still a human criterion. Can the same be said of the latter?

To speak of anarchy where there is method and where objectivity is sought is a joke. The ideal of objectivity disciplines the intellect in an appropriate manner. Its power goes so far that a philosopher rightly said that if a geometer found in a dream a new proof of one of his propositions, the proof would be no less true (i.e., objective). Even in dreams, therefore, objectivity triumphs: psychological conditions are no longer relevant in its case; they are overcome, even if an objective statement will never be an "objective" truth, that is, something external to consciousness. For — and now this is better understood — it is only by restricting oneself to subjectivity that a certain degree of objectivity is achieved. If the mathematician is always right, it is because he restricts himself to certain rules, which are the rules of his game.

That is precisely why he proves nothing, except that his game can be played, that is, his interpretation succeeds. And that is a lot, even if it does not lead to other gains. We always want to gain something else. But how can you transcend if you have made it a rule not to exceed your consciousness? How can you "discover" when all you do is "put"? A child who performs an addition correctly, says Descartes, knows everything the human mind can learn in this matter. Let us admit that there are a few more things to be learned on the margins of the addition operation: you will never learn more than what the game you have set yourself allows, that is, pure mathematics.

Because the intellect sets its own agenda, prescribes its own rules, and assigns itself the meanings it needs to solve its problems concerning the "world," it is responsible for all human knowledge. It is a responsibility.

difficult, but not something to worry about: it is commensurate with our consciousness, it is within the capacity of our spirit. However, if until now man was threatened by the loneliness that troubled modern people, loneliness in the face of science and the world, the inability to dominate, subjugation to the object — now a new loneliness awaits him, a powerful one, of the intellect that elaborates and unravels. How difficult it is to see yourself as the bearer of such an intellect! When you integrate yourself into a world, into a pre-established order, when you accept it as pre-existing, with its sciences and truths, you relieve yourself of the heaviest burden: that of finding the elements of universality within yourself; for it seems to you that you have them, since you belong to an ecumenical community. But when you detach yourself from the world, from prejudice, from the object, only then does responsibility begin. You must discover yourself as the bearer of valid meanings, and only then will you find not the object — for you can always do without it — but the world, the world you cannot do without at all, because you have its "substance" with substance within you.

There are therefore two kinds of loneliness: one through poverty, worry, fear; the other through strength, methodical will, activity. The man who carries the whole world with him is also alone; but in his loneliness, he carries the whole world with him.

— And all these things could be given a theological interpretation. We might ask ourselves: do things have meaning, or do we give them meaning? If they have meaning in themselves, then God had to create the world piece by piece, in order to signify, through each part of the world, everything that has meaning today. If not, then he only had to create a single being: the one who gives meaning. And isn't the great meaning of the world, as the philosopher said, precisely to have in its midst this being capable of giving it purpose and, ultimately, of being its purpose after giving it form and meaning?

Do not forget that God sent you into the world to replace him: to give meaning, to create, to carry on his work. Make sure you do not waste your time.

THE TYRANNY OF ANONYMOUS POWERS

What has saved or is about to save contemporary man is this sense of responsibility which, little by little, philosophy has managed to awaken in him alongside his scientific attitude. Until now, nothing had been able to truly calm the individual conscience regarding its insignificance in the world, except for the anthropological character of Christianity, which I mentioned above. But Christianity is for the soul, not for the mind; and whenever the mind, freeing itself from the soul, sought to penetrate through itself and explain the world, it only saw its own limitations.

It is true that, at one point, through the impetus of the Renaissance, individual consciousness regained its self-confidence. This marked the beginning of a period of great scientific and philosophical concepts on the one hand, and humanistic individualism on the other. The intellect believes that it knows, or at least that it can know; it proclaims progress, extols its own "lights", but at the same time wisely uses experience and thus manages to constitute a whole universe of science. But, as always happens with presumptuous creators, creation unfolds more and more and more on its own, so that, in the end, it rises, through its immensity and seemingly perfect organisation, even against its creator. Then the intellect can only be intimidated by the autonomy that his work acquires. This phenomenon occurred especially with the scientific development brought about by the nineteenth century, which caused the mind to attribute scientific work not to its own creative power, as it had been told at the beginning, but to the cosmic order, an order that imposed itself with all its determination. The man of the nineteenth century was, in essence, one who lived in a state of alarm.

It is from this state that philosophy, on the margins of today's science, seeks to rescue him, through the sense of responsibility it reawakens in him. Reflecting on the meaning of more

broad — because that is all he is capable of grasping, and perhaps that is all he needs — what emerges from the work of the scientist, the philosopher today believes himself to be able, or should, if he does not want to lag too far behind the scientist in terms of mentality, believe himself capable of asserting that, in a certain sense and only for the sake of argument, the scientist can be regarded as an idealist. Admittedly, the latter is not always pleased with the titles bestowed upon him. But the philosopher is careful not to argue with him, because he risks being overwhelmed by a wave of details that are always intimidating, even if they are only sometimes convincing — but still with those in the philosophical world. And to them he will emphasise the most interesting feature of the new scientific orientation: the fact, often highlighted but necessary to remember, that being is no longer the domain of physics, of a science of nature, in general terms. For some time now, being has been completely replaced by knowing.

One can therefore speak of a primacy of knowing. This means nothing other than that being no longer interests the contemporary mind, or at least no longer interests it in the same way as before. Substances have dissolved and consciousness no longer lives under the pressure of external reality. There is no question that being means anything anymore. But it does not represent something "of the world"; it no longer has a sense of exteriority. Being is no longer the domain of physics, simply because physics studies the so-called outside world. And the outside world is, in fact, as the mind conceives it, an elaboration of our scientific consciousness, if not — as some philosophers today would have it — of our psychological consciousness. The sky is no longer there precisely because it was the representative par excellence of exteriority.

a) Philosophy of consciousness and philosophy of existence

But this is the philosophy of consciousness! exclaimed the expert in philosophy. Hasn't he done away with the philosophy of existence? Undoubtedly, to a certain extent,

it is the philosophy of consciousness. In any case, it uses elements of such a philosophy and often rises to the level of Kant. On the other hand, however, it is not appropriate to dismiss a philosophy of consciousness as it has been constituted or could be constituted today, with arguments that only concern yesterday's conceptions. And the fact that certain representatives of the philosophy of existence proceed in this way only proves that they are afraid to look things in the face.

The idealism that is most often contested is a certain orientation towards the subject, initiated by the Renaissance, passed down through the seventeenth century and fundamentally reworked by Kant, an orientation that is viewed especially in the guise it took in German Romantic philosophy. Fichte and Hegel are most often targeted, even if not explicitly. And the doctrines that are contested are attributed to a general philosophy of consciousness, when in fact it is only the theses of these two that are most often at issue. Thus, the philosophy of consciousness is attributed with the assertion of consciousness as an "original existence" — which would mean that existence, which is denied to the outside world by the human spirit, is attributed to it in an absolute way; it is also attributed with the noble property of giving "eternal norms," consciousness being at the same time a seeker of "absolute" truths; such a consciousness would arrogantly prescribe for itself "absolute autonomy," thanks to which man would be something in and for himself; and life would break down into singular existences, into consciousnesses that would know only themselves, which would be solipsistic; finally — and this is not the last rebuke — it is claimed that such a philosophy of consciousness is incapable of deepening man's destiny and that, in particular, it cannot justify the essential fact of his spiritual activity, namely the existence of sin.

What is true in all this? Very little, if anything at all. It is true that these doctrines are found or can be deduced from the thinking of certain philosophers. But it is not at all true that they constitute the body of doctrines indispensable to an authentic philosophy of consciousness, and it is not at all true that a philosophy today

Consciousness would be obliged to reaffirm such theses. It is not necessary, for example, that existence, which refuses the external world, should return to consciousness in such a way that we can hypostasise it. On the contrary, the philosophy of consciousness does nothing but fight against any absolute, remove the prejudice of the world and of ready-made things, raising everything to the rank of a problem. That is why it will provide norms for raising its questions, but in no case eternal norms, as are attributed to it; and as for absolute truth, it is doubtful that it will set out to seek it, when it has contributed so much to its abolition. That, within this philosophy, consciousness attributes a certain autonomy to itself is true insofar as without it it could not pose its questions; but what would compel it to make more of its autonomy than it had intended? Autonomy cannot be an absolute manifestation, but a simple methodical attempt to build a body of legitimate (but by no means definitive) knowledge. And such a method, even if it initially isolates the thinking consciousness, does so deliberately, through a deliberate reduction — do not the reduction made by Cartesian doubt or the reduction of phenomenology also isolate? — and it too, just like in Cartesianism or phenomenology, must know how to find its way back, a path that will this time properly establish the universe of knowledge. Nothing is more absurd than the accusation that it leads to solipsism. It is true that Fichte seems to have fallen into this trap. But the philosophy of consciousness is designed precisely to rediscover the so-called outside world, precisely to give a better foundation to the relationship between consciousness and the world. And the accusation of solipsism now turns against those who are not on the side of a philosophy of consciousness. For if they, as they boast, are not alone in the world because they admit an infinity of other external existences, they are alone in the face of the world. They only know that they woke up in this world, about which they can only give an account in percentages. That is how much they know about what the world is. And what they know and what they do not know surrounds them, envelops them, and is in them.

They are imprisoned. That they are not alone? They are imprisoned in the midst of the world, and that is worse than if they were alone.

Here — not to mention the solution to the problem of sin, which will be discussed at length below — is the unjust struggle that is sometimes waged against the philosophy of consciousness in the name of the philosophy of existence. The latter, in a word, draws the attention of the former to the fact that it has no right, in the way it has been constituted, to investigate the foundations of human existence; and the philosophy of consciousness rightly replies that it does not even intend to do so and that it investigates only the foundations of human knowledge. If existential philosophy is capable of reaching the first foundations, those of existence, so much the better. But it is very unlikely that it is capable of reaching the others, so it is unwise to prohibit too much when it can do so little itself. It must be admitted, of course, that in its romantic form, the philosophy of consciousness attempts to penetrate the existential plane. But no one today is responsible for the romantic forms of philosophy, and as far as intervention in the plane of existence is concerned, its meaning could at best be ethical. For — let us say it now — it is likely that the way you know reality is not entirely without influence on the way you behave in it. And is it indifferent to the individual, for example, whether the sky is something or nothing in the world of substances?

But all this takes place under the assumption that there are still substances, that there is still a meaning to being alongside knowledge. And a certain meaning does indeed remain: it is the meaning of interiority. What until now seemed to exist was the outside world, things, spaces and their population. But the factor of dissolution for realities, which is the intellect, has gradually penetrated the regions outside itself, transfigured them, mathematised them and made them no longer "be" except perhaps what "being" represents in a problem. Exteriority no longer exists for the intellect, but becomes — in terms of a problem or a system of problems that have managed to encircle it, and even more, to define it, to call it to the other, insubstantial form of existence, of

epistemological certainty replacing metaphysical reality. Exteriority does not exist; it was merely made possible by the intellect. Instead, "being" has conquered the world of interiority, where it asserts itself with increased vigour. But here the question is posed in different terms than when existence still had meaning for the external world. Here, we do not investigate what the subjects different from existence are, what their intimate nature is, what we have called their esteem consists of; but we consider the fact of existence in man — this philosophy, called existential, is often anthropological — within its limits, in its drama, in its participation, in its deep meaning, in its justification. Suffering is. Marginalisation, in the positive sense and not in the sense of being marginalised by something, is also. It is highly significant that the philosophy of existence does not usually bring thought closer to scientific thinking, but it is very often able to lead to theology, to new and disturbing forms of theological thinking. And only those who do not understand the orientation of today's thinking continue to believe that theology is an outdated discipline!

Up to this point, existential philosophy seems entirely justified. It represented a serious opposition to the abuses of the philosophy of consciousness and succeeded in recapturing entire areas of human spirituality, areas in which the analytical mentality of the scientist and the reflective mentality of the ordinary philosopher were not well prepared for exploration. The world of the spirit was thus able to come to light. A world beyond that of the soul and which is still something other than the world of thought — in order to preserve the distinctions made by some. But when it tries to render other types of philosophy useless, to which it can only be complementary, the philosophy of existence begins to want too much. And likewise when it authorises, directly or indirectly, a certain return to that naturalistic attitude, which rightly seemed to have been left behind by contemporary thought.

