RIDE THE TIGER

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Contents

Part 1

Orientations

1

The Modern World and Traditional Man

This book sets out to study some of the ways in which the present age appears essentially as an age of dissolution. At the same time, it addresses the question of what kind of conduct and what form of existence are appropriate under the circumstances for *a particular human type.*

This restriction must be kept in mind. What I am about to say does *not* concern the ordinary man of our day. On the contrary, I have in mind the man who finds himself involved in today's world, even at its most problematic and paroxysmal points; yet he does not belong inwardly to such a world, nor will he give in to it. He feels himself, in essence, as belonging to a different race from that of the overwhelming majority of his contemporaries.

The natural place for such a man, the land in which he would not be a stranger, is the world of Tradition. I use the word *tradition* in a special sense, which I have defined elsewhere.[1] It differs from the common usage, but is close to the meaning given to it by René Guénon in his analysis of the crisis of the modern world.[2] In this particular meaning, a civilization or a society is "traditional" when it is ruled by principles that transcend what is merely human and individual, and when all its sectors are formed and ordered from above, and directed to what is above. Beyond the variety of historical forms, there has existed an essentially identical and constant world of Tradition. I have sought elsewhere to define its values and main categories, which are the basis for any civilization, society, or ordering of existence that calls itself *normal* in a higher sense, and is endowed with real significance.

Everything that has come to predominate in the modern world is the exact antithesis of any traditional type of civilization. Moreover, the

circumstances make it increasingly unlikely that anyone, starting from the values of Tradition (even assuming that one could still identify and adopt them), could take actions or reactions of a certain efficacy that would provoke any real change in the current state of affairs. After the last worldwide upheavals, there seems to be no starting point either for nations or for the vast majority of individuals—nothing in the institutions and general state of society, nor in the predominant ideas, interests, and energies of this epoch.

Nevertheless, a few men exist who are, so to speak, still on their feet among the ruins and the dissolution, and who belong, more or less consciously, to that other world. A little group seems willing to fight on, even in lost positions. So long as it does not yield, does not compromise itself by giving in to the seductions that would condition any success it might have, its testimony is valid. For others, it is a matter of completely isolating themselves, which demands an inner character as well as privileged material conditions, which grow scarcer day by day. All the same, this is the second possible solution. I would add that there are a very few in the intellectual field who can still affirm "traditional" values beyond any immediate goal, so as to perform a "holding action." This is certainly useful to prevent current reality from shutting off every horizon, not only materially but also ideally, and stifling any measures different from its own. Thanks to them, *distances* may be maintained—other possible dimensions, other meanings of life, indicated to those able to detach themselves from looking only to the here and now.

But this does not resolve the practical, personal problem—apart from the case of the man who is blessed with the opportunity for material isolation—of those who cannot or will not burn their bridges with current life, and who must therefore decide how to conduct their existence, even on the level of the most elementary reactions and human relations.

This is precisely the type of man that the present book has in mind. To him applies the saying of a great precursor: "The desert encroaches. Woe to him whose desert is within!"[3] He can in truth find no further support from without. There no longer exist the organizations and institutions that, in a traditional civilization and society, would have allowed him to realize himself wholly, to order his own existence in a clear and unambiguous way, and to defend and apply creatively in his

own environment the principal values that he recognizes within himself. Thus there is no question of suggesting to him lines of action that, adequate and normative in any regular, traditional civilization, can no longer be so in an abnormal one—in an environment that is utterly different socially, psychically, intellectually, and materially; in a climate of general dissolution; in a system ruled by scarcely restrained disorder, and anyway lacking any legitimacy from above. Thence come the specific problems that I intend to treat here.

There is an important point to clarify at the outset regarding the attitude to be taken toward "survivals." Even now, especially in Western Europe, there are habits, institutions, and customs from the world of yesterday (that is, from the bourgeois world) that have a certain persistence. In fact, when crisis is mentioned today, what is meant is precisely the bourgeois world: it is the bases of bourgeois civilization and society that suffer these crises and are struck by dissolution. *This is not what I call the world of Tradition.* Socially, politically, and culturally, what is crashing down is the system that took shape after the revolution of the Third Estate and the first industrial revolution, even though there were often mixed up in it some remnants of a more ancient order, drained of their original vitality.

What kind of relationship can the human type whom I intend to treat here have with such a world? This question is essential. On it depend both the meaning to be attributed to the phenomena of crisis and dissolution that are ever more apparent today, and the attitude to be assumed in the face of them, and toward whatever they have not yet undermined and destroyed.

The answer to this question can only be negative. *The human type I have in mind has nothing to do with the bourgeois world.* He must consider everything bourgeois as being recent and antitraditional, born from processes that in themselves are negative and subversive. In many cases, one can see in the present critical phenomena a kind of nemesis or rebound effect.[4] Although I cannot go into details here, it is the very forces that, in their time, were set to work against the previous, traditional European civilization that have rebounded against those who summoned them, sapping them in their turn and carrying to a further degree the general process of disintegration. This appears very

clearly, for example, in the socioeconomic field, through the obvious relationship between the bourgeois revolution of the Third Estate and the successive socialist and Marxist movements; through democracy and liberalism on the one hand, and socialism on the other. The first revolution simply prepared the way for the second, whereupon the latter, having let the bourgeoisie perform that function, aimed solely at eradicating them.

In view of this, there is one solution to be eliminated right away: the solution of those who want to rely on what is left of the bourgeois world, defending and using it as a bastion against the more extreme currents of dissolution and subversion, even if they have tried to reanimate or reinforce these remnants with some higher and more traditional values.

In the first place, considering the general situation that becomes clearer every day since those crucial events that are the two world wars and their repercussions, to adopt such an orientation signifies self-deception as to the existence of material possibilities. The transformations that have already taken place go too deep to be reversible. The energies that have been liberated, or which are in the course of liberation, are not such as can be reconfined within the structures of yesterday's world. The very fact that attempts at reaction have referred to those structures alone, which are void of any superior legitimacy, has made the subversive forces all the more vigorous and aggressive. In the second place, such a path would lead to a compromise that would be inadmissible as an ideal, and perilous as a tactic. As I have said, the traditional values in the sense that I understand them are not bourgeois values, but the very antithesis of them.

Thus to recognize any validity in those survivals, to associate them in any way with traditional values, and to validate them with the latter with the intentions already described, would be either to demonstrate a feeble grasp of the traditional values themselves, or else to diminish them and drag them down to a deplorable and risky form of compromise. I say "risky" because however one attaches the traditional ideas to the residual forms of bourgeois civilization, one exposes them to the attack—in some respects inevitable, legitimate, and necessary—currently mounted against that civilization.

One is therefore obliged to turn to the opposite solution, even if things thereby become still more difficult and one runs into another type of risk. It is good to sever every link with all that which is destined sooner or later to collapse. The problem will then be to maintain one's essential direction without leaning on any given or transmitted form, including forms that are authentically traditional but belong to past history. In this respect, continuity can only be maintained on an essential plane, so to speak, as an inner orientation of being, beside the greatest possible external liberty. As we shall soon see, the support that the Tradition can continue to give does not refer to positive structures, regular and recognized by some civilization already formed by it, but rather to that doctrine that contains its principles only in their superior, preformal state, anterior to the particular historical formulations: a state that in the past had no pertinence to the masses, but had the character of an esoteric doctrine.

For the rest, given the impossibility of acting positively in the sense of a real and general return to the normal system, and given the impossibility, within the climate of modern society, culture, and customs, of molding one's whole existence in an *organic* and unitary manner, it remains to be seen on what terms one can accept situations of utter dissolution without being inwardly touched by them. What in the current phase—which is, in the last analysis, a transitional one—can be chosen, separated from the rest, and accepted as a free form of behavior that is not outwardly anachronistic? Can one thus measure oneself against what is most advanced in contemporary thought and lifestyle, while remaining inwardly determined and governed by a completely different spirit?

The advice "Don't go to the place of defense, but to the place of attack," might be adopted by the group of differentiated men, late children of the Tradition, who are in question here. That is to say, it might be better to contribute to the fall of that which is already wavering and belongs to yesterday's world than to try to prop it up and prolong its existence artificially. It is a possible tactic, and useful to prevent the final crisis from being the work of the opposition, whose initiative one would then have to suffer. The risks of such a course of action are more than obvious: there is no saying who will have the last word. But in the

present epoch there is nothing that is not risky. This is perhaps the one advantage that it offers to those who are still on their feet.

The basic ideas to be drawn from what has been said so far can be summarized as follows:

The significance of the crises and the dissolutions that so many people deplore today should be stated, indicating the real and direct object of the destructive processes: bourgeois civilization and society. But measured against traditional values, these latter were already the first negation of a world anterior and superior to them. Consequently the crisis of the modern world could represent, in Hegel's terms, a "negation of a negation," so as to signify a phenomenon that, in its own way, is positive. This double negation might end in nothingness—in the nothingness that erupts in multiple forms of chaos, dispersion, rebellion, and "protest" that characterize many tendencies of recent generations; or in that other nothingness that is scarcely hidden behind the organized system of material civilization. Alternatively, for the men in question here it might create a new, free space that could eventually become the premise for a future, formative action.

2
The End of a Cycle
"Ride the Tiger"

The idea just mentioned refers to a perspective that does not really enter into the argument of this book, because it is not concerned with inner, personal behavior, but with outer circumstances; not with present-day reality, but with an unpredictable future upon which one's own conduct should in no wise depend.

This is a perspective already alluded to, which sees that the present time may, in the last analysis, be a transitional epoch. I will say only a little about it before approaching our principal problem. The reference point here is given by the traditional doctrine of cycles and by the idea that the present epoch, with all its typical phenomena, corresponds to the terminal phase of a cycle.

The phrase chosen as the title of this book, "ride the tiger," may serve as a transition between what has been said hitherto, and this other order of ideas. The phrase is a Far Eastern saying, expressing the idea that if one succeeds in riding a tiger, not only does one avoid having it leap on one, but if one can keep one's seat and not fall off, one may eventually get the better of it. Those who are interested may be reminded of a similar theme found in the schools of traditional wisdom, such as the "ox-herding" episodes of Japanese Zen; while in classical antiquity there is a parallel in the trials of Mithras, who lets himself be dragged by the bull and will not let go until the animal stops, whereupon Mithras kills it.

This symbolism is applicable at various levels. First, it can refer to a line of conduct in the interior, personal life; then to the appropriate attitude in the face of critical, historical, and collective situations. In the latter case, we are interested in the relation of the symbol to the

doctrine of cycles, with regard to both the general structure of history and the particular aspect of it that refers to the sequence of the "Four Ages." This is a teaching that, as I have shown elsewhere,[1] bears identical traits in the East and in the ancient West. (Giambattista Vico simply caught an echo of it.)

In the classical world, it was presented in terms of humanity's progressive descent from the Golden Age to what Hesiod called the Iron Age. In the corresponding Hindu teaching, the final age is called the Kali Yuga (Dark Age). Its essential quality is emphatically said to be a climate of dissolution, in which all the forces—individual and collective, material, psychic, and spiritual—that were previously held in check by a higher law and by influences of a superior order pass into a state of freedom and chaos. The texts of Tantra have a striking image for this situation, saying that it is the time when Kali is "wide awake." Kali is a female divinity symbolizing the elementary, primordial forces of the world and of life, but in her "lower" aspects she is also presented as a goddess of sex and orgiastic rites. In previous ages she was "sleeping," that is, latent in the latter aspects, but in the Dark Age she is said to be completely awake and active.[2]

Everything points to the fact that exactly this situation has been reached in recent times, having for its epicenter the civilization and society of the West, from which it has rapidly spread over the whole planet. It is not too forced an interpretation to link this with the fact that the present epoch stands under the zodiacal sign of Aquarius, the waters in which everything turns to a fluid and formless state. Thus predictions made many centuries ago—for these ideas go back that far—appear strangely timely today. One finds here an analogy to what I have said above regarding the problem of what attitude is proper to the final age, associated here with riding the tiger.

In fact, the texts that discuss the Kali Yuga and the Age of Kali also declare that the norms of life, valid during epochs in which divine forces were more or less alive and active, must be considered as cancelled in the final age. During the latter there lives an essentially different human type who is incapable of following the ancient precepts. Not only that, but because of the different historical and even planetary circumstances, such precepts, even if followed, would not yield the same

results. For this reason, different norms apply, and the rule of secrecy is lifted from certain truths, a certain ethic, and particular "rites" to which the rule previously applied on account of their dangerous character and because they contravened the forms of a normal existence, regulated by the sacred tradition. No one can fail to see the significance of this convergence of views. In this as in other points, my ideas, far from having a personal and contingent character, are essentially linked to perspectives already known to the world of Tradition, when abnormal situations in general were foreseen and analyzed.

We shall now examine the principle of "riding the tiger" as applied to the external world and the total environment. Its significance can be stated as follows: When a cycle of civilization is reaching its end, it is difficult to achieve anything by resisting it and by directly opposing the forces in motion. The current is too strong; one would be overwhelmed. The essential thing is not to let oneself be impressed by the omnipotence and apparent triumph of the forces of the epoch. These forces, devoid of connection with any higher principle, are in fact on a short chain. One should not become fixated on the present and on things at hand, but keep in view the conditions that may come about in the future. Thus the principle to follow could be that of letting the forces and processes of this epoch take their own course, while keeping oneself firm and ready to intervene when "the tiger, which cannot leap on the person riding it, is tired of running." The Christian injunction "Resist not evil" may have a similar meaning, if taken in a very particular way. One abandons direct action and retreats to a more internal position.

The perspective offered by the doctrine of cyclical laws is implicit here. When one cycle closes, another begins, and the point at which a given process reaches its extreme is also the point at which it turns in the opposite direction. But there is still the problem of continuity between the two cycles. To use an image from Hoffmansthal, the positive solution would be that of a meeting between those who have been able to stay awake through the long night, and those who may appear the next morning. But one cannot be sure of this happening. It is impossible to foresee with certainty how, and on what plane, there can be any continuity between the cycle that is nearing its end and the next one.

Therefore the line of conduct to be followed in the present epoch must have an autonomous character and an immanent, individual value. I mean to say that the attraction of positive prospects, more or less short-term, should not play an important part in it. They might be entirely lacking right up to the end of the cycle, and the possibilities offered by a new movement beyond the zero point might concern others coming after us, who may have held equally firm without awaiting any direct results or exterior changes.

Before leaving this topic and resuming my principal argument, it may be useful to mention another point connected to cyclical laws. This concerns the relationship between Western civilization and other civilizations, especially those of the East. Among those who have recognized the crisis of the modern world, and who have also abandoned the idea that modern civilization is the civilization par excellence, the zenith and measure of all others, some have turned their eyes to the East. They see there, to a certain degree, a traditional and spiritual orientation to life that has long ceased to exist in the West as the basis for the effective organization of the various realms of existence. They have even wondered whether the East might furnish useful reference points for a revival and reintegration of the West.

It is important to have a clear view of the domain to which such a proposition might apply. If it is simply a matter of doctrines and "intellectual" contacts, the attempt is legitimate. But one should take note that valid examples and points of reference are to be found, at least partially, in our own traditional past, without having to turn to non-European civilizations. Not much is to be gained by any of this, however. It would be a matter of conversations at a high level between isolated individuals, cultivators of metaphysical systems. If one is more concerned with real influences that have a powerful effect on existence, one should have no illusions about them. The East itself is now following in our footsteps, ever more subject to the ideas and influences that have led us to the point at which we find ourselves, "modernizing" itself and adopting our own secular and materialistic forms of life. What is still left of Eastern traditions and character is steadily losing ground and becoming marginalized. The liquidation of "colonialism" and the material independence that Eastern peoples are

acquiring vis-à-vis Europe are closely accompanied by an ever more blatant subjection to the ideas, the mores, and the "advanced" and "progressive" mentality of the West.

Based on the doctrine of cycles, it may be that anything of value from the point of view of a man of Tradition, either in the East or elsewhere, concerns a residual legacy that survives, up to a point, not because it belongs to areas that are truly untouched by the principle of decline, but merely because this process is still in an early phase there. For such civilizations it is only a matter of time before they find themselves at the same point as ourselves, knowing the same problems and the same phenomena of dissolution under the sign of "progress" and modernity. The tempo may even be much faster in the East. We have the example of China, which in two decades has traveled the whole way from an imperial, traditional civilization to a materialistic and atheist communist regime—a journey that the Europeans took centuries to accomplish.

Outside the circles of scholars and specialists in metaphysical disciplines, the "myth of the East" is therefore a fallacy. "The desert encroaches": there is no other civilization that can serve as support; we have to face our problems alone. The only prospect offered us as a counterpart of the cyclical laws, and that only hypothetical, is that the process of decline of the Dark Age has first reached its terminal phases with us in the West. Therefore it is not impossible that we would also be the first to pass the zero point, in a period in which the other civilizations, entering later into the same current, would find themselves more or less in our current state, having abandoned—"superseded"—what they still offer today in the way of superior values and traditional forms of existence that attract us. The consequence would be a reversal of roles. The West, having reached the point beyond the negative limit, would be qualified to assume a new function of guidance or command, very different from the material, techno-industrial leadership that it wielded in the past, which, once it collapsed, resulted only in a general leveling.

This rapid overview of general prospects and problems may have been useful to some readers, but I shall not dwell further on these matters. As I have said, what interests us here is the field of personal life;

and from that point of view, in defining the attitude to be taken toward certain experiences and processes of today, having consequences different from what they appear to have for practically all our contemporaries, we need to establish autonomous positions, independent of anything the future may or may not bring.

Part 2

In the World Where God Is Dead

3

European Nihilism

The Dissolution of Morals

For the symbolic expression of the complex process that has led to the present situation of crisis in matters of morals and the vision of life, the best formulation is that of Nietzsche: "God is dead."[1]

For our purposes, we can take Nietzsche's theme as our point of departure, because it has lost nothing of its validity and relevance. It has been rightly said that Nietzsche's personality and thought also have a symbolic character. Robert Reininger writes: "This is a struggle for the sake of modern man, that man who no longer has any roots in the sacred soil of tradition, wavering in search of himself between the peaks of civilization and the abysses of barbarism, trying to find a satisfactory meaning for an existence completely left to itself."[2]

Friedrich Nietzsche is the one who best foresaw "European nihilism" as a future and a destiny "which proclaims itself everywhere by the voice of a thousand signs and a thousand presages." The "great event, obscurely suspected, that God is dead," is the principle of the collapse of all values. From this point, morality is deprived of its sanction and "incapable of maintaining itself," and the interpretation and justification formerly given to all norms and values disappear.

Dostoyevsky expressed the same idea in the words, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted."[3]

"The death of God" is an image that characterizes a whole historical process. The phrase expresses "unbelief turned to daily reality," a desacralization of existence and a total rift with the world of Tradition that, beginning in the West at about the period of the Renaissance and humanism, has increasingly assumed the character of an obvious and irreversible state of affairs for present-day humanity. This state is no

less real where it is not yet clearly visible, owing to a regime of doubles and surrogates of the "God who is dead."

We must distinguish various stages of the process in question. The elementary fact is a fracture of an ontological character, through which human life loses any real reference to transcendence. All the developments of nihilism are already virtually contained in this fact. Morality rendered independent from theology and metaphysics and founded on the sole authority of reason—so-called "autonomous" morality—is the first phenomenon to take shape after the death of God, trying to hide it from consciousness. When the level of the sacred is lost, the absolute principle descends to the level of pure human morality. This defines the rationalistic phase of the "stoicism of duty" and of "moral fetishism," which, incidentally, is one of the characteristics of Protestantism. In speculative philosophy, this phase has as its sign or symbol the Kantian theory of the categorical imperative, ethical rationalism, and "autonomous morality."

But once morality has lost its root, which is the original and effective relationship of man with a higher world, it ceases to have any invulnerable foundation, and the critics soon have the better of it. In "autonomous morality," which is secular and rational, the only resistance to any natural impulse is an empty and rigid command, a "thou shalt" that is a mere echo of the ancient, living law. Then at the point where one tries to give this "thou shalt" some firm content and to justify that content, the ground gives way. There is no support for those capable of thinking it through to the end. This is already the case with Kantian ethics. In reality, there is no "imperative" at this stage that does not imply the presumed, axiomatic value of certain unexplained premises that depend simply on a personal equation or on the accepted state of affairs in a given society.