Indeed, man viewed as an existence, and moreover as a limited one and existing in time, seems to be a being belonging to a certain order. That was enough for the realist.

— And does not every individual harbour a realist within themselves? Is not the scientist, as several authoritative commentators have pointed out, idealistic in fact and realistic in doctrine?

— So that his old theses might be revived. The naturalist thesis, in particular, seemed to have regained all its rights. Man once again had the feeling that he was part of nature, that, because he belonged to a certain order, he was explained, made, manipulated, and no longer gave account of things. The feeling of belonging, of rotating with the cosmos, of fatality, of irresponsibility, overwhelmed him once again. What does his existence mean in the face of the great Existence? And what do his powers represent in the face of the overwhelming anonymous powers that are placed before him by that same Existence? The obsessions worthy of the Pythagorean man, who could only contemplate and hear, overwhelm him; even the obsessions of the Aristotelian man are reawakened in him (indeed, Catholicism never ceases to preach them through Thomism and Neothomism), causing his individual consciousness to settle on a certain rung of the worldly hierarchy and to know that it will remain there forever.

In order to properly confront this resurgence of naturalism, it is appropriate to bring to light, from the body of prejudices that are capable of clouding and even disturbing the mind, those that seem, more than any others, to be active. Let us review some of the anonymous forces that are usually opposed to individual consciousness and tend to obscure and diminish it. In other words, let us shed light on some of the reasons, perhaps the main ones, why contemporary man continues to feel an inferiority complex — so to speak

— in front of his world; through which, therefore, he continues to feel paralysed. For is not mistrust the gravest sin in today's world? Those who trust themselves do not live on the surface, do not take existence lightly, do not mock things too much out of fear of them, as contemporary man feels deep down. Nietzsche said that beautiful thing, known to everyone, that the Greeks tended towards harmony and Apollonianism precisely because their tragic, Dionysian background disturbed them too deeply. The tragic background

has remained; perhaps it is even more pronounced through everything that is "Faustian" in contemporary man; but the ability to overcome it, to reach the Apollonian, has weakened instead of growing. Our capacity for the Apollonian stops at caricature and cartoon, the two great arts of contemporary times!

b) The cosmos as an anonymous power

The first impulse to feel something that could be called an inferiority complex in the face of the world was given to the modern consciousness by the increasingly astonished contemplation of the astronomical worlds. The above analyses of exteriority might allow us to easily overlook the emotional resonance of this contemplation. But if today's epistemology seems to us to be idealistic, the mentality of old realism has not yet been completely replaced; and nothing can be more fruitful in combating such a mentality than highlighting it, with all its instinctive but also prejudiced aspects. Therefore, Pascal's feeling of emotion in the face of infinite spaces is still present in each of us. Perhaps it is even more meaningful, because we are more knowledgeable astronomers than Pascal, and everything we have learned in this field has only served to fuel our amazement.

Only the figures, and how astonishing they are, how deliberately crafted, as if to intimidate. Any popular science book is, by its very nature, capable of deeply disturbing our modest individual consciousness. Doesn't even Kant, the father of idealism, as he is sometimes called, feel disturbed by the spectacle of the starry sky? And the popular science book you open begins, by a coincidence destined to disturb you even more, with the classic spectacle of the starry sky. On a clear, moonless night, it says, a good eye can see not quite countless stars, as the mind sometimes imagines, but in any case close to three thousand. In itself, the number may not seem large, but the idea of three thousand stars, many of which

could be home to living beings, just like this being that allows the present mind to rise to such heights (but even Plato said: do not elevate the spirit by contemplating those "above", but only by looking at them in a noble light), was bound to have a powerful emotional impact.

Let us now admit that the individual still has the pride to claim that he is not overwhelmed by all this immensity. What will astronomy tell him? It will show him that those three thousand stars are only those visible to the naked eye and that, according to some researchers, the total number of stars in the galactic system amounts to 300,000 million. Enough, isn't it? Except that, for the astronomer, even this figure is not the final one; he insists on knowing that, outside the galactic system, there are millions of other stars, whose exact number has not yet been counted. And the game of numbers can continue. Does the individual consciousness want to know the dimensions of the universe in which it claims to be something? Then let it learn that the diameter of the galactic system is 220,000 light-years — because our kilometres have now become insignificant. In fact, this is not the largest number in the astronomical universe. Today, it seems that we are talking about distances hundreds of times greater, and no further than the radius of Einsteinian space, which is estimated at 84 billion light years, of which it is good to know that our telescopes can barely see a hundred and forty million light years. And finally — because individual consciousness feels its existence in time — the mind wonders: how old is the solar system? It is, replies the astronomer, about two thousand million years old, which is quite a long time compared to humans, who are said to have existed for only about three hundred thousand years, but quite short compared to the age of other stars, which is up to five trillion years.

Finally, individual consciousness now feels overwhelmed. Or not yet? Does it still claim that, if man is not a privileged being due to the proportions of the globe on which he lives and his uniqueness, he is privileged due to the place he occupies in the universe? Then the answer is already formulated in astronomy books. On

the question of what man's place in the universe is, the first solution — we are told — was that of Ptolemy: at the centre. This is what all of Antiquity believed, and this is what the Church liked to think, since it believes so much in man and affirms that the Son of God became incarnate to save man on earth. It was difficult to impose Galileo's thesis, which stated that man's place is not at the centre of the universe, but in one of the countless corpuscles revolving around a central sun. And the nineteenth century, which liked to be excessive in everything, completed the picture: not even the sun is central; there are millions of stars in the sky, each like our sun, surrounded by planets, on whose surface there may be life. Although twentieth-century science has somewhat softened the assertion of scientists from the previous century — life is a very rare accident, they say today — this does not change much in the astronomer's response to the above claim. And the answer is that human beings do not stand at the centre of the universe, but far away, on its periphery. If it needed this title of inferiority, it did not take long to get it.

There is something curious, however, when you speak as the astronomer does with the above thoughts. The notions of centre and periphery all fit into an image of the mind, an image without which they would be nothing. In a sense, the immensity of space is reduced to the "mensility" of the senses. To view the Earth as a globe means to view it as a visible globe, revolving around another visible globe, the sun. To imagine the universe therefore means, in a certain sense, to reduce it to the measure of the senses, since we need to figure it out. What else could be hidden under the expression "to imagine"?

And, in fact, one wonders if all this makes any sense. Then it would make sense to say that the deeper space is considered to be, the stronger human consciousness is, rather than diminished. The infinity of space should, on the one hand, overwhelm us, but on the other hand, give us a sense of our own greatness. This is what Pascal felt, to a certain extent, as the dualism between the cosmic and human orders both repelled and excited him. But can the greatness or smallness of man be a subject for

meditation, other than a lyrical one, the fact of human greatness or smallness? Because, taking things a step further, you might be able to ask yourself: are we "small" in relation to whom or what? In relation to the mass of matter? In relation to nebulae? In relation to the void? What if we were fifty times, five thousand times larger? What curious frog-like ambitions...

No matter how tiny modern man may feel, with his globe or without, in the face of the infinity of astronomical space, he cannot help but feel one thing: that, although limited, Aristotle's spheres were more oppressive. In today's scientific universe, we may feel freer and more creative than in the scientific universe of antiquity. The new vision of the sky seems to give man a new freedom. Aristotle's man was paralysed in a closed universe. Today's man is or could be master of himself in a world without a frame or with Einstein's immense frame (even with a radius of 84,000 million light years). Or, in any case: Aristotelian man knew that between himself and the universe of which he was a part, there was a common measure; today's man could set aside this prejudice.

In short, our contemporary might feel that he is not nature (in the sense of an external "being": belonging to, being part of). He might think of his relationship with the rest in terms other than quantitative, other than as a tiny part of an infinite whole; they could further conceive that they are not placed in a hierarchy, where the matter of which individuals on a higher level are composed is of a nobler nature than their own constituent matter, as Aristotelianism believes; and, finally, they could leave the field of spatiality and no longer think about the fact that they have a certain place in the world.

But what would happen if — to forestall the objection of the naturalist thesis — the consciousness of contemporary man were one day to register a fact of such a nature as to show him that he occupies, without question, a certain place in the astronomical world? What would happen, for example, if, as has long been suspected and perhaps still is, another planet were discovered

another planet living beings and rational living beings with whom we could communicate and whose existence would therefore make us truly aware of the specific place we occupy in space? For then we would indeed have such a place, at least in relation to the planet in question. And having a place, as well as the awareness of a place, we would feel part of a whole, nature.

But a simple question: how would we realise the existence and rationality of others, how could we communicate with each other? Through certain formulas, wouldn't you say? — which are certain truths. It has thus been proposed that, in such a case, communication should be achieved by illuminating a huge figure representing the square of the hypotenuse, the well-known fact that the square constructed on a hypotenuse is equivalent to the sum of the squares constructed on the cathetus. If beings from other planets are rational, they will have to understand the truth symbolised by our figure. But then we are entitled to ask ourselves: what is more interesting, the place or the idea? Our place, that of each of us on the planet, or the great common place, "truth," in which we all find ourselves, creators and all, consciousnesses from beyond the world?

And so, suddenly, it became clear that consciousness cannot be located in nature, as part of nature. It has no place there, because it does not belong to that world. Some even say that, in a sense of knowledge, it is consciousness itself that makes nature possible. How, then, could it be found there? Astronomy can bring forth any number of figures to intimidate individual consciousness — and the figures will be very instructive in themselves, but they will only intimidate those who do not want to defend themselves; astronomy can push consciousness as far as it likes to the periphery: none of this can humiliate or diminish individual consciousness in its own eyes, because it knows that only quantities can be diminished, and it is not a quantity. In its own way, it is not, it is only for itself — so that nothing can humiliate it, except its own misunderstandings, its own wrongful exercise.

Man should not be troubled by astronomical worlds, and he should not feel inferior in their presence. He is not inferior in relation to anything else, since there is no common measure between him and anything else. He is inferior in relation to himself when he does not stand so high on the steps of lucidity that he can have an adequate self-awareness.

c) History as an anonymous power

On another level, less cosmic than the astronomical conception of nature, the anonymous power of history attempts to intimidate individual consciousness. What am I in the face of the world? (whose answer has been seen to be: I am myself and the world is the world, that is, I am myself and the world is known) is a question that corresponds exactly to: what am I in the face of history? As in the face of infinite spaces, the individual is tempted here by an inferiority complex. And, just as he felt like a simple term in the natural order, he now feels like one in the historical order. And the feeling of historicity does not seem designed to increase man's confidence in himself, or possibly in his mission; most of the time it makes you lucid about certain futilities, such as trying to rise above the wave that carries you or wanting something other than what the obscure powers within you want. The only role that the individual feels he has in the face of these powers is to watch them unfold towards what seems to him to be, along with him, their end, their constitution into a cycle. More than any other order, the historical one will give the feeling of fulfilment, of the end, which will ultimately relieve the individual of the burden of thinking and wanting the future.

Integrated into the historical order, the individual cannot explain anything; he is explained, as he was, on another plane, and in the natural order. There are "laws" above our heads that make us what we are. Without wanting to, without having any power against it, it seems appropriate to this mentality — a certain historical destiny

to its purposes, which thereby become our own purposes. And what are historical laws? They are simple regularities of the past, sanctified by antiquity and by a constant recurrence. We derive them from the past and confirm them there, for the only subject matter of history seems to be the past. At its end, as we find ourselves, history usually presents itself as a well-knit, well-articulated whole, with full meanings that are not slow to reveal themselves to the researcher. What was becoming, the struggle between two or more possibilities, the search, the anxiety, has been lost. All that remains is the broad outline, its steady course, which comes towards us with such relentlessness that we no longer even wonder whether or not we should attempt a gesture of resistance. It seems to us that we are — to use the word spoken in such circumstances — truly objects of history.