The phase of dissolution that follows that of ethical rationalism is defined by utilitarian or "social" ethics. Renouncing any intrinsic or absolute basis for "good" and "evil," the justification proposed for what is left of moral norms is whatever suits the individual for his own advantage and for his material tranquility in social life. But nihilism is already visible behind this morality. When there is no longer any internal restraint, every action and behavior appears licit so long as the outer

sanctions of society's laws can be avoided, or if one is indifferent to them. Nothing any longer has an intrinsic norm and an imperative character. It is just a matter of adjusting to society's codes, which take the place of the superseded laws of religion. After Puritanism and ethical rigorism, this is the orientation of the bourgeois world: toward social idols and conformism founded on convenience, cowardice, hypocrisy, or inertia. But the individualism of the end of the nineteenth century marked in its turn the beginning of an anarchic dissolution that rapidly spread and intensified. It had already prepared the chaos hiding behind the façade of apparent orderliness.

The previous phase, limited in its extent, had been that of the Romantic hero: the man who feels himself alone in the face of divine indifference, and the superior individual who despite everything reaffirms himself in a tragic context. He breaks accepted laws, but not in the sense of denying their validity; rather, he claims for himself exceptional rights to what is forbidden, be it good or ill. The process exhausts itself, for example, in a man like Max Stirner, who saw in all morality the ultimate form of the divine fetish that was to be destroyed. He denounced the "beyond" that exists within man and that tries to give him rules as being a "new heaven" that is merely the insidious transposition of the external, theological beyond, which has been negated.[4] With this conquest of the "interior god" and the exaltation of the "Unique" that is free from rules and "rests its cause on nothingness," opposing itself to every value and pretense of society, Stirner marks the end of the road trodden by the nihilistic social revolutionaries (to whom the term *nihilism* was originally applied)—but trodden in the name of utopian social ideas in which they always believed: ideas such as "justice," "liberty," and "humanity," as opposed to the injustice and tyranny that they saw in the existing order.

Turning to Nietzsche, the European nihilism that he predicted as a general, not just a sporadic, phenomenon attacks not only the field of morality in a strict sense, but also that of truth, of worldviews, and of ends. The "death of God" is associated with this loss of any meaning to life, any superior justification for existence. Nietzsche's theme is well known: that a need for evasion and a surrender of life have brought about the invention of a "world of truth" or a "world of val-

ues" separate from, and in opposition to, this world, now characterized as false and worthless. Another world has been invented: a world of being, goodness, and spirit as a negation or condemnation of the world of becoming, of the senses, and of living reality. But that constructed world dissolved, once it was discovered that it was an illusion. Nietzsche revealed its genesis and pointed out its human—"all too human"—and irrational roots. His contribution to nihilism as a "free spirit" and "immoralist" has been precisely his interpretation of certain "superior" and "spiritual" values not only as simple vital impulses, but in most cases as the results of a "decadent" and enfeebled life.

On these terms, all that remains real is what had been negated or rejected from the point of view of that other, "superior" world of "God" and "truth"—the world of what *ought to be*, not of what is. The conclusion is that "what ought to be is not; what is, is what ought not to be." This is what Nietzsche called the "tragic phase" of nihilism. It is the beginning of the "misery of man without God." Existence seems devoid of any meaning, any goal. While all imperatives, moral values, and restraints have fallen away, so have all supports. Once more we find a parallel in Dostoyevsky, where he makes Kirilov say that man invented God just to be able to go on living:[5] God, therefore, as an "alienation of the I." The terminal situation is given in drastic form by Sartre, when he declares that "existentialism is not an atheism in the sense of being reduced to proving that God does not exist. Rather it says that even if God existed, nothing would change." Existence is reduced to itself in its naked reality, without any reference point outside itself that could give it a real meaning for man.

Thus there are two phases. The first is a sort of metaphysical or moral rebellion. The second is the phase in which the very motives that had implicitly nourished that rebellion give way and dissolve. For a new type of man, they are empty. That is the nihilistic phase in the proper sense, whose chief theme is the sense of the absurdity, the pure irrationality of the human condition.

4

From the Precursors of Nihilism to the "Lost Youth" and the Protest Movement

A current of thought and a "historiography" exist that represent this process of rebellion and dissolution, or at least its first phases, as having been something positive and as a victory. It is another aspect of contemporary nihilism, whose undeclared basis is a sort of "shipwreck euphoria." It is well known that the phases of dissolution, beginning with illuminism and liberalism and proceeding gradually to immanentist historicism (first "idealistic," then materialist and Marxist), have been interpreted and celebrated as those of the emancipation and reaffirmation of man, of progress of the spirit, and of true "humanism." We shall see later how Nietzsche's program for the postnihilist period arose, in its worse aspects, out of this very mentality. For the present, there is just one point to be made.

No God has ever controlled man. Divine despotism is a fantasy, and so is most of that to which, in the illuminist and revolutionary interpretation, the world of Tradition owes its ordering from above and its orientation toward the above, its hierarchical system, its various forms of legitimate authority and sacral power. No—the true and essential foundation of this whole system is the particular inner structure, the capacity of recognition, and the various inborn interests of a type of man who nowadays has virtually disappeared. Man, at a given moment, wanted to "be free." He was allowed to be so, and he was allowed to throw off the chains that did not bind him so much as sustain him. Thereupon he was allowed to suffer all the consequences of

his liberation, following ineluctably up to his present state in which "God is dead" (or "God has withdrawn," as Bernanos says), and existence becomes the field of absurdity where everything is possible and everything is allowed. Nothing has acted in all of this but the law that is known in the Far East as the law of actions and reactions, which is objectively "beyond good and evil" and beyond any petty morality.

In recent times, the fracture has extended from the moral plane to the existential and ontological. Values that were previously questioned and shaken only by a few precursors in relative isolation now lose all relevance for general consciousness in everyday life. One is no longer dealing with "problems" but with a state of affairs in which the immoralist pathos of yesterday's rebels seems increasingly old-fashioned and incongruous. For some time, a good part of Western humanity has considered it a natural thing for existence to lack any real meaning, and for it not to be ordered by any higher principle, arranging their lives in the most bearable and least disagreeable way they can. Of course this has its counterpart and inevitable consequence in an inner life that is more and more reduced, formless, feeble, and elusive, and in a growing dissolution of any uprightness and character. Another aspect of the same process is a regime of compensations and anesthetics that is no less deceptive for not being recognized as such. A character in Hemingway summarizes it when he says:

> Religion is the opium of the people . . . And now economics is the opium of the people; along with patriotism . . . What about sexual intercourse; was that an opium of the people? . . . But drink was a sovereign opium of the people, oh, an excellent opium. Although some prefer the radio, another opium of the people, a cheap one . . .[1]

But once this sensation occurs, the façade may start to waver, the assemblage to collapse, and the dissolution of values is followed by the denial of everything one has resorted to in order to make up for the senselessness of a life henceforth reduced to itself. Then comes the existential theme of nausea and disgust, of the void that is sensed behind the whole system of bourgeois life, the theme of the absurdity of the whole new, earthbound "civilization." Where the sensation is most acute there occur forms of existential trauma and states that have been called "the

spectrality of events," "the degradation of objective reality," "existential alienation." One also notices that the sporadic experiences of intellectuals and artists of the past become modes of behavior occurring in the natural course of things for certain groups of the younger generation.

Only yesterday it was a matter of writers, painters, and "damned poets" living on the edge, often alcoholics, mingling their talents with the climate of existential dissolution and with irrational rebellion against established values. Typical in this regard is the case of Rimbaud, whose extreme form of rebellion was the renunciation of his own genius, poetic silence, and immersion in practical activity. Another is the case of Lautréamont, driven by existential trauma to the morbid exaltation of evil, horror, and formless elementarity (Maldoror, the personage of his poems, says that he has "received life like a wound, and forbidden the suicide from curing his injury"). Then there are those isolated individuals given to adventure, like Jack London and the early Ernst Jünger, who seek new horizons on distant lands and seas; while for the others everything seems in order, safe and sound, as under the banner of science they hymn the triumphal march of progress, scarcely troubled by the noise of anarchist bombs.

Already after World War I, processes of this type had begun to spread, announcing the final phases of nihilism. At first such harbingers remained at the margins of life, on the frontier-zone of art. The most significant and radical of them all was perhaps Dadaism, the end result of the deepest impulses that had nourished the various movements of avant-garde art. But Dadaism negated the very categories of art, showing the transition to the chaotic forms of a life deprived of any rationality, any restraint, any coherence; it was not just the acceptance but the exaltation of the absurd and the contradictory, of nonsense and pointlessness taken just as they are.

Surrealism took up some similar themes, in part, when it refused to adapt life to the "derisory conditions of all existence down here." Sometimes the path was in fact followed to the very end, as with the suicide of surrealists like Vaché, Crevel, and Rigault; the latter reproached the others for being able to do nothing but literature and poetry. Indeed, when the young André Breton declared that the simplest surrealist act would be to go out into the street and shoot passersby

at random,[2] he was anticipating what happened more than once after World War II, when some of the younger generation passed from theory to practice. By absurd and destructive actions, they sought to attain the only possible meaning of existence, after rejecting suicide as the radical solution for the metaphysically abandoned individual.

With the further traumatization brought about by World War II, and with the collapse of a new set of false values, the same current was effectively diffused in characteristic and endemic fashion among a youth that regarded itself as burned-out or lost. Its broad margin of inauthenticity, pose, and caricature does not lessen its value as a living sign of the times now approaching their final nadir.

On the one hand there were the "rebels without a cause," the "angry young men" with their rage and aggression in a world where they felt like strangers, where they saw no sense, no values worth embracing and fighting for. As we have seen, that was the liquidation, in the world where God is dead, of those previous forms of revolt that, despite everything—and even in utopian anarchism—still had a fundamental belief in a just cause to defend, at the price of any destruction and at the sacrifice of one's own life. "Nihilism" there referred to the negation of the values of the world and of the society against which one was rebelling, not to those of the rebels themselves. But in its current forms, the rebellion is a sheer, irrational movement "without a flag."