How can we be subjects of history if we only look at the past? With this philological mentality, as Ortega y Gasset calls the mentality of historians, always looking to the past, doing the etymology of facts, we condemn ourselves to sterility, since we cannot explain the past in a vivid way, it is no longer within our purview — even if we admit that it, in turn, does not explain exactly how we are. But why should it be true that history must point to the past? It is worth dwelling a little on the poor understanding of history that its study gives you. Instead of the past being a way of seeing, sensing, and wanting the future, it is a constant denial, a constant darkening of it. For all minds, the world of the past is something, while the future is almost nothing. And instead of enlivening and increasing the powers of the individual, the past weighs heavily and depresses, giving that feeling of the end that so often disturbs our conscience. Our usual historical feeling is that of possessing an immensity of past and a doubtful future.

But we could represent the historical flow of time differently than through the immensity of the concrete and colourful past, in the face of a pale and uncertain future. We could use, for example, the representation on a straight line of algebraic numbers. E

The same, the wealth of negative numbers on my left, as the wealth of positive numbers on my right. The only difference between history and algebra is that in the former I can no longer operate with negative numbers. The past does not mean the events I know, as opposed to those I do not yet know, those of the future; in fact, I do not know even those of the past well enough, but often construct them; we only know what is. Instead, it means the events that I can no longer control, in which there is no point in trying to be an agent, while the other field belongs entirely to me.

Our historical vision is therefore asymmetrical. And not only in its meaning, that is, in the very fact that it has a meaning, but also in the imbalance between the past and the future. In a symmetrical view of history, which might be the appropriate one, we would realise that there are as many seeds of life in the world as there are lifeless things. In a certain sense, therefore, the world should appear to us to be growing through its own death in direct proportion to it. As what is on our left, in the negative field, grows, so does what is on our right. If the imagination of today's man were freed from the obsession with the past, then the history of self-conscious humanity should last as long as the past, that is, say, another six or seven thousand years. And for those of that time, twice as long. Far from giving us a sense of the end, a well-understood history should dictate beginnings to us.

But if we have said about the past — and this is clear — that it is not our field of action, could we say the same about the future? Is it not because we imagine ourselves to be extracting laws from the past, laws that we consider to be valid in the future as well? In this case, it would appear that the whole past prevails in our consciousness and that its laws pass over our heads towards their future realisations. However, things do not seem to be quite like that. The so-called laws of history are nothing more than the regularities under which, let us say, the spirit of history has manifested itself. A freedom that has been manifested and consumed has, like anything that has been consumed, certain regularities. However, this does not in any way constrain a freedom that is in the making. The laws of history are regularities of

observation, valid for the dead field. The living will determine the laws, which have only a greater probability, and nothing more, of being the same, as they may very well be different. So it is not the laws of history that make the future our field of action; the laws are the whole past of history, however much some may want to make them its eternity. The future viewed in itself, willed in itself, this is our possible action. And to the extent that we accomplish this, as will be seen, we cease to be objects and become, to a certain extent, subjects of history.

Or not. Let's not say more than necessary. We only want to say that, while ordinary history, turned towards the past, makes us exclusively objects, just as the world, viewed from the outside as exteriority, made us exclusively objects, history viewed as an active expectation of the future frees us from our tragic "objectivity". Admittedly, we do not know whether, by ceasing to be objects, we can be subjects of true history. No one knows what the "living waters and dead waters" of history are; no one can say what tomorrow will bring, what will remain tomorrow of the act of will of today's world. We could admit, strictly speaking, that a prolonged will, spread over the entire span of our lives, would succeed in being truly transformative; and, likewise, we might be entitled to believe that, if we do not make history with bursts of will (and the will of all people, even those who consider themselves historical beings, is more a sum of bursts than a single will), we are capable, we cannot fail to be capable, of achieving something if we have a restless will. But let us not admit even that; let us recognise that the will to be a subject in history means nothing for history. It may, however, mean something in itself and may be valid for itself.

Ultimately, is it history — that is, the fact that actions are famous, bear fruit, endure — is what measures people? No, it is their own humanity. And here, just as in astronomical naturalism, one searches in vain for a measure for man other than the measure of his own being. The will to be a subject, which means first and foremost the will not to be an object, may not achieve anything in history; it may achieve something alongside history.

But what does it matter? The main thing is to achieve something. It is not what will be later, viewed as historical fact, that matters. This is a naturalistic way of looking at history, namely as a collection of realities, among which may or may not feature the realities you desire, exalt or simply correct. However, it is not the historicity of a gesture that should be sought, but its intrinsic human value. How many noble gestures have been lost and how many disturbing sacrifices have been cast aside, out of forgetfulness or ignorance, by history! How many truly Christian lives have been lived without their holiness becoming famous, historical! And is their Christianity any less? Was their moral value spent in vain? It may be that, in the plan of history itself, through natural and living connections, it bore fruit in anonymous ways. But even if we admit that it did not bear fruit even anonymously, their lives were in themselves a fulfilment, and that is enough.

Let us therefore look to the future, so as not to risk being merely objects of history. And, in fact, let us learn not to love history more than it deserves. It is good to desire the future, not because it makes our actions survive — for it does not always do so — but in order to define ourselves, to perfect ourselves. Man is not what his present is. He is his own future. And Nietzsche said only of himself that he was a posthumous man, when in fact all those who believe even a little in their own humanity have a vocation as posthumous men.

History does not tell us these things. Burdened by the past it has set out to clarify, it can only point us in that direction. At most, if it lifts its gaze from the inscriptions of the past, it strives to understand the present as a product of the former, as a collection of phenomena that the series of events of the past can very well justify. And since we are the present, or imagine ourselves to be, we find ourselves explained and understood before we have made the slightest effort to understand, looking at ourselves. "What am I in the face of history?" therefore. In other words, what are we, as specific beings, in the face of this current of anonymity? But it is not that we will never be anything if history is for us only

the past, a given world, dead spaces and reality. Never has individual consciousness, whose ultimate meaning is creation, action, becoming, meant anything under the species of the become.

d) The masses as an anonymous power

As if the two anonymous powers, that of astronomical nature and that of the historical world, were not enough, a third obscure power, that of the masses, comes to defeat not only the pride of individual consciousness, which would be a good thing, but also its self-confidence, which cannot be a good thing. And indeed, the first two powers are not enough. In order to realise that you are nothing in the face of nature, as well as to realise that you are nothing in the face of history, you need — it is said — a certain lucidity, which you do not always have. Living in the present, you can overlook the historical and natural order of which you are a part. But even for the present, there is a kind of order that is difficult, if not impossible, not to be aware of; it is the order of the collective, an order in which, willy-nilly, you find yourself and in the face of which, as in the first two cases, you are entitled to ask yourself what you can mean, in other words, whether you can ever be a subject instead of an object.

European cultural philosophers claim, not without justification, that the feeling of belonging to the masses, and with it the inferiority complex in relation to the masses, is particularly challenging for people today. Have people become more lucid about their own situation through history, sociology and cultural philosophy? Or have the masses really become more active and dominant today? In any case, one fact should not be overlooked, and indeed has not been overlooked by researchers: the disturbing growth of the European masses over the last century, which from the sixth century AD to 1800 never exceeded 180 million, and from

1800 to the beginning of the twentieth century reached 460 million. Could it be that the masses are becoming more active because they are more numerous?

But the facts need to be examined according to criteria that go deeper than arithmetic. The Spanish essayist Ortega y Gasset — whose observations can always be accepted, even if his ideas do not always win us over — shows that, ultimately, without the population of Europe having grown significantly in a period of fifteen years, the post-war world has changed, moving from a state of individuals to that of the masses. This means that it is not only numbers that determine the masses. The Spanish thinker further observes that even isolated individuals can be said to be part of the masses, to have a mass mentality. He asserts that the difference between the masses and the elite is not based on social categories, as there are masses and elites in every class, but on human categories, the elite being those who demand much of themselves, who seek personal fulfilment in everything, while the man of the masses has a character of intellectual laziness, not bothering to seek meaning himself, but accepting everything ready-made, which does not prevent him from having opinions about everything. According to this criterion, today's man is mainly a man of the masses. Today, says the writer quoted above, the heroes of tragedy have disappeared; only the chorus remains.

It is what another contemporary writer calls "the tyranny of the middle consciousness." Why does the individual accept it? Largely out of convenience. Having things ready-made is everything that appeals to contemporary man. It is true that if they did not have them ready-made, in terms of knowledge and civilisation, they would be different: they would invent, that is, they would exercise their primary faculties; without machines, without technology, without comfort, we would be more ingenious, if not better — as some claim. But who is absurd enough to give up what they have? And then there is something else besides the fact that, having things ready-made, we live more comfortably. It is the fact that, out of a timidity that is present here too, we imagine that if we did not take them for granted, we would not get them at all. What assures me that, by giving up the goods of today's civilisation on the one hand, and the prestige of

on the other, I will still be able to find the key to both?

It is strange, however, if you think about it a little more carefully, this desire to accept, to submit, to become part of the herd again. To tell the truth, the whole course of history has striven to raise man to the consciousness of his humanity, to make him autonomous, homo singularis. If man has associated with others — sociologists tell us in detail — he has not done so to serve them, or to serve an idea of the collective, but to serve himself, to relieve himself of certain labours, to defend himself from certain dangers, to request and obtain certain benefits. However, these were not done to serve him, but quite the contrary, to liberate him: relieved of the thought and need for them, he could, while naturally fulfilling his duties to the collective, develop his personal dialectic.

But there is something more, beyond what sociologists say. The most stirring moral movement, Christianity, had no other meaning, perhaps, than precisely that of liberating man by isolating him. Christianity is a gathering of loners, said Unamuno in that profound *Agony of Christianity*; for if truth is something collective, social, communicable, Christianity is individual and incommunicable. Undoubtedly, the Christian then finds companionship and establishes the Church. But he finds it within himself. His first step is to detach himself from his own, to renounce his old ties to his own. Jesus has no parents, no sisters, no brothers. He says so himself, and urges others to break away from theirs. The meaning of Christianity in this matter is nothing more than to ennoble the individual through his power of sacrifice and his power of love.

And yet man becomes a flock again. Why?

The above is in no way intended to challenge the legitimacy of collectivism, which seems to inspire the contemporary world. We are not rising up against today's ideal or ideals, but against the way in which the contemporary individual serves these ideals, whatever they may be. The mistake of cultural philosophers

And today's "intellectuals", people who claim to be part of the elite, seem to us to be doing just that, protesting against any incorporation of the individual into the masses, opposing the unnatural individualism of elites who are distant from the rest. However, it is not the fact that an individual is integrated into a group that kills personality, but the fact that he did not do so by adhering, but by surrendering. You can very well be a collectivist without sinning against true individualism; moreover, you can be a collectivist while remaining very much a member of the elite. But you must do it from within. You must desire it, not endure it.

In a word, therefore, it is not the ideals of today's society, but its servants who sin against the spirit. The herd mentality, the spirit of today's masses, is not guilty in itself. It is only guilty — and unfortunately this is very often the case — when its servants lack self-awareness. You cannot have group consciousness before you have self-awareness. Your first act must be, just like that of a Christian, to isolate yourself. From then on, you will find what you had left behind, as you should. Through himself, the Christian finds the church, just as, on another level, through himself, the spirit finds science or individual consciousness finds historical objectivity. Group consciousness that comes before self-awareness distances one from action, from free creation, that is, from creation itself. The latter consciousness is the only productive force in the world. The rest — group ideologies without individuality that "group together" — are simply defeats of the individual, with no victory for anyone.

The herd is not in ideologies, but in its misguided adaptation to them. The truths for the herd — the invitation to unthinking, un-lived adherence, before any hesitation; the primacy of the idea of the masses in individual consciousness, timidity and resignation in the face of this anonymous power of the masses — must be opposed by the truths for people. Group ideals have nothing to lose from this. On the contrary, to perfect yourself — I have said this before — means to make yourself good for all experiences. You must be selfish before serving an ideal, or precisely because you want to serve an ideal. How absurd it is to say that selfishness is the source of all

evil! A certain selfishness, yes; but, on the other hand, without selfishness you cannot truly love. You must love yourself in order to love your neighbour. If this is a paradox, it is the living paradox of the Church, of the community that you can only find in solitude. First comes solitude, with all that it entails. Tacitus, the historian, knew well that isolation gives you certain qualities that you will never acquire from the outset: that is why he wrote about the Germans that, liking their isolation, they gained self-respect and a sense of honour, which the Romans and Greeks, breathing only through the community, did not have. One must therefore be exactly like the German described so beautifully by Tacitus: a man who resembles only himself.

How little this ideal is in the minds of our contemporaries can be seen from the hypocrisy, which I have also pointed out, of thinking only of others, of blaming or wanting only the good of others, losing sight of our own lives. In the sense we are talking about, there is an activity that is characteristic of all eras in which man flees from individual responsibility: the activity of politics. Nothing debases our times more than the spread of this type of activity. Thinking more about himself, the man of today would certainly consider himself to be a "politics" more worthy, not only from his point of view, but even from the point of view of the city. You are a better soldier if you know how to fight than if you teach others — without knowing it very well yourself — to do so. Leave them alone: don't criticise them, don't flatter them. Detach yourself from others and you will understand your true connections with them and your fruitful duties towards them.

After all, what benefit can communities derive from a person who lacks a sense of honour and responsibility, who is paralysed and overwhelmed? With such people and for such people, it is a shame to start a revolution. For collectivist movements begin and must end in the individual.

It is clear that they begin this way: are not all movements in contemporary history the creation of a single personality? We know the answer: the momentum of the masses, it is said, is only

polarised by a personality; for this personality to emerge, a favourable moment is needed, a moment that belongs to the masses themselves. According to the materialist thesis above, it is not the personal fulfilment of the messianic individual that is of interest, but the historical moment, the conjuncture. This is, of course, very often true, and perhaps especially so in the contemporary world; but it is sometimes a way of exempting oneself from toil and diminishing that of others. It is likely that such materialists also said of the Saviour that he had a fairly easy task, thanks to the "favourable historical moment" in which he appeared.

As for the fact that the purpose of collectivist movements is to serve the individual, this expresses nothing more than that collectivities themselves are destined to serve the individual. The latter do so to the extent that they liberate him. And one could say that they liberate him in two ways. In a negative sense, more appropriately called liberation, and in a positive sense, by endowing them with freedom. They liberate them from needs in the first place, providing a solution to the economic phenomenon. However, doctrines based on political economy seem to know only liberation. And a liberated man is not necessarily a free man — unless this use of words bothers you. A liberated man is one who is free from certain obstacles; a free man, on the other hand, is one who is endowed with certain powers. And it does not follow at all from the fact that humanity will one day be liberated through a better economic order — desired by everyone — from material concerns, that it will also be free, that is, properly endowed for spiritual concerns. Collectivism, which for the time being is only attempting to redistribute goods, often forgets that it tends to solve only one problem and postpones the other.

Representatives of this type of collectivism always have an economic background. Today's theorists could easily be divided into two groups: economists and moralists. Economists believe in doctrine and work with quantitative, abstract ratios; moralists believe in people. They wonder whether spiritual goods, which are distributed more fairly than material goods, bear fruit as they should and whether

reactivating the former would help to balance the latter. In this sense, they do not believe it is wise to liberate the individual without equipping them for positive freedom, and the proposed postponement seems to them to be a true *ignoratio elenchi*. Economists distribute material goods, while moralists value spiritual goods. We fear that the former are not always right.

In order to be positively liberated, the individual must find himself in a group that has perfected itself, that has clarified the meanings of life and culture, which give content to individual existence. One can, of course, speak of a moment of sub-collectivity, a moment when a group is created, develops and therefore subjugates the individual. However, there must also be a moment of supra-collectivity, when a group opens up to the outside world and serves the individual. For what good would collectivities be otherwise, if they did not have this gateway to universality, the individual?

If there is something we find fortunate in Catholicism, towards which, on the other hand, we show so many reservations, it is the theoretical way in which the relationship between the individual and the collective is resolved. Distinguishing between individuality and personality—the former based on the needs of matter, the latter on those of the spirit—Catholicism is able to show, through St. Thomas, that the individual is subordinate to the state, but the state is subordinate to the person. For the individual is for the city, and the person is for God. That is why today's Catholics accuse Luther and other liberators of the individual of having liberated only human individuality, not personality, just as, on another level, they hold Descartes responsible for the flourishing of modern individualism.

But Catholicism does not unjustly condemn the subject-oriented approach of modern philosophy. Such an approach does tend, it is true, to isolate consciousness and remove it from the hierarchy of nature: this is precisely what Catholic realism is accused of. However, the awakening of a certain autonomy of consciousness cannot be a sin against the spirit if it does not fall back into what it fought against, namely absolutism. Only the elevation of consciousness to the rank of an entity, and an absolute one at that, only the assertion that its prerogatives

are immutable, and the meanings it prescribes to the eternal world, can justify criticism. Humanism is not a sin in itself; it is only a sin through pride.

What do I mean to the masses? What do I mean to history? What do I mean to the cosmos? I mean nothing, undoubtedly. But these are questions born of pride, of the desire to be something, and therefore their answer can only oscillate between utter humility and utter pride. But if all pride is guilty, not all humility is beneficial. The humility of contemporary man — born of the meaningless realisation that he means nothing in the order of nature or in other orders — is pure and simple despair. This is how our desire to be somewhere other than in our own inner world was bound to end.

TOWARDS A REHABILITATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Today, with our despair, the type of man that the Renaissance wanted and brought about is being fulfilled, say contemporary cultural historians. Believing in the autonomous powers of man, the Renaissance glorified a kind of humanism that was born of pride and fulfilled itself in humility. And it is not surprising, given the above, that the Renaissance ended this way. This happened precisely because it did not look at human powers in themselves, but recklessly tried to oppose them to anonymous powers.

As far as the masses are concerned, for example, Berdiaev himself, who denounced "humanistic pride," noted that the Renaissance began with the affirmation of creative individuality and ended with its denial, our socialism today. Similarly, one could easily find examples of the individual's prideful attitude towards history or his sense of personal security towards the cosmos, whose laws his reason revealed or even prescribed in some cases. These attitudes and feelings are best understood in the light of how science itself is viewed by Renaissance humanism, continued in the Enlightenment. For if science itself is not an anonymous power, since it proves to be nothing more than the exercise of our intellectual consciousness (consciousness therefore cannot be in science as it was imagined in nature, in history, in society), the naturalistic obsession does no less than make science itself appear — as shown above — a totalisation of ready-made meanings, which the mind has the privilege of rediscovering exactly as they are. But this is what metaphysical dogmatism has claimed since the beginning of modern times. Not idealism, which, even in its excessive forms, did nothing more than prescribe an order, but metaphysical dogmatism, which still believed in the existence of a reality independent of the intellect, but claimed that the structure of this reality is perfectly rational, like the structure of our intellect. Such dogmatism may seem to us

human arrogance itself. But where did it end? It ended, as on the social level, with the denial of what it had proclaimed at the beginning: with the doctrine that the spirit is not capable of grasping the *esse*, in other words, with positivism! Socialism on the level of the masses, seen as the defeat of the creative individuality of the Renaissance, corresponds perfectly, on another level, to positivism, seen as the defeat of the rationality of the dogmatic era to which the Renaissance had led.

In socialism and positivism, both of which are hopeless, everything that is prideful in modern humanism culminates and is therefore cut short. Everything that is prideful, but not everything that is humanism. This is precisely what most philosophers of contemporary culture do not understand, or pretend not to understand. They stubbornly link humanism to the proud forms of individual consciousness, just as, on a philosophical level, they link idealism to a certain absolutism — as if one could not deny the absolute object without at the same time affirming the absolute subject. The sin of humanism is pride; the sin of idealism is absolutism; but, among disinterested minds, a reprehensible form of a doctrine cannot obscure the doctrine itself. Today's minds are not always completely disinterested, however; they want to prove something (honestly, no doubt, because you can have honest interests) and then they do not hesitate to discredit even doctrines that are not yet obsolete. When, for example, you have an interest in proving that St. Thomas' realism can still be used in philosophical thinking today, it is only natural to rush to liquidate the idealism that stands in its way; and when you want to revive Aristotle's naturalism, with those beings placed on levels, it is only natural to rush to do away with humanism, which confuses the beautiful hierarchies by simply denaturalising man.

No one wants to say, by this, that the moral order of man today, insofar as it is still humanistic, is the right order. However, before we abandon it, it would be wiser to see what exactly it has done wrong and whether our rejection of it should be so complete. Catholicism, for example, has

whose representatives in philosophy today wish to renounce idealism and humanism entirely, may be reminded that not so long ago, in the nineteenth century, certain Russian thinkers, led by Dostoevsky, were not far from rising up against him and accusing him, with the same exclusivity that his representatives display today, of embodying the spirit of the Antichrist. In his monograph on the Russian novelist, Berdiaev shows how opposed Dostoevsky was to any form of social eudemonism, to the extent that he was able to place Catholicism and socialism together in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor as opposed to true Christianity. It is superfluous to tell us afterwards that Dostoevsky did not know Western Catholicism very well: the injustice remains, and Catholicism should not allow what it did not like to endure yesterday to be done in its name today. For if excesses suit a Russian, and a genius at that, they cannot be used in the case of simple Catholic thinkers and commentators who, through some of their representatives, such as Maritain, do not always urge us to exercise restraint in the fight against those they consider to be the prophets of modern individualism.

If we must renounce anything, it is not, therefore, the things themselves, the doctrines themselves, but, once again, the spirit in which we have served them. When, for example, Ortega y Gasset says, "Europe no longer believes in moral norms," "People today imagine that they only have rights, not duties," does this mean that our doctrines, and in particular Renaissance humanism together with the idealism that followed, have led us to the state of anarchic individualism that we seem to be living in or have lived in until now? Not entirely. For in order to return to norms, we do not need a new decalogue to impose them on us, but a spirit to awaken them in us. And that spirit — unless we are mistaken — can very well move within the framework of philosophical idealism and cultural humanism. Indeed, it is only in the midst of these that it can reveal its full measure, provided, of course, that it is not disturbed in its action, as it has been until now, by

individualistic pride, accompanied by the naturalistic prejudice of "being something in the face of anonymous powers".

In other words, all that is needed is for individual ambitions to be extinguished in order for individual responsibilities to awaken. This is something that contemporary science can do, in terms of knowledge, even though until now it has usually inspired the opposite attitude; and it achieves this by offering the intellect the surest way out of the naturalistic impasse: the de-substantialisation of nature. But how can responsibility be awakened in the deeper layers of the human spirit, beyond the realm of knowledge? How can it be awakened on a moral level?

The political order of the nineteenth century did everything in its power to compromise such a rehabilitation of the individual. It rushed to demand freedom for him. But by freedom, it meant rights. If people today, as Ortega y Gasset says, imagine that they have rights, it is because those rights were indeed demanded for them. But rights are not freedom, and the gift of freedom is given to you more by duty than by rights — today this is clearly visible. As long as it demands something for him and not from him, liberalism could not awaken in the individual a sense of responsibility and of his own power. That is why the individual in the political order that we have all lived in until today presented this paradoxical aspect: he was full of rights, yet deprived of power. Nothing in contemporary society is weaker than a citizen endowed with all rights. For if he has rights, he knows that, ultimately, he has no responsibilities: the masses have suppressed any responsibility, he tells himself, and in the ocean of collectivity, even if he were guilty of something, his guilt would be so insignificant in the face of the powers that create history that it would be lost. He imagines himself, willingly or unwillingly, struck by irresponsibility.