This trend appeared with the "teddy boys," with their German analogs the *Halbstarken*, and the *generazione delle macerie* [generation of rubble]. Their style was one of aggressive protest, expressed through vandalism and lawless actions valued as "pure acts" in cold witness to their otherness. In the Slavic countries there were the "hooligans." More significant was the American counterpart, the "hipsters" and the Beat generation. Rather than intellectual attitudes, these were existential positions lived out by the young, of which a certain type of novel is merely a reflection. Compared to the British types, they were more cold and unadorned, more corrosive in their opposition to everything pseudo-orderly, rational, and coherent—everything that was "square," meaning solid, justified, and safe. They showed "a destructive, voiceless rage," as somebody put it, a contempt for "those incomprehensible characters who are capable of being seriously involved with a woman, a

job, a cause" (Norman Podhoretz).[3] The absurdity of what is considered normal, "the organized insanity of the normal world," seemed all the more evident to the hipsters in the climate of industrialization and frenetic activity that, despite all the triumphs of science, was meaningless. Alienation from their surroundings, absolute refusal to collaborate or to have any defined position in society were the rule in this milieu, which did not only include the young, and which recruited its members not only from the lower classes but from all social levels, including the wealthy. Some preferred a new form of nomadic existence; others, to live at the most elementary level. The methods used by the hipsters to survive the existential void through strong sensations included alcohol, sex, negro jazz, high speed, drugs, and even acts of gratuitous criminality like those suggested in Breton's surrealism. They did not fear experiences of any kind, but sought them out to "receive tremendous blows on their own selves" (Norman Mailer). The books of Jack Kerouac and the poetry of Allen Ginsberg were inspired in part by this climate.[4]

But it had already been announced by some authors who were rightly called the Walt Whitmans, not of the optimistic and hopeful world of the young American democracy, but of a world in collapse. Beside Dos Passos and others of the same group, the early Henry Miller may be called the spiritual father of the currents under discussion. It has been said of him that he is "more than a writer or an artist, a kind of collective phenomenon of his epoch—an incarnate and vociferous phenomenon, a raw manifestation of the anguish, the furious despair, and the infinite horror extending behind the crumbling façade."[5] It is the sense of a *tabula rasa,* the cosmic silence, the void, the end of a whole epoch, "in a prophet who proclaims the end of a world at the very moment when it is flowering and radiating, at the apogee of its grandeur and its pestilential contagion."

Miller himself wrote these characteristic words: "From the beginning it was never anything but chaos: it was a fluid which enveloped me, which I breathed in through the gills."[6] "A stone forest the center of which was chaos"[7] is the sensation of the ambience in which today's man moves. "Sometimes in the dead center, in that very heart of chaos, I danced or drank myself silly, or I made love, or I befriended someone,

or I planned a new life, but it was all chaos, all stone, and all hopeless and bewildering."[8]

A partly convergent testimony from another direction is that which Hermann Hesse puts into the mouth of one of his characters: "I'd rather feel burned by a diabolic pain than to live in these sanely temperate surroundings. A wild desire flares up in me for intense emotions, sensations, a rage against this whole toneless, flat, normal, sterilized life, and a wish to destroy something—perhaps a warehouse, a cathedral, or myself—and to commit outrageous follies. . . . This in fact is what I have always most hated, abhorred, and cursed: this satisfaction, this complacent healthiness, this plump bourgeois optimism, this life of the mediocre, normal, common man."[9] Paul van den Bosch, in his *Les enfants de l'absurde*, wrote: "We are the ghosts of a war that we have not fought. . . . Having opened our eyes on a disenchanted world, we are more than any others the children of the absurd. On certain days, the senselessness of the world weighs on us like a deformity. It seems to us that God has died of old age, and we exist without a goal. . . . We are not embittered; we start from zero. We were born among the ruins. When we were born, the gold was already transmuted into lead."[10]

The heritage of the precursors of European nihilism has largely been translated, in these movements of ruined youth, into the crude forms of life as it is lived. An important trait here is the absence of any social-revolutionary motive and the belief that no organized action can change things. That is the difference from the left-wing intellectuals who condemn bourgeois society, and from the nihilists of the past. "Work, read, prepare in groups, believe, then have your back broken—no thanks, that's not for me," says one of Kerouac's characters. This is the end result at which the "revolution" of the left has practically arrived after its triumph, after passing the phase of simple revolt. Camus made it quite plain after the period of his communist illusions: The revolution has betrayed its origins with the constitution of new yokes and a new conformism, more obtuse and absurd than ever.

It is not necessary to dwell any further on these testimonies of a traumatized existence, nor on those whom one might call the "martyrs of modern progress." As I have said, all that interests us here is their value as symptomatic indices of the times. The forms mentioned here

have also degenerated into extravagant and ephemeral fashions. But there is no denying the causal and necessary connection that unites them to the world where "God is dead" and no substitute has yet been found for him. When these forms pass, others of the same type will certainly crop up, according to circumstances, until the present cycle is exhausted.

5

Disguises of European Nihilism

The Socioeconomic Myth and the Protest Movement

It is an important fact that some of the young people in crisis have shown such indifference to the prospects of social revolution. But now it is time to broaden our horizons by showing the particular type of evasion and anesthetization, on the part of a humanity that has lost the meaning of existence, that lurks behind the varieties of the modern socioeconomic myth, both that of Western "prosperity" and that of Marxist-communist ideology. In both cases, we still find ourselves within the orbit of nihilism, and a nihilism of far more spectacular proportions than those of the extremist groups where the crisis remains acute and undisguised.[1]

I have already shown that the actual basis of the myth in question is the interpretation, on the part of a well-organized historiography, of the processes that prepared for European nihilism as constituting progress. This basis is essentially identical both in the "Western" myth and in that of communism. But the two of them are in a kind of dialectical relationship, which reveals their true existential significance.

It is easier to find the elements that betray this ultimate sense in the communist myth, because of its blatant coarseness and its more explicit reference to the basic motive: the economy. As is well known, the communist myth takes the form of a violent polemic against all the phenomena of spiritual crisis that I have treated up to now. These phenomena are recognized, certainly, but are blamed on bourgeois

decadence, the fin de siècle, and anarchic individualism: the symptoms of bourgeois elements alienated from reality. These are supposed to be the terminal stages of decomposition of a doomed economic system, that of capitalism. The crisis is thus presented exclusively as one of values and ideals serving as superstructure to that system, which, having become hypocritical and deceptive, have nothing more to do with the practical conduct of individuals or with the driving forces of the epoch. Humanity's existential lesion is generally explained as an effect of material, economic organization in a society such as the capitalist one. The true remedy, the start of a "new and authentic humanism," a human integrity and a "happiness never known before," would then be furnished by the setting up of a different socioeconomic system, by the abolition of capitalism, and by the institution of a communist society of workers, such as is taking place in the Soviet area. Karl Marx had already praised in communism "the real appropriation of the human essence on the part of man and for the sake of man, the return of man to himself as a social being, thus as a human man,"[2] seeing in it the equivalent of a perfect naturalism and even a true humanism.

In its radical forms, wherever this myth is affirmed through the control of movements, organizations, and people, it is linked to a corresponding education, a sort of psychic lobotomy intended methodically to neutralize and infantilize any form of higher sensibility and interest, every way of thought that is not in terms of the economy and socioeconomic processes. Behind the myth is the most terrible void, which acts as the worst opiate yet administered to a rootless humanity. Yet this deception is no different from the myth of prosperity, especially in the form it has taken in the West. Oblivious of the fact that they are living on a volcano, materially, politically, and in relation to the struggle for world domination, Westerners enjoy a technological euphoria, encouraged by the prospects of the "second industrial revolution" of the atomic age.

I have mentioned a type of dialectic that leads to the demolition of this theory from the inside, insofar as in the communist world the myth has drawn most of its energy from a misrepresentation. The idea of states in which "individual" problems and "decadent" crises no longer exist is presented as something only to be attained in the future,

whereas these are the very conditions that already obtain in the West and the Nordic countries. It is the fascination of a goal that vanishes at the moment one reaches it. In fact, the future socioeconomic ideal of proletarian humanity already exists, spiritually bought and paid for, in Western society, where, to the shame of Marx and Engels' prognosis, a climate of prosperity has spread to vast social strata in the form of a plentiful, easy, and comfortable existence—a condition that Marxism does not condemn as such, but only because it thinks of it as the privilege of an upper class of capitalist "exploiters," not as the common property of a homogenized society. But the horizons are essentially the same, and in regard to recent developments, we shall see what conclusions the so-called protest movement has drawn from them.

At all events, the error and the illusion are the same in both socioeconomic ideologies, namely the serious assumption that existential misery can be reduced to suffering in one way or another from material want, and to impoverishment due to a given socioeconomic system. They assume that misery is greater among the disinherited or the proletariat than among those living in prosperous or privileged economic conditions, and that it will consequently diminish with the "freedom from want" and the general advance of the material conditions of existence. The truth of the matter is that the meaning of existence can be lacking as much in one group as in the other, and that there is no correlation between material and spiritual misery. Only to the lowest and dullest levels of society can one preach the formula for all human happiness and wholeness as the well-named "animal ideal," a well-being that is little better than bovine. Hegel rightly wrote that the epochs of material well-being are blank pages in the history book, and Toynbee has shown that the challenge to mankind of environmentally and spiritually harsh and problematic conditions is often the incentive that awakens the creative energies of civilization.[3] In some cases, it is not paradoxical to say that the man of good will should try to make life difficult for his neighbor! It is a commonplace that all the higher virtues attenuate and atrophy under easy conditions, when man is not forced to prove himself in some way; and in the final analysis it does not matter in such situations if a good number fall away and are lost through natural selection. André Breton was right when he wrote that "we must

prevent the artificial precariousness of social conditions from concealing the real precariousness of the human condition."

But to avoid straying too far from my argument, the point is that the most acute forms of the modern existential crisis are appearing today at the margin of a civilization of prosperity, as witness the currents in the new generation that have been described. One sees there rebellion, disgust, and anger manifesting not in a wretched and oppressed subproletariat but often in young people who lack nothing, even in millionaires' children. And among other things it is a significant fact, statistically proven, that suicide is much rarer in poor countries than in rich ones, showing that the problematic life is felt more in the latter than in the former. Blank despair can occur right up to the finishing-post of socioeconomic messianism, as in the musical comedy about a utopian island where they have everything, "fun, women, and whiskey," but also the ever-recurrent sense of the emptiness of existence, the sense that something is still missing.