Can we escape this through a political revolution? Probably not. But we can escape, as has often been said, through a spiritual one. However, since spirit is not doctrine but life, it is not a better doctrine that we must seek, but a better impulse in the plan of life. And

life is individualised, it is in the individual conscience. How can its responsibility be awakened? Not through rights, but through duties, through a sense of guilt. A sense of individual guilt must be developed. This is the only way humanism can be fruitful: not through the pride of rights, but through the humility of sin. Naturalism, which made individual consciousness feel insignificant in the face of the cosmos; the obsession with the past, "etymologism" — if this expression is permissible — which made it fade into history; misunderstood collectivism, which nullified it in the face of the masses, all these not only take away its rights, cutting off the roots of pride, but also erase all its sins, exempting it from any responsibility. And in order to reawaken it to the struggle, it must be accustomed to the idea that its guilt is not lost but, on the contrary, accumulates.

It is curious how difficult it is for people to admit that they have done wrong. Before the jury, before the community, before our own conscience, we strive for only one thing: to exonerate ourselves. Sometimes we admit that we have committed an act. But only that we have committed it, not that we have done wrong. If others want to punish us, so be it. Perhaps their ethics compel them to do so, perhaps only their laws, laws they are forced to obey. But, deep down, we do not feel guilty. We did it, but we did not do wrong. We had to do it; we could not not do it.

Moreover, all or almost all doctrines help us to exonerate ourselves, to understand ourselves, to justify ourselves, to explain ourselves. One of the grossest exaggerations of modern times is to attempt, under the impetus of scientific illusionism, to unravel the phenomenon of man. We have seen that man is explained, instead of him explaining the world. There is no question that there are aspects of the human being, spiritual aspects, psychological traits, which can and must be explained by influences of all kinds, that is, by a certain materialism. But the exclusively materialistic explanation of man authorises his moral detachment from the actions he performs, the automation of his spiritual life. This has led to a complete lack of any sense of sin. All our educational systems teach man to understand himself, to know himself, to progress

— which is beautiful; but almost none of them teach him to blame himself and to redeem himself through atonement. And without a sense of sin, without a conscience of individual guilt, there is no spiritual fulfilment. Moreover, we are also deprived of self-confidence: for, having no confidence in our ability to do wrong, we have no confidence in our ability to do right either. We are thus cut off from the true sources of moral strength.

We do not know how to ask for forgiveness — that is, atonement for our sins, not absolution. In a world where people would have the desire to redeem themselves, things would look very different from how they do in ours. For we are "progressing," but, as you can see, we are actually standing still. Our doctrines make us progress in skill, in specialisation, but not on a moral level. And that sense of sin, which alone could empower us, is not among our virtues.

How much it was, for example, among the virtues of Platonism! In his Dialogues, Plato often returns to the assertion that the one who endures injustice is happier than the one who commits it, no matter how many apparent benefits he may derive from it; that, furthermore, again despite appearances, you are more unhappy if you do not atone for your mistake than if you do; and that the wisest thing to do when you have done wrong is to go to the judge yourself, to be condemned and relieved of your sin. For just as medicine heals the body, justice, says the philosopher, heals the soul. By serving a sentence, you free your soul from evil. Therefore, if you have sinned, run to where you will find the swiftest punishment, just as you would run to the doctor — so that evil does not corrupt your entire being.

Poor Polos, but especially Callicles, are outraged to hear such statements from Socrates in *Gorgias*. What nonsense! they exclaim. Doesn't everyone know that tyrants live well as long as they are strong, just as deceivers live well as long as they are not exposed? And that is precisely why rhetoric is the foremost science, because it serves to convince others of your righteousness even when you do not have it. But

Socrates is patient. He breaks things down as he sees fit, forcing the other person to follow his reasoning and agree with him, and finally decides (480 a): "Therefore, if it is necessary to defend ourselves against injustice, or to defend our parents, friends, children, homeland, when it is guilty, — rhetoric, Polos, can be of no use; unless, on the contrary, we consider that we must use it to blame ourselves first, then to blame all those parents and friends who are guilty, without concealing anything, but rather bringing the mistake to light, so that the guilty party may be healed through atonement. We would thus compel ourselves and others not to hesitate, to appear bravely before the judge, with closed eyes, as they submit to the iron and fire of a doctor, out of love for beauty and goodness, without concern for pain; and if the deed committed deserves blows, each one stepping forward before the blows, before the chains if the deed deserves chains, ready to pay if the punishment is to be done, ready to go into exile if the sentence is exile, to die if they must die; unceasingly the first to blame himself, as well as his own; an orator with this sole aim of making his mistake fully clear, in order to free himself from the greatest of evils, injustice." That this way of speaking is beautiful is superfluous to say. But it is also right.

It restores man to his dignity, making him aware of his limits and virtues. Today, Plato's exhortation could still be fruitful. Man is explained by the influence of the environment, by heredity, by Freudian complexes and so on; but all this does not prevent him from feeling guilty, from knowing himself to be guilty. Wouldn't blaming himself be an empowerment for him? At Plato's school, we could learn that sin is not fatality; or, even if it is, in the sense that we cannot avoid it, it is not fatal in the sense that it darkens our entire being. Plato's school is a school of human dignity. You can fall, but at the same time you can redeem yourself. There is enough virtue in us to become morally healthy beings again. The key is not to

hide your sins; bring them to light, confess them, and burn them in the flame of sincerity towards yourself.

But Platonism only teaches you to take responsibility for your own sins. There is another doctrine — also outdated today — that teaches you to take on the sins of others. Never has the individual been stronger than when he followed this teaching, which is simply Christianity. But did he really follow it? Most of the time he forgot it, lost its meaning and left it to be a museum piece, instead of a chapter in a living ethic.

In a museum, in Dostoevsky's gallery of heroes, one can find that human specimen who rehabilitates the individual, showing everything that is within his spiritual powers, everything that is free in man. It is Alyosha Karamazov.

Alyosha is not a saint. He is not even a good Christian, if by Christian we mean a fanatic and a mystic. He is only — as the author says of him, emphasising the word — an altruist, a precocious altruist. Young, almost adolescent as he is, he took the monastic habit only out of disgust for the life he had lived until then and, above all, out of admiration for the monastery's abbot, Zosima. The author does not say much about the abbot, but among the few things he does say, one is particularly meaningful: the abbot takes the will and soul of others to forge his own soul and will; moreover, he takes upon himself all the misfortunes of the world, in the hope of overcoming himself, of transcending everything that is personal in him, thereby gaining true and complete freedom. Was there nothing to learn from an abbot with a soul as pure as Karamazov's?

It wasn't just that Alyosha had only good intentions in his heart. After all, he was also a Karamazov, meaning he was sensual and passionate. When his older brother, Mitya, tells him something about his past, which was full of passions and sins, Alyosha blushes. But not because he is ashamed of what he hears — he confesses this himself — but because he feels like his brother. Even if he has not

sinned yet, he knows full well that he could sin: he is on the edge of sin, "on its first step". He says it openly several times: I am a Karamazov too!

But his sins are only beginnings; they will never be more than beginnings. Alyosha still has a pure heart — was not his mother a true believer? — and that is why everyone loves him. Perhaps they also loved him because they sensed his indulgence, because they saw that he did not judge them, did not willingly believe in their guilt. When evil was proven to him, the author writes, he was more saddened than astonished, never frightened by anything. How could people not love him, since nothing they did disturbed him? Only hypocrites are surprised by the actions of their fellow men and are frightened. Alyosha seemed indifferent. Perhaps he even understood. In any case, he did not condemn, as others were too quick to do. Fyodor Karamazov, the guilty father, feels this well, that the youngest of his sons does not condemn him, that he is the only soul in the world who does not condemn him. Grusenka, the woman for whom Mitya and Fyodor Karamazov, son and father, are enemies, feels the same way; she has been waiting a long time for Alyosha to come and forgive her, to love her "for something other than her baseness." And Alyosha, moved, does not quite understand: "What have I done to you?" he asks with tears in his eyes. — And then the others love him for his being, for his clear eyes, for the fact that he finds no particular merit in himself; they love him simply. There are not many beings who are loved for no particular reason, simply for their presence!

Everyone needs Alyosha's presence. Everyone calls him to them on the tragic morning of the murder; everyone feels comfortable with this innocent soul by their side. It's not so much that they need his advice. Some ask him for advice, but advice is not what he has to offer. On that strange day, as he goes from one to another, from his father to his older brother, from Ivan, his youngest brother, the intellectual and atheist, to Caterina Ivanovna, Mitea's fiancée and Ivan's beloved, and from among them all he returns several times to the monastery to see how the dying abbot Zosima is doing, — Alyosha is nothing

but a presence. He has nothing to say to anyone; he knows less than the others, and yet he is a blessing to all.

His abbot senses this. From the outset, he tells Alyosha that he must not remain in the monastery, because his future is not there; as soon as he, Zosima, dies, the young man must go out among people, endure the great trial of the world; he will have to go through many things before returning to the monastery; but he must believe in Christ and "work, work without ceasing." That is all. Alyosha does not understand well. He barely leaves the monastery and returns with a heavy heart. Why did they send him into the world? Why did they make him leave the light here for the darkness there? But the abbot insists. Alyosha is forced to leave again, somewhat puzzled. Little by little, he begins to be caught up in the chorus of those who call him among them. But he is also dizzy with their enthusiasm, with all of them. What verve all of Dostoevsky's heroes have! How much they talk, how passionately! They all have something to say, and Alyosha listens to them patiently, seriously. Only he has nothing to say. Only once, when his brother Ivan, after telling him about all kinds of cruelty and injustice in the world, asks him if he would prefer to stop the stories, Alyosha replies: No, I want to suffer. Suffering is the beginning of his brotherhood with the world he was destined to enter. Through suffering, he too begins to have something to say.

What is significant in the case of the Karamazov brothers is that all three, although they are so different in character, understand, in their own ways, the price of suffering and redemption. When Mitya is accused of killing his father, when he has to admit that all the evidence against him is overwhelming, even if he does not admit that he is his father's killer — then he understands, in a moment of resignation, that fate has dealt him this trial in order to set him straight. For a being as wicked as he, only a stroke of fate can save him. That is why he accepts any accusation, any public humiliation: "I will suffer," he says, "and I will redeem myself through suffering." Does he not begin to understand more things in the dawn after the crime? What is the dream he had, with the crying child, the starving peasants, all that misery that now,

suddenly sees? Later, in prison, he will say that he feels, in that dream, a prophecy. A new man was born in him, a man who knows that he is guilty for all living beings and must give himself to them. He did not kill his father, but he accepts the punishment, because through it he discovers himself. And what does it matter that Mitea is intoxicated by his own thoughts when he says this, that he will later abandon them, agreeing to flee, to avoid punishment, and forgetting his promises? He, the true Karamazov, impulsive, is sincere when he says this, and the simple fact that he thinks it, that suffering has made him think, means moral progress.

Ivan's suffering is of a different nature, although it also ennobles him. He does not know for sure whether Mitya killed or not, but he feels remorse: he left home on the very day of the murder, and Smerdyakov, the servant, had warned him that something was going to happen. Did he sincerely wish for his father's death? Did he think about the immediate inheritance, as the same servant later insinuated? (Ivan, it should not be forgotten, was the most interested of the brothers, having been forced to work for money from a young age.) In any case, he did nothing to prevent the crime. Whether it was Mitya or Smerdyakov who killed him was irrelevant; he, Ivan, was the moral author. And hence the decision to save Mitya, to help him escape and leave, accompanied by Grushenka, for America, and on the other hand to declare himself, before the court, as the author of the crime. But the lucid conscience of a man on the verge of madness troubled him. Was he doing it out of vanity? Was he thinking of impressing others, forcing them to admire him, exclaiming: what a noble soul! He declared his guilt before the jury, prepared everything for Mitya's escape, then went completely mad. And yet he was right: his sacrifice also had an element of pride. Ivan is an intellectual and makes his sacrifice lucidly, with his mind, not his heart.

Aliosa, on the other hand, will sacrifice himself wholeheartedly. He still doesn't understand things very well, but he knows something in his heart: that Mitea is innocent of the crime. Nothing was more natural than to suspect him. Hadn't Mitea told him several times that he felt capable of killing his father? But Aliosa does not believe this now, once the crime has been committed. He does not know what to

say to the jurors, and yet he states firmly: Mitea is guilty only in his thoughts. Therefore, as soon as his brother is convicted, Alyosha thinks only of how to save him. If he were truly guilty, he would have let him serve his sentence. But now? No matter how much Mitea wants to redeem himself through suffering, to sing hymns, to do good deeds, he must escape. "You are not capable," Alyosha tells him, "of bearing this cross; you are not ready and you have not earned it."

He deserves it and wants it. More than through brandy, says the author, it is through willpower that Alyosha corrupts those who are taking Mitya to Siberia. He frees his brother, takes his place in chains, lies to him, smiling, that he will save himself too, but remains there for good, even though it would have been very easy for him to escape from among the deportees. And when Mitea runs away with his beloved, fulfilling his Karamazov-like destiny, the other Karamazov, who has defeated himself, is overwhelmed with joy. He looks at the convicts around him, at those who are deported as well as those who guard them, who are also condemned in their own way, and says to himself: "It is good that an innocent person should descend among them."

In the dream he now has, as he falls asleep, his good friend Zosima appears to him, his own conscience, his Christian spirit. What does he say to him? He tells him that he has done well. His life needed suffering: the danger until then was precisely that misfortune was missing from his life. That is why Zosima had sent him into the world. And Alyosha understood that he had to take on the sins of others. This alone means loving your neighbour, and only when you do this do you accomplish something for him. "Today," Zosima tells him, "you are doing it for the first time." The deed means closeness to sin, appropriation of sin, for sin is in man and only in man. Humility, mercy, a monastic spirit in the midst of the world—this is the mission that Alyosha has to fulfil. Therefore, whenever he can, he should take upon himself the sins and transgressions of those whom he feels tempted to condemn; he should suffer in their place and let them go with serenity...

...Alyosha opens his eyes: "The room was full of noise, it was getting light; Alyosha distinguished coarse and brutal faces around him, staring at him, the swarthy faces of peasants and soldiers, slaves to the knout and the consignment, faces which the sense of their obvious guilt and inevitable punishment made, at that moment, truly tragic with fear and at the same time with cruelty. Alyosha smiled.

It is difficult to say, without a detailed consideration of the facts, whether and to what extent this literary fiction (which is no longer even Dostoevsky's, according to the final version of the novel) embodies the spirit of Christianity. However, there is no doubt that there are Christian elements here. And there is, above all, that ennoblement of the individual, which Christianity knows how to preach and illustrate in the first place.

Plato's doctrine regenerates man, bringing him back to his normal state of purity. The idea of normal, healthy, right, proper, balanced, commands Platonism. But that is precisely why the regeneration in question did not mean an increase in man's powers, a spiritual victory for him, but simply a regaining of his initial powers. Plato's morality therefore does not create heroes, but decent people, certainly the most decent citizens that humanity has ever desired. Christianity, on the other hand, breaks the fundamental balance of the individual, disturbs the health of his nature, makes him sick, this time in order to throw him beyond and not within the boundaries of his individual existence. Christianity truly makes strong individuals, which means individuals who broaden the circle of their humanity. Other doctrines and other eras than those of true Christianity have also known how to increase individual power, to a certain extent. The Renaissance, for example, made individual power a cause for pride, and this is again a weakness that Ivan Karamazov knew how to hide. Unadulterated power dwells rather in the heart of Alyosha Karamazov.

And perhaps even Alyosha does not fully rehabilitate the individual. For if he humbly takes upon himself the sins of others, he imagines in return that he is innocent.

he, therefore, does not truly take on the sin of the world, that is, he does not take it on to the extent that he feels individual guilt. "It is good for an innocent man to descend among them," Alyosha says to himself, when he should have said, "It is good for a guilty man to rise from among them." Zosima knew well why he was sending this Karamazov, who had not yet redeemed himself, into the world!

The feeling of individual guilt is the beginning of our world. Those who do not want to be strong remain among the innocent of the age in which they live. But those who, on the contrary, do not want to be overwhelmed by anonymous powers learn that the best way to defeat them is to blame themselves. God himself does not exclusively like innocent people. The person "after God's own heart," say the people of the Church, is David, who sinned but repented. If humanism wants to endure, it must not begin with pride and end, as we have seen, in despair, but in the only way that can make the individual active, through true, not borrowed, humility. Born of remorse, of individual guilt, humility is the only form of life that compels. Before granting rights to man, it imposes responsibility, which is his very drama, his action.

The naturalistic and realistic perspective of the world makes man inactive. The world becomes better if others become better, not you alone. That is why doctrines will force themselves to improve people, not man, for man seems to us to mean nothing in himself. Realism said the same thing in terms of knowledge: if heaven reveals itself to you, you know it; if not, you will probably never learn anything about it or the world. God, the devils, history, and people have made the world what it is today. You came to a finished work, to observe and, at most, to make judgements of value and existence.

Faced with such passivity, humanism has the right to rehabilitate action, individual deeds. Alyosha acted for the first time when he substituted himself for the sinner, taking on his guilt. Humanism has here the key to activity. Sin is in man, and to take on the sin of another means nothing more than to become

aware of one's own sin (I am a Karamazov too!), to rediscover the beginning of one's individual drama, which is in solidarity with the drama of others. Descending thus into itself, consciousness discovers two things: the motive for action, on the one hand, and the basis of moral community, on the other.

These two, action and love, only now possible, are encompassed by the full meaning that must be given to the will. The rehabilitation of the individual, a rehabilitation to which any well-understood humanism should lead, would unfold through two series of manifestations that are as characteristic as possible: first, it would authorise the individual to want more, making responsible creation possible; secondly, it would authorise the individual to want less, rehabilitating, along with the individual, the insignificant, the action without resonance. To want more, with the emphasis on wanting, to want less, with the emphasis on less. The first term of this distinction—which I have used on another occasion—tends to show that the individual should not feel paralysed in the midst of the world around him, just as consciousness should not feel paralysed in the face of pre-existing science. No anonymous power can prevent the individual from delving into himself and discovering himself to be guilty, in solidarity with the guilt of others. Wanting more therefore means wanting more responsibility, without fear of being overwhelmed by it; for it is only by taking responsibility for many things that you can achieve something.

But this does not mean that you must only do great things. The second part of the above statement tends to show that it is not great creation that matters, but creation itself. "Great" is a term used by proud minds, those who usually end up in despair because they have pointlessly measured themselves against things they are not. The absurdity of today's desires is precisely that they strive for greatness. Today, every desire for reform is a desire for revolution. If a cosmic revolution is not possible, our reformer would at least want an international one; if an international one is not possible either, he dreams in any case of one for the group to which he belongs. We never descend below the sub-group; no one bothers to preach to a single person anymore. Why

do we write books?1 Precisely to speak to hundreds of people, not to one person alone. Today's reformer wants to reform people, not man. And that is why we achieve nothing! That is why we talk but do not act: neither in our own regard, nor in regard to others. "Less" would mean something smaller, less resonant, for fewer people, even for just one person. And that would be: not always proclaiming our reform, but living it.

However few your desires may be, precisely because they are based on facts and not on a proud impulse to overturn the status quo, they may fit better into reality than the latter. The grand, expansive desires of reformers of all kinds are ultimately futile and bring despair. In a sense, they are not even true desires, but simulated ones. Behind them lies indifference: either everything or nothing. And because you cannot have everything, you settle for nothing. The desire is only superficial; the basis is indifference. Does the political reformer of our day, for example, really want what he proposes? He makes his proclamation to the people; if the people agree and follow him, very well; if not, he will be content to know that he was right and will fall back into the state of indifference that his belief had grafted onto him. When, in the midst of this world of indifference, authentic will, devoid of pride, full of a sense of its own measure, but also of its own power, emerges, it will encounter no obstacles other than those of its own unfolding. It has probably been said before: the love of one person is, in the end, stronger than the indifference of all.

The feeling that the contemporary world is, in essence, indifferent when it lacks the lucidity to be desperate allows us, in conclusion, to say that it has no future. It is inclined towards the past, if it is inclined towards anything at all; in fact, it reflects itself in the waters of the present and, even if it is not entirely satisfied with its image, it very rarely has the active, non-utopian, reforming hope that the images of the future could be more beautiful than those of the present moment. It does not want the future with

because it wants nothing. Only the willing have a future. We do not have one. We could be posthumous people, as Nietzsche said: but we do not yet know how to be.

TO LOVE THE FUTURE

It would be the most fervent wish of many today for the world to end a little after them or, if possible, even at the same time as them. We cannot bear the future, that is the truth. We pretend to prepare for it, to want it, to wait for it, but, deep down, we are not interested in it itself. And preparing for it would not even be an act of generosity towards others. It would be, as has already been shown, a simple act of defining ourselves, since we are nothing but our own future. We cannot bear the future, the only thing that is ours!

Significant for this aversion to the future is the feeling, often present in some minds, that the world is truly finite or coming to an end. Sometimes this feeling takes on absolute forms. This must have been the case around the year 1000, when the panic of the end of the world had completely taken hold of the minds of Christians and perhaps even non-Christians. It will be the same — there is no doubt about it — around the year 2000. But even first-rate thinkers are tempted by this feeling. Do La Bruyère's *Characters* not begin with: *Tout est dit, et l'on vient trop tard depuis plus de sept mille ans qu'il y a des hommes, et qui pensent**? (And after this *tout est dit* came Kant, came Goethe, came mathematical analysis...) And nothing is more impressive in this regard than the example of Hegel, who claimed that the evolution of the spirit in history ends with the attainment of a full consciousness of itself, which his philosophy brings to the world, beyond which the dialectic of the spirit in history no longer seems to have much meaning.

It is not just pride here. It is also a great deal of fatigue, an awful lot of fatigue. Where the history we know ends, it seems to us that history itself ends. Where our life ends, we feel that if not life itself, at least a chapter of it ends. It is so easy to look at things this way. Isn't it simpler to make today a peak than a true beginning? History seems to be completed by the present moment, in

This day, whose content comes naturally to fulfil everything that could still be fulfilled in the world. And the end seems inevitable to us as long as history presents itself as a whole, with full and well-articulated meanings, instead of pure and simple becoming. We consider ourselves victims on the one hand, and privileged on the other. Victims of the so-called "course of history"; privileged, however, because at least we can be its spectators. So we sit here, at the end of the historical series, and weigh everything that was and the way it was. We honour Solon, we value and despise Alcibiades, we condemn ancient slavery and the medieval Inquisition, we glorify Joan of Arc. But who are we? What unique privilege do we have that allows us to do nothing and yet have the right to judge everything?

In other cases, our sense of the end does not take such absolute forms, but somewhat milder ones. It is not really the end of the world, we are told then; it is only the end of an age. If we are not at the far end of the series, we are still somewhere, at a junction of it. With us, a chain of things ends, and with us, another begins. In our times, say these prophets, the so-called "new man" is being conceived.

The new man! If only they truly wanted him, for what is new in him, for his future... But our prophets are, in fact, still philologists, as that thinker called them, still looking to the past, and only the past is their subject matter. However, since the past does not contain the future in itself, but through our power of will, today's prophets, that is, ideologues (the breed of windbags who managed to compromise ideas through the sterility of the nineteenth century), can no longer see anything. And then it's simple: because they cannot see, they predict. The new man is a negation; he is what they cannot distinguish well in the future, not knowing well in the present. The new man wants to say only the end of the old world. It is the illusion of those who are not prepared to carry on the old man. How, have all the virtues of our culture grown weary? Does Christianity no longer inspire? Does humanism no longer cultivate? Does science no longer prove? What lies! How many accents of

art can still awaken religious sentiment! How many geometries have yet to be written! We must look to the future, of course, but not by cursing the past, but by carrying it with us forward. The end of the world, that is how we know how to baptise our lack of will, the smallness of our vision, this lack of any idealism.