There exists, therefore, no correlation, except possibly a negative one, between the meaning of life and conditions of economic well-being. There is a famous example, not recent but from the traditional world, of the Buddha Shakyamuni. He who on a metaphysical plane radically denounced the emptiness of existence and the deceptions of the "god of life," pointing out the way of spiritual awakening, was not a victim of oppression and hunger, not a representative of social strata like the plebeians of the Roman empire, to whom the revolutionary sermons of Christianity were first addressed; no, he was of the race of princes, in all the splendor of his power and all the fullness of his youth. The true significance of the socioeconomic myth, in any of its forms, is as a means of internal anesthetization or prophylaxis, aimed at evading the problem of an existence robbed of any meaning and at consolidating in every way the fundamental insignificance of modern man's life. We may therefore speak either of an opiate that is much more real than that which, according to the Marxists, was fed to a humanity as yet unillumined and unevolved, mystified by religious beliefs, or, from another point of view, of the organized method of an active nihilism. The prospects in a goodly part of today's world are more or less those that Zarathustra attributed to the "last man": "The time is near

of the most despicable of men, who can no longer despise himself," the last man "of the tenacious and pullulating race." "We have invented happiness, say the last men with a wink," having "abandoned the lands where life is hard."[4]

In this context, there is another more recent phenomenon that is heavy with significance: that of the so-called global protest movement. It took its rise in part from the order of ideas already mentioned. In the wake of theories such as Marcuse's, it came to the conclusion that there is a basic similarity, in terms of technological consumer society, between the system of advanced communist countries and that of the capitalist world, because in the former, the original impulse of the proletarian revolution is much diminished. This impulse has now been realized, inasmuch as the working class has entered the consumer system, being assured of a lifestyle that is no longer proletarian but bourgeois: the very thing whose absence was the incentive for revolution. But alongside this convergence there has become visible the conditioning power of one and the same "system," manifesting as the tendency to destroy all the higher values of life and personality. At the level more or less corresponding to the "last man" foreseen by Nietzsche, the individual in contemporary consumer society reckons that it would be too expensive, indeed absurd, to do without the comfort and well-being that this evolved society offers him, merely for the sake of an abstract freedom. Thus he accepts with a good grace all the leveling conditionings of the system. This realization has caused a bypassing of revolutionary Marxism, now deprived of its original motive force, in favor of a "global protest" against the system. This movement, however, also lacks any higher principle: it is irrational, anarchic, and instinctive in character. For want of anything else, it calls on the abject minorities of outsiders, on the excluded and rejected, sometimes even on the Third World (in which case Marxist fantasies reappear) and on the blacks, as being the only revolutionary potential. But it stands under the sign of nothingness: it is a hysterical "revolution of the void and the 'underground,'" of "maddened wasps trapped in a glass jar, who throw themselves frenetically against the walls." In all of this it confirms in another way the general nihilistic character of the epoch, and indeed on a much larger scale, for the current protest is no longer that of the individuals

and small groups mentioned earlier, whose intellectual level was indubitably higher.[5]

Another point should be mentioned, at least cursorily, in the current climate of dissolution. The collapse of superstructures—of all that can henceforth only be regarded as superstructures—did not manifest only in the sociological form of denouncing the lies and hypocrisy of bourgeois life (as in Max Nordau, or as in the words of Relling to Gregers in Ibsen: "Why do you use that odd word 'ideals'? We have our own perfectly good word: 'lies'")[6] or in moral and philosophical nihilism. It is prolonged and completed today by means of a science that, though false and contaminating if applied to men of other times and other civilizations, has the power of persuasion when applied to traumatized modern man; this science is none other than psychoanalysis. The impassioned effort of that philosopher who sought out the secret origin, the "genealogy" of predominant moral values at the very roots of all those vital impulses that morality avoids or condemns, who sought thus to "naturalize" morality by denying it any autonomous or preeminent dignity, this impassioned effort has given place to the cold, cynical, and "scientific" methods of "depth psychology," of the exploration of the subconscious and the unconscious. In the latter, the irrational subsoil of existence, it has recognized the motive force essential to the whole life of the soul; from that it deduces the proofs that make an illusion of the upper world of moral and social conscience with all its values, all its inhibitions and prohibitions, and its hysterical will to dominate. Meanwhile, in the subterranean zone nothing is at work but a mess of compulsions toward pleasure and death: *Lustprinzip* and *Todestrieb*.[7]

This, as everyone knows, is the essence of Freudianism. Other psychoanalytic currents that diverge in part from Freud are not substantially different. The evident theme in all of them is the regression to the psychic subsoil, together with a profound traumatization of the human personality. It is one further aspect of contemporary nihilism, and, moreover, the symptom of a sickly consciousness, too weak to hold in check the lower regions of the soul with their so-called archetypes, and which might well be compared to Goethe's "world of the Mothers."[8]

It is hardly worth pointing out how these destructions converge with the atmosphere of another typical genre of contemporary litera-

ture, in which the sense of the "spectrality of existence" is associated with that of an obscure, incomprehensible destiny, a fatality, and an absurd condemnation hanging over man's eternal solitude, taken to be the actual human condition. It is like the sense of an incomprehensible foundation of human life that fades into impenetrable and anguish-filled darkness.

This theme, shown in its typical form by Kafka, is not foreign to speculative existentialism, to which I shall return in due course. What I wish to underline at this point is that we are not dealing with a truth discovered by someone who "has been able to feel more and see more deeply"; it is merely what is perceived in the very atmosphere of European nihilism, and of a humanity that has taken shape after the death of God.

6
Active Nihilism
Nietzsche

We can now return to the problem that really interests us. In all the critical situations treated up to now, their predominant trait is that of being the *objects*, indeed the victims, of the destructive processes set in motion: processes which are simply *suffered* by current humanity. This holds good both for those who have adapted to a life based on nothing and lacking any true direction, helping themselves with a system of anesthetics and surrogates, and eventually resorting to the surviving forms of a secure bourgeois existence, and for those who feel the existential crisis of modern man in all of their being, and are consequently driven toward the kinds of revolt or risky existence that were mentioned above.

This applies, therefore, to the vast majority of our contemporaries. In contrast, there is a different and much smaller category of modern men who, instead of submitting to the nihilist processes, seek to accept them actively. In particular, there are those who not only admit that the processes of dissolution are irreversible and that there is no going back, but who would not want to follow that path even if it existed. They willingly accept their condition of being without support or roots. Then the problem arises of how far the negative can be transformed into something positive.

To someone who has the necessary character to assume such an attitude, the possibility opens of a new interpretation of the adventure of mankind wanting to be free, and of the crisis that is the consequence of this adventure. Thus arises the idea of a *trial*, and of destructions that are simply the consequence of not being equal to it, or as one might say, not being equal to one's own action. Those who are interested may

recall the ancient myths concerning an audacious sacrilege in which it is not the sacrilege in itself that brings about the ruin of some symbolic personage, but lack of the necessary dignity or strength to accomplish an act that frees one from the divine bonds.

The special human type who concerns us here and who partially fits the category in question may adopt the same point of view. As we recall, his differentiated character consists in facing the problems of modern man without being a "modern man" himself; he belongs to a different world and preserves within himself a different existential dimension. Unlike the others, his problem is not the dramatic search for a basis (in principle, he already possesses one), but that of his own *expression* and confirmation in the modern epoch, in his life here and now.

With this human type in mind, let us examine the theme of "positive nihilism," or, if one prefers, the transition to the postnihilist stage. Since it is better to do so from a standpoint inside the modern world, rather than outside it, we can take as a provisional basis some of Nietzsche's fundamental ideas, to test their solidity. We may find, in fact, that the more recent exponents of modern thought have gone little further than Nietzsche in their search for a new meaning of life, despite all that is inconsistent and negative in his philosophy.

Nietzsche considered himself "the first perfect nihilist in Europe, because he has already overcome nihilism, having lived it in his soul—having it behind himself, beneath himself, outside himself."[1] Having seen that "nihilism is the final, logical conclusion of our great values and ideals," and having asserted that "we must pass through this nihilism in order to grasp the true nature of the 'values' of the past,"[2] he nevertheless considered nihilism as "a pathological, transitional stage"[3] and proclaimed the "countermovement" that was destined to supplant it, without giving up the ground already won.

Nietzsche showed that the point at which one realizes that "God is dead," that the whole world of "spirit," of good and evil, is only an illusion, and that the only true world is that which was negated or rejected in the name of the former, is the crux of a decisive test. "The weak shatter, the strong destroy what does not shatter them, while those stronger still go beyond the values that once served them."[4] Nietzsche calls this the "tragic phase" of nihilism, which leads to a reversal of perspectives;

nihilism at this point appears as a sign of strength, signifying "that the power to create, to will, has developed far enough that one has no further need for this general interpretation (of existence), of this introduction of a meaning (into it)."[5] "It is a measure of one's strength of will to know how far one can do without a meaning to things, how far one can bear to live in a meaningless world: for then one will organize part of it."[6] Nietzsche calls this positive pessimism, or "the pessimism of strength,"[7] and makes it the premise of a higher ethic. "If at first man needed a god, now he is thrilled with a universal, godless disorder, with a world of chance, where the fearful, the ambiguous, and the seductive are part of his very existence." In this world once again made "pure" and uniquely itself he stands erect, "conqueror of God and of nothingness."[8] The problem of the meaning of life is thus resolved with the affirmation that life is and can be a value in itself.

This brings us to the precise point made above. The significance of all the crises of recent times can be summarized as follows: a man wanted to be free, for whom a life of freedom could spell only ruin. To say "God is dead" is only an emotional way of stating the basic fact of the epoch. But Nietzsche himself remarks that having "killed God, wasn't that perhaps rather too grand of us? Shouldn't we become gods in order to be worthy of it?"[9] After recognizing that "nothing exists, all is permitted,"[10] and the "freedom of the spirit," the inevitable consequence is the challenge: "Now prove the nobility of your nature."

A famous passage of *Zarathustra* gives the most pregnant formulation to the essence of the crisis. "You call yourself free? Let me hear your ruling thoughts, and not that you have escaped bondage. Are you one who *deserved* to escape from it? There are many who threw away their only worth when they threw away their servitude. Free from what? Why should Zarathustra care? Your eyes should answer plainly: free *for what?*"[11] And Zarathustra warns that it will be terrible to be alone, without any laws from above oneself, alone with one's own freedom in a desert place and an icy air, judge and avenger of one's own law. For him who only acquires any worth by serving, for him who had in his bonds not a cause of paralysis but a support, solitude appears as a curse; he loses courage and his initial pride deflates. These are the sentiments, continues Zarathustra, that then assail the free man, and that

will not fail to kill him if he does not kill them first. In precise terms, and from a higher point of view, this is the essential ground of modern man's unhappiness.