For the most part, this stems from a mistake in perspective. The cultural philosopher Oswald Spengler described the privileged historical view as Ptolemaic because, just as Ptolemy's system made the Earth the centre of the universe, this view makes the present the centre of perspective. What is needed, he adds, is a Copernican view, an examination of history with an eye so indifferent to my personal situation as a researcher that it no longer seems to me, for example, that the nineteenth century AD is much more significant than the nineteenth century BC. For even the physicist sees the moon as larger than Jupiter and Saturn, but does not proclaim this fact. — Yet there is something Ptolemaic even in Spengler's historical vision. Namely, there is an obsession with the end of the century, an obsession that may well have been reinforced by observations and evidence, but which remains, psychologically, a sign of fatigue and, in any case, a privileged position of the present.

a) On the apathy of contemporary man

The historical mentality, oriented solely towards the past, is, as mentioned, truly to blame for the error of perspective in question. It does not urge people to action, to struggle, to what theologians call agony, but, by presenting the past as destiny, as a curse, it teaches people apathy. The Christian alone — as Unamuno shows in *The Agony of Christianity* — knows how to learn the meaning of struggle, of agony. Ordinary history replaces agony with apathy, thus constituting the worst possible school for the individual. From a moral point of view, today's individual is worse off.

gifted than any other, perhaps, and to a large extent this is due to the spirit of history, historicism, which has elevated the apathy of modern man — encouraged, moreover, by the pressure of other anonymous powers — to the rank of the chosen flower of lucidity.

Let us briefly highlight a few traits that we consider characteristic of modern man's apathy. It cannot be said that he is completely apathetic and that, for example, he is not capable of enthusiasm. But his enthusiasm is of a certain kind: it is not an enthusiasm that awakens within him, but one that overwhelms him. If, therefore, we become enthusiastic, we do so from the outside, through a current that carries us away, to which we surrender, as I said above. That is why we get excited about so many things. A superficial observer might say that contemporary society is very young at heart, since it has so much warmth, since it applauds with such goodwill. What could be younger than the enthusiasm of a crowd watching a sporting event or the unusual popularity that some things, many things, enjoy on that quintessentially young continent of America?

There is something suspicious here, however: popularity does not last; enthusiasm is sincere and has a certain spontaneity, but it is not durable. Why? Perhaps precisely because they "overwhelm" us, because they come—they come from somewhere, they are made somewhere, from an anonymous mass—to sweep us away for a moment and leave us unchanged afterwards. But that is not what youth is about. That may be American youth, the youth of a sports spectator, but it is not true youth. Youth has, to some extent, an inner dimension. Enthusiasm comes from within, you create it yourself, or it does not come at all. And the enthusiasms that "encompass" are states of mind, they are true psychoses, which no one should desire, least of all commanders for their soldiers. Nothing is more ridiculous, but also more significant, for the states of mind of contemporary society than the case of these commanders — most often politicians — who one day feel lifted by the wave of popular enthusiasm, only to wake up the next day in the calm waters of

mediocrity, without knowing why either thing happened. The whim of the crowd, the wise man exclaims, thinking he has explained everything there is to explain. But caprice does not adequately describe the spiritual emptiness of the masses, that inner void beyond which everything is uncertainty and instability. Caprice is too much. The masses do not even have that much.

Another characteristic of modern man is the feeling of "waiting for something to happen". From one moment to the next, something must or may, it seems, happen. We prick up our ears and wait. Hasn't it happened yet? It will surely happen in a little while. This is how we wait for both bad and good things. For years, we have been waiting for war, for example. We have been waiting for it because, we say, it is bound to happen, just as we have been waiting for the revolution, which is bound to happen. Revolutions "happen". We are so apathetic that even human actions par excellence and initiatives par excellence, such as revolutions, happen in an impersonal way. And we do not always realise that fatalism in such matters is almost as absurd as the attitude of a thirsty man who would wait for clouds to gather and rain to fall, instead of simply digging to find water where it is. We are not saying, after all, that revolutions do not happen on their own. But they happen precisely because, intimidated, the individual waits for them. In a world that wanted more, such manifestations would be less common.

But the apathy of modern man finds its ultimate fulfilment in his sense of so-called curiosity. For let us not deceive ourselves: curiosity is not, in most cases, an active form, a desire to know, the positive side of the soul. It is the turning away, out of laziness, out of fatigue, of the spirit. We are extroverts out of boredom. Criticism of contemporary society should begin precisely with the condemnation of this stupid form of curiosity, which turns us all into gawkers. When an aeroplane passes through the air, we rush to turn our eyes towards it. What do we want to see? Nothing specific, because we do not even recognise its principles.

Not the laws of its ascent and movement; we are interested in something else, something undefined, something spectacular. What a great invention the newspaper is! It puts before our eyes — and sometimes even literally, with photographs — everything that has happened in the world recently. We know well what happened before and we wholeheartedly want what will happen after us; we are now only interested in knowing what has happened in the world in the last few days... And yet the newspaper is quite cumbersome. But television, or whatever it will be called, is coming, and, together with the radio, it will give us an instant picture of the world today, which we were so curious to see. Then, at least, we can hope that our tragic boredom will come to an end; for we cannot wish for anything more perfect than an exercise in satisfying our curiosity.

There is a supreme form of this curiosity: the stupidity with which we look at each other. Yes, we stand at the window and look at each other. We marvel at each other! It is astonishing how man can be tempted by such absurd feelings. What do we see in others? We see nothing deep, nothing human. But we watch with pleasure, we point fingers, we make fun of each other, we admire, we comment. You turn back to people and look at people when you have humanity within you. What apathy!

Such curiosity can no longer have anything positive in itself. It is simply the inverse form of will, its weakening and paralysis. Will is born from within, from a fullness of spiritual life. But we have no inside. That is why — and the philosophers of our time or culture were quick to notice this fact.

— The originality of today's people is, after all, so small. In terms of creativity, the man of culture of our days rarely has anything to say; instead, he is an excellent commentator, a remarkable philologist, he does comparative science and, above all, he does history and erudite work perfectly well. What better sign, says the philosopher of culture, of the decadence of our times than this apathy? If further proof were needed that our era is ending a century, a cycle of culture, do we not have it in the very dullness of the contemporary individual?

Ultimately, if apathy is the fate of societies in liquidation, there would be nothing left to say. But let it not be apathy through ignorance; rather, through self-deception. Have people been told that their will is decisive? That what they do can be inscribed in history? That, even if it is not inscribed in history, it creates a personal fulfilment, valid in itself, alongside history? Have those of today been told that they can will? No. Have they been told that the individual means nothing in the face of anonymous powers; that the masses, history, nature and even human science all come over them like a wave? Have they been told that to want, any kind of wanting, is pride and therefore recklessness? That it is wiser to despair than to want.

Then apathy is not exactly a destiny. The individual has been slandered, and the doctrinaires prove to be seeking only to intimidate him. Such phenomena of intimidation often occur in the world of history. In the face of a great will, there seem to be circumstances when individuals or even entire societies are forced to abdicate. This is what happened, for example, to many peoples of Antiquity, who were intimidated by the power and especially the will to power of Rome. King Attalus, upon his death, left Rome the powerful kingdom of Pergamon. Historians tell us that the same thing happened with Bithynia. Even a king of Egypt, Alexander II, imitating the king of Pergamon, left Rome the kingdom that was said to be the richest in Antiquity. What a strange suicide! exclaims the historian.

Strange? These suicides at least make sense. They are committed by one man in front of another man or other men. But how can we describe the suicide I mentioned, of a man of today in front of a completely anonymous power? King Attalus must have been an apathetic man, he and his entire family, but at least they had the excuse that their will bowed to another will. But to whose will do we bow? To whom do we bow down, whose subjugation do we seek? Is not the most surprising of idolatries that which we, the enlightened ones of today, demonstrate?

There is definitely something primitive in contemporary man. To save him, today's historian says that he is only, through lucidity, a despairing man. And indeed, if you consider yourself to be in a ready-made world, with God, interplanetary spaces and angels, with history, masses and destiny, it is hard not to be despairing. But you are a hopeless person just as a primitive person without magic would have been, for example. Primitives without magic, superstitious people without faith, fallen angels overcome by passivity, positivity and boredom – this is what our mentality resembles, after all. And in order to retain a grain of the privileges that the individual has gradually lost, we have imagined that, if we could not mean anything in the world in which we found ourselves, we still have the satisfaction of seeing that this world is ending with us. We are at the end of the world; it is ending with us. If we are nothing, we at least have the satisfaction of knowing that, before long, the world will also be nothing.

Perhaps it is in this conviction that our primitive mentality betrays itself more than anywhere else. Undoubtedly, there are among us authentic philosophers of culture who see, understand and explain the phenomena of the contemporary world. If they find signs of decadence, signs of the end within it, in other words, if, with our times, they feel that a cycle is coming to an end, their explanation is certainly based on a wealth of facts that are too rich and too convincing to be dismissed simply by observing that the idea of the end gives rise to a certain feeling of the end, present in each of us. We are not talking about such great minds of the time, but rather about us, those who feel without stirring up the facts. Such an uncritical, uncontrolled feeling arises and feeds only on the apathy that we undoubtedly demonstrate. And what else can shake us out of our passivity? Only noise, sensationalism, apocalypse. We like the fuss, and that is why we want or wait for endings, any ending being resounding.

The need for sensationalism in contemporary man has often been observed. Everything must be loud to the ear and unexpectedly large to the eye; in moral terms, we seek effect, surprise, and in literary terms, paradox. It is true that we are also governed by a certain taste for discretion, for moderation, at times. Contemporary jazz is noisy, but it is also restrained at the same time. However, if our primitive nature has become civilised, it has not been able to do so by altering itself to such an extent that it has disappeared completely. On other levels, our unquenchable thirst for the sensational, our so-called "strong" vocabulary, full of superlatives, our need to excite our senses and our being clearly prove that the sense of moderation is, in most cases, nothing more than a technique. We want to be constantly frenetic or to see constantly frenetic things; but frenzy stands out better if we are also calm from time to time.

And for us, the many, the lovers of noise and apocalypse, those who desire the end of everything and everyone, because the end is at least resounding at its peak, for us, a contemporary said those profound and calm words: "A tree falls with a crash. It grew without a sound."

b) Between apathy and agony

Without noise, this is true growth. With how much joy do you return to it, after wandering among all those things written with capital letters: Cosmos, Being, Non-being, History. It is a detour to ourselves, but let us never regret the detour, since we have rediscovered ourselves. It is in the nature of the moral problem to debate big issues in order to return to small duties.

Wanting to start now makes sense. The Promethean factor in willpower corrupts it. Not exaltation — because it is difficult to live constantly at such heights — but moderation, discretion, and perseverance are what a person needs. Everything that is exaggerated borders on indifference, on emptiness. In order not to endanger our will to fall back into apathy, we

choose a struggle, perhaps without resonance, but also without rest: agony. To want only has meaning in this unceasing tension on the moral plane.

One of the most reckless errors that can be committed against the spirit is to kidnap the moral plane in order to transfer it to other planes. This is what happened so many times in the guilty nineteenth century. Instead of the will serving the moral perfection of the individual, instead of it adapting to the problems posed by individual activity, giving each gesture an ethical meaning, saving, in a word, individual life itself — it allowed itself to be stimulated by the intellect and recklessly strove to master nature through science. To know, it was said with equal arrogance as in Bacon's time, means to be able, to become powerful. What could man desire more than power? So let us desire power. But we forget that man has desired power on other occasions, in the days of magic, for example, or with each demiurge. And so it happened that, instead of a healthy will, seen as a path to moral perfection, we preferred an exalted one, tending towards the senseless domination of nature.

It is curious how we chase after "power." Over us and against us, yes, that makes sense. It is the only meaning we are able to give to power and the will to power. For our object is ourselves; our only field of action is our own humanity. If we needed another sign of primitive, magical mentality, we can find it precisely in this unnatural leap into the void.

How healthy is the moral problem, as a problem of humanity, and how unhealthy are the ages that do not take it into account! The same past age, about which we have perhaps spoken too much, is characteristic in this respect. It has no moral problems — broadly speaking, without a doubt — because it does not, strictly speaking, have the feeling of being in crisis. The philosophical problem of morality arises, like philosophy in general, in times of crisis. The past age did not know, in its illusionism, what crisis was, and therefore did not have a philosophy proper, but was content to

deny. Today, he seems not only too naive, but also too intellectual, too fond of ideology. A century without ethics!