Dostoyevsky points out the same thing in analogous fashion: it is Kirilov's doctrine. The framework is identical: "Man only invented God so that he could live without killing himself. And this is the history of mankind from its origins up to the present day," says Kirilov.[12] The implication is plain: it is a necessity for man to have a center, a basic value. When he did not find it within himself, he placed it outside himself, projecting it onto God, whom he supposed to exist, certainly, but incarnated in an "other," and faith in this other provisionally solved the existential problem. Naturally this is not really, as Kirilov says, the whole meaning of the history of mankind; it is only that of the devotional phase of a theistic religion, a phase that already represents a disintegration of the world of Tradition and precedes the critical point of metaphysical breakdown of which I have spoken. The eyes of the "free man" Kirilov are open: "I don't want to believe. I know that God doesn't exist, and can't exist." The consequence is therefore "If God does not exist, I am God. . . . To recognize that there is no God and not to recognize at the same time that one has become God is an absurdity and an incongruity, because otherwise one would not fail to kill oneself." One can dispense with the suicide that is an obsession of Kirilov's lucid folly, and speak simply of breakdown, disintegration, becoming lost in meaninglessness. In the face of this situation, terror and anguish arise: "He's like a wretch who has received a legacy but takes fright and won't set his hand to it, because he doesn't think himself worthy of it." We should not take seriously the act with which Kirilov thinks he can destroy his terror in the face of the divine legacy that he *should* accept, demonstrating at the same time "his divinity." And we can set aside all this emphatic talk of God and being God, for the real problem posed here is one of values, and of "being free for what?"

Nothing better characterizes failure in the crucial test, the negative result of the nihilistic experience, than the sentiment expressed by Sartre in these words: "We are condemned to be free."[13] Man takes absolute freedom for himself, but he can only feel this freedom as a *condemnation.* Metaphysical anguish is its counterpart.

Later we shall examine the specific themes of existentialism. For now, we shall see what can be retained of Nietzsche's views, not as a nihilist but as one who thought that he had left nihilism behind him, and thus created the premises for a higher existence and a new state of health.

Once the idols have fallen, good and evil have been surpassed, along with all the surrogates of the old God, and the mist has lifted from one's eyes, nothing is left to Nietzsche but "this world," life, the body; he remains "faithful to the earth." Thereupon, as we know, the theme of the superman appears. "God is dead, now we want the superman to come."[14] The superman will be the meaning of the earth, the justification of existence. Man is "a bridge, not a goal," "a rope stretched between the brute and the superman, a rope stretched above an abyss."[15] This is not the place for a deep analysis of the manifold and divergent themes that crystallize in Nietzsche's work around this central motif. The essential can be spelled out as follows.

The negative, destructive phase of Nietzsche's thought ends with the affirmation of immanence: all transcendent values, systems of ends and of higher truths, are interpreted as functions of life. In its turn, the essence of life—and more generally of nature—is the will to power. The superman is also defined as a function of the will to power and domination. One can see from this that Nietzsche's nihilism stops halfway. It sets up a new table of values, including a good and an evil. It presents a new ideal with dogmatic affirmation, whereas in reality this ideal is only one of many that could take shape in "life," and which is not in fact justified in and of itself, without a particular choice and without faith in it. The fact that the fixed point of reference set up beyond nihilism lacks a true foundation so long as one insists on pure immanence is already apparent in the part of Nietzsche's thought that deals with historical criticism and sociology. The entire world of "higher" values is interpreted there as reflecting a "decadence." But at the same time these values are seen as the weapons of a hidden will to power on the part of a certain human group, which has used them to hamper another group whose life and ideals resemble those of the superman. The instinct of decadence itself is then presented as a special variety of the will to power. Now, it is obvious that in function of a

mere will to power, all distinctions vanish: there are no more supermen or sheep-men, neither affirmers nor negators of life. There is only a variety of techniques, of means (far from being reducible to sheer physical force), tending to make one human class or another prevail; means that are indiscriminately called good in proportion to their success. If in life and the history of civilization there exist phases of rise and decline, phases of creation and destruction and decadence, what authorizes us to ascribe value to one rather than to the others? Why should decadence be an evil? It is all life, and all justifiable in terms of life, if this is truly taken in its irrational, naked reality, outside any theology or teleology, as Nietzsche would have wished. Even "antinature" and "violence against life" enter into it. Once again, all firm ground gives way.

Nietzsche moreover wanted to restore its "innocence" to becoming by freeing it from all finality and intentionality, so as to free man and let him walk on his own feet—the same Nietzsche who had justly criticized and rejected evolutionism and Darwinism because he could see that the higher figures and types of life are only sporadic and fortuituous cases.[16] They are positions that man gains only in order to lose them, and they create no continuity because they consist of beings who are more than usually exposed to danger and destruction. The philosopher himself ends with a finalistic concession when, in order to give meaning to present-day humanity, he proposes the hypothetical future man in the guise of the superman: a goal worth dedicating oneself to, and even sacrificing oneself and dying for. Mutatis mutandis, things here are not very different from the Marxist-communist eschatology, in which the mirage of a future human condition after the worldwide revolution serves to give meaning to everything inflicted on the man of today in the areas controlled by this ideology. This is a flagrant contradiction of the demands of a life that is its own meaning. The second point is that the pure affirmation of life does not necessarily coincide with the will to power in the strict, qualitative sense, nor with the affirmation of the superman.

Thus Nietzsche's solution is only a pseudosolution. A true nihilism does not spare even the doctrine of the superman. What is left, if one wants to be radical and follow a line of strict coherence, and what we

can accept in our investigations, is the idea that Nietzsche expressed through the symbol of the eternal return. It is the affirmation, now truly unconditional, of all that is and of all that one is, of one's own nature and one's own situation. It is the attitude of one whose self-affirmation and self-identity come from the very roots of his being; who is not scared but exalted by the prospect that for an indefinite repetition of identical cosmic cycles he has been what he is, and will be again, innumerable times. Naturally we are dealing with nothing more than a myth, which has the simple, pragmatic value of a test of strength. But there is another view that in fact leads beyond the world of becoming and toward an eternalization of the being. Nietzsche differs little from Neoplatonism when he says: "For everything to return is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being."[17] And also: "To impose the character of being upon becoming is the supreme test of power."[18] At its base, this leads to an opening beyond immanence unilaterally conceived, and toward the feeling that "all things have been baptized in the font of eternity and beyond good and evil."[19] The same thing was taught in the world of Tradition; and it is uncontestable that a confused thirst for eternity runs through Nietzsche's works, even opening to certain momentary ecstasies. One recalls Zarathustra invoking "the joy that wills the eternity of everything, a deep eternity"[20] like the heavens above, "pure, profound abyss of light."[21]

7
"Being Oneself"

For now we must set aside such allusions to a higher dimension of experience of a liberated world in order to define more precisely what such a vision of existence offers us in realistic terms. It is, in fact, *the principle of purely being oneself.* This is what remains after the elimination of what philosophy calls "heteronomous morality," or morality based on an external law or command. Nietzsche said this about it: "They call you destroyers of morality, but you are only the discoverers of yourselves";[1] and also: "We must liberate ourselves from morality so that we can live morally."[2] By the latter phrase, he means living according to one's own law, the law defined by one's own nature. (This may result in the way of the superman, but only as a very special case.)

This is on the same lines as the "autonomous morality" of Kant's categorical imperative, but with the difference that the command is absolutely internal, separate from any external mover, and is not based on a hypothetical law extracted from practical reason that is valid for all and revealed to man's conscience as such, but rather on one's own specific being.

Nietzsche himself often presented these issues as though they were equivalent to naturalism. One frequently finds in him the simplistically physiological and materialistic interpretation of human nature, but it is basically inauthentic, accessory, and prompted by his well-known polemic against "pure spirit." In fact, Nietzsche saw deeper than that, and did not stop at the physical being when he spoke of the "greater reason"[3] contained in the body and opposed to the lesser reason: that which "does not say I, but *is* I," and which uses the "spirit" and even the senses as "little tools and toys." It is a "powerful lord, an unknown sage that is called oneself *(Selbst),*" "the guiding thread of the I that suggests all its ideas to it," which "looks with the eyes of the senses and

listens with the ears of the spirit." He is not speaking here of the *physis* but of the "being" in the full ontological significance of the word. The term he uses, *das Selbst*, can also be rendered by "the Self" as opposed to the I (*Ich*): an opposition that recalls that of the traditional doctrines already mentioned between the supra-individual principle of the person and that which they call the "physical I."

Once the crude physiological interpretation is cleared away, there emerges a valid attitude for the man who must stay standing as a free being, even in the epoch of dissolution: to assume his own *being* into a *willing*, making it his own law, a law as absolute and autonomous as Kant's categorical imperative, but affirmed without regard for received values, for "good" or "evil," nor for happiness, pleasure, or pain. (Nietzsche too regarded hedonism and eudaemonism, the abstract, inorganic search for pleasure and happiness, as symptoms of weakening and decadence.) The man in question affirms and actualizes his own being without considering rewards or punishments, either here or in an afterlife, saying: "The way does not exist: this is my will, neither good nor bad, but my own."[4] In short, Nietzsche hands on the ancient sayings "Be yourself," "Become what you are,"[5] as propositions for today, when all superstructure has fragmented. We shall see that the existentialists take up a similar theme, albeit less confidently. Stirner is, however, not to be counted among its antecedents, because in his idea of the "Unique" there is virtually no opening of the deepest dimensions of existence. One has to go back to M. Guyau, who equally posed the problem of a line of conduct beyond any sanction or duty; he wrote: "Authoritarian metaphysics and religion are leading-strings for babies: it's time to walk by oneself. . . . We should look for revelation in ourselves. Christ is no more: each of us must be Christ for himself, and be joined to God as far as he will or can be, or even deny God."[6] It is as though faith still existed, but "without a heaven waiting for us or a positive law to guide us," as a simple state. Strength and responsibility must be no less than they were long ago, when they were born from religious faith and from a given point of support, in a different human type and a different climate. Nietzsche's idea is identical.

For our part, if this system is to be made acceptable as valid for the problem in hand, every unspoken but limiting implication has to

be eliminated from it, everything from which one might draw a new, illusory support.

Post-Rousseau anarchic doctrines were already characterized by premises of this kind: the nihilism of the anarchist classics had as its counterpart the supposition of the fundamental goodness of human nature. Guyau, who has just been quoted, offers another example. He sought to found a morality "without sanctions or obligations," a "free" morality, on "life."[7] But his notion of life was not the naked, authentic life free from attributes, but rather a life conceived as preventively and arbitrarily moralized or sterilized, a life in which certain tendencies are taken for granted: expansion, altruism, superabundance. Guyau formulated a new idea of *duty*: a duty that derived from *power*, from the life impulse, from the sense of one's own strength "that demands to be exercised"[8] ("I can, therefore I must"). Its limitation becomes obvious when Guyau endows the expansive life impulse with an exclusively positive, even a social character, while presenting pure self-affirmation, expansion not toward others and for others but against them, as a self-negation and a contradiction of life, opposed to its natural expressive motion of increase and enrichment. It is enough to ask what could ever prevent a life that wanted to "negate" or "contradict" itself from doing so, and what would be censurable if it decided to take this route, to realize that Guyau has by no means made a tabula rasa, but has furtively introduced restrictions that more or less return to one of the systems of the old morality that he intended to supersede, because he recognized their vulnerability to nihilist criticism.

The elimination of every presupposition also causes a crisis for much of the Nietzschean doctrine of the superman, which is no less unilateral because of its frequent emphasis on aspects of life contrary to those just posited by Guyau: will to power, hardness, and so on. In all strictness, to be purely oneself and to have a fully free existence, one should be able to accept, will, and say an absolute "yes" to whatever one is—even when there is nothing in one's nature that approaches the ideal of the superman; even if one's own life and destiny do not present heroism, nobility, splendor, generosity, and altruism, but decadence, corruption, debility, and perversion. A distant reflection of this path is to be found even in the Christian world, in Calvinism. It is the

doctrine of fallen man, broken by original sin but redeemed through "faith"; of man simultaneously justified and a sinner, in the face of the Absolute. But in the world without God, the result of such an attitude is to leave one to oneself in an extreme trial of strength and denudation of the I. Hence the Nietzschean claim of having "rediscovered the way that leads to a yes and a no: I teach you to say yes to all that strengthens, that gathers energy, that justifies the feeling of vigor."[9] This claim is justified only when the corresponding command is transposed, internalized, and purified, detached from any specific content and especially from any reference to a greater or lesser vitality. It is rather a matter of either being capable or incapable of holding firm within, in one's own naked absolute being, with nothing to fear and nothing to hope for.

At this level, the words about the liberation from every sin may become valid: "There is no place, no aim, no sense, in which we can be in any way unburdened of our own being"[10]—not in the physical world, nor in society, nor in God. It is an existential mode. As for the content of one's own law, as I have said, that remains and *must* remain undetermined.

We can now summarize the positive gains to be made from the systems of Nietzsche and other thinkers along the same lines as his. For our purposes, however, we should remember that this analysis is not being made in the abstract, but in view of what may have value, not for everyone but for *a special human type.*

This requires some extra considerations, because without this premise it is easy to see that even the solution of "being oneself" cannot really serve as a solid foundation. We shall see in due course that it is only a "first-grade solution," but before that there is a difficulty to be dealt with.

It is clear that the rule of being oneself implies that one can speak of a "proper nature" for everyone, whatever it may be, as something well defined and recognizable. But this is problematic, especially at the present time. It may have been less difficult in societies that did not know individualism, in traditional societies organized along groups and castes where the factors of heredity, birth, and environment favored a high degree of internal unity and the differentiation of types, and where

the natural articulations were reinforced and nurtured by customs, ethics, laws, and sometimes even by no less differentiated religious forms. All this has long ceased to exist for modern Western man, and has long been "superseded" along the road of "liberty"; thus the average modern man is changeable, unstable, devoid of any real form. The Pauline and Faustian lament, "two souls, alas, live in my breast,"[11] is already an optimistic assumption; all too many have to admit, like a typical character in Hesse, that they have a multitude of souls! Nietzsche himself admitted this state of affairs when he wrote: "One should not assume that many men are 'persons.' There are also men composed of several persons, but the majority possess none at all."[12] And again: "Become yourself: an injunction addressed only to a few, and which to an even smaller number appears redundant."[13] One can see now how problematic is the very point that has hitherto seemed fixed: fidelity to oneself, the absolute, autonomous law based on one's own "being," when it is formulated in general and abstract terms. Everything is subject to debate—a situation accurately exemplified by characters in Dostoyevsky, like Raskolnikov or Stavrogin. At the moment when they are thrown back on their own naked will, trying to prove it to themselves with an absolute action, they collapse; they collapse precisely because they are divided beings, because they are deluded concerning their true nature and their real strength. Their freedom is turned against them and destroys them; they fail at the very point at which they should have reaffirmed themselves—in their depths they find nothing to sustain them and carry them forward. We recall the words of Stavrogin's testament: "I have tested my strength everywhere, as you advised me to do in order to know myself. . . . What I have never seen, and still do not see, is what I should apply my strength to. My desires lack the energy; they cannot drive me. One can cross a river on a log, but not on a splinter."[14] The abyss wins out over Stavrogin, and his failure is sealed by suicide.

The same problem evidently lurks at the center of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power. Power in itself is formless. It has no sense without the basis of a given "being," an internal direction, an essential unity. When that is wanting, everything slides back into chaos. "Here is the greatest strength, but it does not know what it is for. The means

exist, but they have no end." We shall soon see how this situation is aggravated when the transcendent dimension is activated in it.

For the moment, we note that in general, the phenomenon of *remorse* is closely linked to the situation of a divided and self-contradictory being. Remorse occurs when, despite everything, a central tendency survives in the being and reawakens after actions that have violated or denied it, arising from secondary impulses that are not strong enough to completely supplant it. Guyau speaks in this sense of a morality "that is none other than the *unity* of the being," and an immorality that, "on the contrary, is a splitting, an opposition of tendencies that limit one another." We know Nietzsche's image of the "pale criminal," a true mirror of the Dostoyevskian character just mentioned, "whose action has paralyzed his poor reason, as a chalk line paralyzes a chicken."[15]

We have clearly reached the point at which one must go beyond the "neutral" posing of the problem. To continue our agenda, I will now consider a line of conduct during the reign of dissolution that is not suitable for everyone, but for a differentiated type, and especially for the heir to the man of the traditional world, who retains his roots in that world even though he finds himself devoid of any support for it in his outer existence.

The Transcendent Dimension

"Life" and "More Than Life"

Only this kind of man can use those positive aspects gleaned from the preceding analysis as his *elementary basis*, because when he looks within himself, he does not find a changeable and divided substance, but a fundamental direction, a "dominant," even though shrouded or limited by secondary impulses. *What is more, the essential thing is that such a man is characterized by an existential dimension not present in the predominant human type of recent times—that is, the dimension of transcendence.*

The problems raised by these last considerations can be exemplified with reference to Nietzsche himself, for the tacit assumption of many of his attitudes is no different: it is the action, albeit unconscious, of the transcendent dimension. This alone can explain the otherwise arbitrary and contradictory quality of some of his statements; only this point of view also offers the possibility of integrating and consolidating them by not taking the wrong path of "naturalism." On the one hand, Nietzsche really felt the vocation of the particular human type just mentioned, both in his destructive role and in his effort to get beyond the zero point of values. On the other hand, rather than consciously taking up the existential dimension of transcendence, he was, as it were, its victim, the object rather than the subject of the corresponding energy in action. This gives one a sure guide for orientation throughout Nietzsche's philosophy, for recognizing both its limitations and its high value for our purposes.

No less evident here is the solution given by turning the tragic and absurd vision of life into its opposite. *Nietzsche's solution of the problem of the meaning of life, consisting in the affirmation that this meaning*

does not exist outside of life, and that life in itself is meaning (from which derive all the themes already mentioned, including the myth of the eternal return), *is valid only on the presupposition of a being that has transcendence as its essential component.*

This is no place for the detailed proof of this thesis, which would belong in a special study of Nietzsche. We have already seen with regard to the "will to power" that it is not so much the general characteristic of life, but one of its possible manifestations, one of its many faces. To say that life "always surpasses itself," "wants to ascend, and to regenerate itself by rising and surpassing itself,"[1] or that the life's secret is "I am that which must always conquer itself"[2] —all that is simply the result of a very unusual vocation projecting itself to the dimensions of a world-view. It is merely the reflection of a certain nature, and by no means the general or objective character of every existence. The foundation that really prevails in existence is much closer to Schopenhauer's formulation than to this one of Nietzsche's; that is, the will to live as eternal and inexhaustible desire, not the will to power in the true sense, or the positive, ascending drive to dominance.

It is only, in fact, through the *other* dimension, that of transcendence, that life presents those characteristics that Nietzsche mistakenly generalizes and thinks he can attribute to it when he sets up his new values. His imperfect understanding of what was going on inside him explains not only the oscillations and limitations of his philosophy, but also the tragic side of his human existence. On the one hand, we have the theme of a pure, naturalistic exaltation of life, albeit in forms that betray a surrender of being to the simple world of instincts and passions; for the absolute affirmation of the latter on the part of the will runs the danger of their asserting themselves *through* the will, making it their servant. On the other hand, many and indeed prevalent are the testimonies to a reaction to life that cannot arise out of life itself, but solely from a principle superior to it, as revealed in a characteristic phrase: "Spirit is the life that cuts through life" *(Geist ist das Leben, das selber ins Leben schneidet).*[3]

All the positive aspects of the way of the superman belong to this second aspect: the power to make a law for oneself, the "power to refuse and not to act, when one is pressed to affirmation by a prodi-

gious force and an enormous tension"[4]; the natural and free asceticism moved to test its own strength by gauging "the power of a will according to the degree of resistance, pain, and torment that it can bear in order to turn them to its own advantage"[5] (so that from this point of view everything that existence offers in the way of evil, pain, and obstacles, everything that has nourished the popular forms of savior religions, is accepted, even desired); the principle of not obeying the passions, but of holding them on a leash ("greatness of character does not consist in not having such passions: one must have them to the greatest degree, but held in check, and moreover doing this with simplicity, not feeling any particular satisfaction thereby"[6]); the idea that "the superior man is distinguished from the inferior by his intrepidity, by his defiance of unhappiness"[7] ("it is a sign of regression when pleasure begins to be considered as the highest principle"[8]); the responding with incredulity to those who point "the way to happiness" in order to make man follow a certain behavior: "But what does happiness matter *to us*?"[9]; the recognition that one of the ways to preserve a superior species of man is "to claim the right to exceptional acts as attempts at victory over oneself and as acts of freedom . . . to assure oneself, with a sort of asceticism, a preponderance and a certitude of one's own strength of will,"[10] without refusing any privation; to affirm that freedom whose elements include "keeping the distance which separates us, being indifferent to difficulties, hardships, privations, *even to life itself*,"[11] the highest type of the free man being seen in "he who always overcomes the strongest resistances . . . great danger making him a being worthy of veneration"[12]; to denounce the insidious confusion between discipline and enfeeblement (the goal of discipline can only be a greater strength—"he who does not dominate is weak, dissipated, inconstant") and holding that "indulgence can only be objected to in the case of him who has no right to it, and when all the passions have been discredited thanks to those who were not strong enough to turn them to their own advantage"[13]; to point the way of those who, free from all bonds, obeying only their own law, are unbending in obedience to it and above every human weakness; all those aspects, in fine, in which the superman is not the "blond beast of prey"[14] and the heir to the equivocal *virtus* of Renaissance despots, but is also capable

of generosity, quick to offer manly aid, of "generous virtue," magnanimity, and superiority to his own individuality[15]—all these are the positive elements that the man of Tradition also makes his own, but which are only comprehensible and attainable when "life" is "more than life," that is, through transcendence. They are values attainable only by those in whom there is something else, and something more, than mere life.