Wanting only begins to mean something after the disaster of ideologies. The ideologue is the man without responsibility for all reform programmes and projects. We are all still ideologues, as long as our ideas do not oblige us in practical terms. But then wanting would no longer make sense with regard to everyone, wanting the good of humanity; even less does it mean wanting the power of the intellect to rule over nature; it means something for oneself, that is, to be responsible for what one has proposed. The ideologue has no moral will but, at most, ambitions. Such an example of humanity compromises the ideas in whose name he speaks — is this not why we are so bored with "ideas" today? — and falsifies the purposes of the will. Although still *vir dicendi peritus*, he has ceased to be *vir bonus*.

For the *vir bonus*, for the self-controlled, powerful man, but powerful in his own world, for his perfection, it makes sense to want, if we must want something. But can we really want? asks the contemporary man again. Is our defeat, when we tried through the will to power to be demiurges, so complete that even in human affairs, on a moral level, the will is no longer fruitful? In other words, is it still possible for today's man to cease to be apathetic and begin to be agonising?

It is worth noting that, despite the fatigue evident in today's societies, they have not ceased to want, in their own way. If to desire means to look to the future, to be the future, it cannot always be said that societies ignore their own future. Popularisers of science and positivists who idolise it to the point of compromise make much of the fact that science predicts certain phenomena. For example, it is announced that on 11 August 1999 there will be a total solar eclipse. No one doubts this, according to the astronomer's prophecy, and the positivist, victorious, asks you if something similar can be predicted in the moral order. The answer is: yes, it can be predicted, precisely because societies are not

completely devoid of will. We cannot know what European societies will be like around the year 2000; who can predict today the profound changes that will take place in them by then? Nevertheless, we can know — with a certain certainty, of a different nature than the astronomical one, but just as indisputable — that, whatever the societies of Europe will be like in 1996, they will celebrate four hundred years since the birth of Descartes. And whatever societies will be like in 2032, they will celebrate two hundred years since Goethe's death. We have no doubt about this, just as we have no doubt about the solar eclipse on 11 August 1999. And what makes us not doubt it is precisely the awareness that humanity today wants to celebrate Goethe, believes in his spirit, in its survival.

It could therefore be said that it is not only the intellect that creates order and is therefore prescient, but also the will. Through the will, the future takes on a certain structure. We realise this structure precisely because we exercise our will. We know the things we want — not out of an arbitrary will, but out of a deep one, springing from the nature of our spirit. When we let certain anonymous powers want for us, it is natural that we know nothing. But the same thing would probably happen in the field of science if the experimenter did not want anything, but merely observed what happened to fall within the scope of his experience. By wanting, we therefore emerge from anonymity. And the future itself ceases to be anonymous when, through will, we emerge from the ranks of the anonymous. The philosophy of culture speaks of a plant-like destiny for the spiritual creations of humanity. Cultures, if not humans, would be born, develop and perish just like plants; no more freedom, no more fate. But how could it be otherwise, as long as there is no will and no awareness that it is possible to transcend the plant-like state?

Here is what could be said to those who question man's capacity to be active, combative, agonising. For if societies want to and can move, in a certain sense, towards the future; if they can achieve fulfilment, then all the more so could the individual be capable of striving towards his own perfection. In fact, the above says too much

. For the will of societies for the future and their capacity for prophecy are historical. We prophesy something that will happen in history. But the meaning of wanting must be foreign to the taste of historicity. It must not yearn for epochal ends or beginnings. Wanting is the quiet, unheralded growth.

I mentioned the will of societies because it is clearer to everyone; its action takes place on a larger scale. But true growth towards the future belongs to individuals, not to collectives. And it is interesting in itself, not in its echo. What can a will aim for more than the self-fulfilment of its subject? Only this future, not a historical one, is enviable.

But the future does not bring fulfilment, it only promises it. Moral life is moral struggle, agony on a daily basis. What interests the fighter above all else is the beginning. He very rarely thinks about the resounding end of things, but always about their silent beginning. He knows, on an individual level, that the world is not given to him ready-made, that it has not yet been created, and, in a certain sense, that it will never be created properly. The meaning of his struggle is to define the world by defining himself. And he cannot define himself through other things, but precisely through those things he gives himself, through the moral order he prescribes for himself. Without pathos, let us seek to be at the beginning of the world, unceasingly at its beginning. This is what consciousness did in the realm of knowledge, and this is what it does now, in the realm of action. How sad are those philosophies in which you believe one thing and do another: scepticism, for example, which does not tell you not to act, although it recommends that you do not make up your mind in matters of judgement.

Here everything must be a process, on the intellectual plane as well as on the spiritual plane. Individual consciousness is a consciousness of action. Through this, it is indeed one of its own action, for if we do not live the life at the beginning of which we stood, we are automatic beings, not truly active. This often happens to us, that we find ourselves living automatically in the forms of other times. These forms were also once elaborations, processes. However, they have become fixed, and now tend to become permanent. Societies do not educate

always individuals awakening their own powers, but serving them ready-made frameworks and even formulas that scientific and moral efforts from previous times had arrived at. This is why moral education is often attempted through proverbs and aphorisms. But how can proverbs convince and aphorisms inspire, since they do not respond to anything in the consciousness of others?

Our education is made up of aphorisms: there could be no better proof of complacency, of the conviction that we have reached a peak beyond which any effort is pointless. This illusion is so deeply rooted that it was believed that wisdom, which is the living fact of intellectual life, could be taught. We are living in an age of textbooks.

The agonising person appropriates his own life. There is a frightening lack of will in this world where everything is found in textbooks. Only the agonising person renounces catechism. There are believers, it seems, in certain religions, believers who have a

"spiritual father"; whatever they do, they go to consult him: is what they want to do right? Is it wrong? And if the spiritual father tells them: do this and that, the believers do so. Should we be surprised that there are believers of this kind? They are perfectly suited to a world like ours, where individual conscience no longer knows anything by itself, but takes everything for granted. Only let us not call such believers Christians. He who has no norm within himself, he who does not know, he who does not want, cannot be a Christian.

Why ask someone else about your sins? Why expect condemnation from someone else? It is always less difficult to bear when it comes from outside, because it does not require any effort on your part, it does not strike you, it does not leave you free for redemption. When your sin is pointed out to you, you are overwhelmed; when, on the other hand, you feel your sin, you are inspired. Perhaps it is human nature not to feel one's sin and to forgive oneself more than one's confessor would forgive. In this sense, some religions may be right when they do not seem to set souls free, but rather control them through the mediation of their authoritarian priests. But, in principle, such doctrines resemble intimidation rather than the salvation of man.

A Russian writer, Berdiaev, outlined the process of man's moral deepening, a process that we have followed above in terms of knowledge.¹ According to the author, in the medieval conception, which is closely related to the ancient one, for Dante and St. Thomas, man is an organic part of the objective world, a step in a universal hierarchy. Order is imposed on man from outside. Hell and heaven are given to him; they are not found in the depths of the human spirit. With the Renaissance, the author continues, humanism begins; infinity opens up to man who, out of fear, takes refuge in himself and discovers there, with Shakespeare for example, the realm of the psyche. But the psyche is not the deepest layer of human existence. Only with Dostoevsky, says the author, is the spiritual discovered, in relation to which heaven and hell are no longer an objective, imposed order, but an inner one. In such a spiritual order, Christ is no longer an external law, a mere current of external life.

Shouldn't man's double victory over heaven be significant? We have seen that the heaven of astronomical speculation, with its vault and blue sky, has today become a mere mathematical question. The moral heaven, the heaven of Christian promise, now proves to be a simple inner urge to perfection. In both cases, it has ceased to overwhelm, in order to increase confidence in oneself, through the responsibility it awakens. How many things Plato says, describing them, both about the physical sky and, especially, about the moral one! They were myths, of course, just as the stories of the Bible are myths. Only that the ancients truly believed in Plato's myths, while Christians should only live the myths of the Church. There is a distance between the ancient perspective and the one to be adopted today; a distance from heaven to man. To speak of the heaven of modern man is only to burden him with responsibilities. The ancient heaven was, in the mind of man, a real curse hanging over our heads; today's heaven we could consider a simple command to fight.

But a lowly struggle, commensurate with our current situation. Nothing can tempt us to be anything other than human. Neither the will to power on a cosmic scale, nor the will to historicity, nor the will to dominate the masses are human ideals. They have cast man into the shadows, under the pretext of exalting him. Nietzsche did the same — it has been said, profoundly — when he wanted to reach the superman: he only succeeded in killing man. There are enough powers within us, and the substance of our lives is precious enough that we no longer need to think about things that are beyond our reach.

That is why the struggle of today's truly creative individual is, in most cases, to find his own measure.

For moral life, in particular, the return to the very substance of spiritual life is of utmost importance. The substance of our lives, so long mocked or simply disregarded, is regaining its right to a future. But not to the future of something that lasts, but to that of something that tends towards perfection.

In this heroic yet human sense, we know of only one person today who has a future: the Christian. Perhaps we attribute too much to him, or perhaps we simplify him too much; but we do not want to look at him in himself, but only as the bearer of those few traits that are human, first and foremost. We will never understand how Christian morality could have been called slave morality. On the contrary, everything beyond the boundaries of Christianity proves to be slavery; and Christianity alone seems to make people free. The solutions that have been brought to date outside of Christianity all spring from despair, just as the superman sprang from despair. We do not know if happier solutions will be found in the future. It may even be that the society of the future will not be Christian, more Christian than today's. However, it is no less true that man has found fulfilment through Christianity. That, in a certain sense, the Christian alone is, until now, the portrait of man.

Has anyone painted such a type of Christian?

His eyes see and do not see. Or rather, they see twice. They look, but they also reflect, as if their light were flowing outwards and reflecting inwards at the same time. Their eyes see, like everyone else's, the order of nature; but their gaze also distinguishes the order of creation. They contemplate the world as the world of man.

The Christian is in the group and withdraws from the group. What could give body to the unceasing rhythm that animates him? No one, in fact, renounces people less than he does. But it is not people, but man that he will seek among them. And that is why, when he no longer finds him where he hoped to find him at first, he will turn decisively to himself.

He is humiliated, but he is not ashamed of himself. If he despised his body, it is because it was born to overwhelm his being. Now the body is one thing and the Christian's being is another. Its centre of gravity, its principle of balance, does not belong to the order of the visible.

The Christian's left hand is on his chest. Does he want to undo and reveal — or only condemn? He condemns himself. And everything he lost by separating himself from others he now regains, through suffering, together with them. His community with the world is given to him from within, for within he finds sin, like a destiny in whose bosom all things were conceived together.

But destiny must be carried on. Destiny does not end a life: it barely begins it. And the Christian's right hand sketches this beginning, sketches it with a gesture that resembles, gathers, gives, fights — a gesture of a half-extended arm, with an open hand, with spread fingers.

And who could say that this gesture does not signify a beginning for something else? The fingers can come together, the hand can close, and the Christian's forehead is always serene enough to receive the sign of the cross. For he, who never ends, who never completes himself, must be constantly ready to give himself through death. Ready through will, through the orientation of life.

That is why he allows his face to be so calm in the face of agony. He is the only one who will never feel that he has wasted his time. Any powerful figure on earth, any victor of history, looking back on his life from a distance of a century, would feel that he had wasted it. Only the Christian would not feel this. Returning to earth, even then he would find nothing better to do.

NOTE

In this first post-war edition of Noica's book, the text of the 1937 first edition has been reproduced in accordance with the rules established by the Dictionarul ortografic, ortoepic și morfologic al limbii române (DOOM) [Dictionary of Romanian Spelling, Pronunciation and Morphology], published by the Romanian Academy and the Institute of Linguistics of the University of Bucharest (Editura Academiei RSR, 1989). Thus, apart from the spelling updates commonly used in post-war editions, certain lexical or morphological variants considered obsolete today have been modernised (such as *conditiune / distinctiune*, changed to *conditie/distinctie*, or *trebuie/autoriza*, changed to *trebuie/autorizeaza*). Changes of this kind were extremely few, as Noica's text rarely contained such forms. Likewise, in the current edition, the few obvious errors in the first edition have been tacitly corrected.

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