This is no place to go into detail about all the finer shades of meaning in the mass of Nietzsche's thought concerning these main points, nor into the confusions and deviations of which one must beware when one passes the point at which most of Nietzsche's admirers, as well as his detractors, have stopped. Life and transcendence are continually muddled in his philosophy, and of all the consequences of his anti-Christian polemic, this confusion has been one of the worst. He characterizes the values negated by Christian ideals—the ideals of the pariah, the *chandala*—and which supposedly constitute the opposite, affirmative, antinihilistic ideals, as follows: "dignity, distance, great responsibility, exuberance, proud animality, the martial and victorious instincts, the apotheosis of the passions, of revenge, cunning, anger, voluptuousness, the spirit of adventurous knowledge"[16]; then he enumerates among the positive passions "pride, happiness, health, love between the sexes, hostility and war, reverence, beautiful attitudes, good manners, strong will, the discipline of higher intellectuality, the will to power, respect for the earth and for life—all that is rich, which wants to give and to justify life, eternalize it, divinize it."[17] The muddle is evident; it is a confusion of the sacred and the profane.

But there is another point, and for us it is an even more important one. Even if one extracts from all this the effective forms of a self-transcendence, one faces an awkward situation when trying to speak of an "ascesis as a goal in itself" and when the superman is presented as the utmost limit of the human species, rather than as "more than man" and a being of a different nature, wielder and witness of a different dignity. One danger is that all the experiences not marked by a simple adherence to the pure, irrational, and instinctive substratum of life, in which the simple will to power is surpassed and the path is not that of a dominator of men and of external forces, but rather a dominator of oneself,

remain closed off in the field of mere *sensation*. There is a significant passage in Nietzsche concerning this, in which the "saying no" to all the force surging within oneself is presented as a "Dionysism,"[18] whereas a more fitting term would perhaps be auto-sadism. A lifelong discipline and an asceticism pursued inexorably for better or worse, through extreme trials, regardless of oneself and others, may have the mere value of an increased and exasperated sensation of "life," of an "I" whose sense of itself comes only from this savage and embittered sensation. All too often, it is in such terms that Nietzsche interpreted his own experience and the way that he proclaimed. For our purposes it is all the more important to signal this wrong turning, because, all theory aside, it is easy to see that it lies at the basis of many extreme experiences on the part of those contemporary generations who courted disaster, as mentioned above.

As for the internal, "esoteric" interpretation of Nietzsche's personal experience, taken as a whole beyond this pseudosolution, I have already indicated that the key to it is given by a *passive* experience of transcendence and of its activation. The cutting of all bonds, the intolerance of all limits, the pure and incoercible impulse to overcome without any determined goal, to always move on beyond any given state, experience, or idea, and naturally and even more beyond any human attachment to a given person, fearing neither contradictions nor destructions, thus pure movement, with all that that implies of dissolution—"advancing with a devouring fire that leaves nothing behind itself," to use an expression from an ancient wisdom tradition, though it applies to a very different context—these essential characteristics that some have already recognized in Nietzsche can be explained precisely as so many forms in which the transcendent acts and manifests. But the fact that this is not recognized and admitted as such, the fact, therefore, that this energy remains in the closed circle of immanence and of "life," generates a higher voltage than the circuit can sustain. This fact, moreover, may be the true and deeper cause of the final collapse of Nietzsche the man. Besides, he always had a sensation of living dangerously. By 1881 he was writing to Gast: "I have the feeling of living a life that is risky to the highest degree—I am one of those machines that might explode."[19] At other times he spoke of a "continual

proximity to danger," and it was surely from this that he drew the generalization that "superior men find themselves in continual inner and outer peril."

It is clear, even in this particular respect, how important Nietzsche is as a symbolic figure for our entire investigation. His case illustrates in precise terms what can, and indeed must, occur in a human type in which transcendence has awakened, yes, but who is *uncentered with regard to it.* We shall see that the essential themes of existentialism are to be interpreted no differently.

This is not the way of the man we have in mind, who has quite another constitution. A clean line of division must be drawn. But first it is useful to see what is to be expected in the case of those who remain on this side of the line, that is, in those who follow the way of immanence unflinchingly, without turning back, without lowering their level, but also without the capacity to reach the turning point that alone can make good their lack, from the very start, of the quality I have indicated in the man of Tradition, in the man who is constitutionally not modern. Once they have entered on the way of absolute affirmation, and have mastered all those forms of "ascesis" and the activation of a higher intensity of life that we have mentioned, their only saving solution is in a conscious change of polarity; in the possibility that at a given point, in given situations or environments, by a kind of ontological rupture of level, their life would be turned upside down, as it were, and transformed into a different quality—the *mehr leben* [living more] would give place to a *mehr-als-leben* [more than living], to use the neat expression suggested in another context by Georg Simmel.[20]

This is a possibility that can be entertained even in this present epoch. The few who can accomplish it may achieve, even under current conditions, a qualification analogous to what was inborn in the type under consideration. Certain gropings toward openings of the kind are not unknown today, alongside the traumatization of existence. One typical sign, for example, is the interest in Zen felt by some members of the Beat Generation. The condition for it is something like a sudden illumination—the *satori* of Zen. Without it, the path of those who have undergone experiences like Nietzsche's—and, in general, of those in whom, for one reason or another and with or without their volition,

transcendence has awakened in the human circuit as an energy in the world where God is dead—is a path that leads to the abyss. It is cold comfort in such cases to speak of "the damned saints of our time" or of "angels with the face of a criminal or a pervert"; that is pure, gratuitous romanticism.

In the contrary and positive case, the result might be expressed as a transition from the plane of "Dionysus" to that of a spiritual superiority, known in antiquity under the Apollonian or Olympian symbol. It is of capital importance to recognize that this is the only solution that does not involve a regression, and that it is the antithesis of any solution of the religious or devotional type. The "conversion" of certain contemporaries who found themselves unable to sustain the tension of the nihilistic climate, or who faced the experiences in question superficially, as mere intellectuals, represent cases of surrender that are devoid of any interest for us.

9

Beyond Theism and Atheism

Following on from this, and before taking up the positive part of our subject, I should return to what was said earlier when specifying what had reached, or was reaching, the point of crisis in the modern world.

I have explained that the crisis on the social plane concerned bourgeois society and civilization. From the spiritual point of view, I spoke of the double aspect of the process of "emancipation" that has led to the present situation: first of its solely destructive and regressive aspect, then of how it faces a differentiated human type with the risky ordeal of a complete internal liberation. Pursuing the latter aspect, I would make another point, namely that one of the causes favoring the processes of dissolution has been the confused sense of a true fact: the sense that everything in the recent West of a religious nature, especially Christianity, belongs to the "all too human" and has little to do with really transcendent values, beside being fairly incompatible, as a general climate and an internal attitude, with the dispositions and vocations proper to a higher human type.

In particular, an important factor has been the mutilated character of Christianity when compared to the majority of other traditional forms; mutilated, because it does not possess an "esotericism," an inner teaching of a metaphysical character beyond the truths and dogmas of the faith offered to the common people. The extensions represented by sporadic experiences that are simply "mystical" and little understood cannot make up for this essential lack in Christianity as a whole. This is why the work of demolition was so easy with the rise of so-called free thought, whereas in a different, complete tradition the presence of a body of teachings above the simply religious level would probably have prevented it.

What is the God whose death has been announced? Nietzsche himself replies: "Only the god of morality has been conquered."[1] He also asks: "Is there sense in conceiving of a god beyond good and evil?"[2] The reply must be affirmative. "Let God slough off his moral skin, and we shall see him reappear beyond good and evil."[3] What has disappeared is therefore not the god of metaphysics, but the god of theism, the personal god who is a projection of moral and social values and a support for human weakness. Now, the conception of a god in different terms is not only possible but essential within all the great traditions before and beside Christianity, and the principle of nonduality is also evident in them. These other traditions recognized as the ultimate foundation of the universe a principle anterior and superior to all antitheses, including those of immanence and transcendence considered unilaterally. This conferred on existence—on *all* of existence, including that part of it that appears problematic, destructive, and "evil"—the supreme justification that was being sought through a liberated worldview, to be affirmed beyond the demolitions of nihilism. Zarathustra in fact announces nothing new when he says: "Everything that becomes seems to me divine dance and divine whim, and the liberated world returns to itself"[4]; it is the same idea that Hinduism casts in the well-known symbol of the dance and play of the naked god Shiva. As another example, we might recall the doctrine of the transcendent identity of *samsara* (the world of becoming) with *nirvana* (the unconditioned), that ultimate peak of esoteric wisdom. In the Mediterranean region, the saying of the final mystery initiation, "Osiris is a black god," refers to a similar level; and one could also include the teachings of Neoplatonism and of a few mystics of high stature concerning the metaphysical, impersonal, and superpersonal One, and so forth—right up to William Blake's allegory of the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and the Goethean idea of the God of the "free glance" who does not judge according to good and evil, an idea encountered from the ancient West right up to Far Eastern Taoism. We see one of the most drastic proofs of this wisdom in the words of an ascetic on the point of being murdered by a European soldier: "Don't deceive me! You too are God!"

In the course of the involutional process described in the introduction, such horizons have gradually vanished from view. In cases like

Buddhism and Taoism it is very evident that they have passed from the metaphysical plane to the religious and devotional one, in terms of a regression due to the diffusion and profanation of the original inner doctrine, which most people are incapable of understanding and following.[5] In the West, the conception of the sacred and the transcendent in devotional and moral terms, which in other systems belonged only to the popular or regressive forms, became predominant and all but exclusive.

We should mention, however, that even in the Christian world there have been some allusions on the margins of Johannine mysticism to a future epoch of a higher freedom. Joachim de Flore gave out that the "third age," the age of the Spirit following those of the Father and the Son, would be that of freedom; and the "Brethren of the Free Spirit," along similar lines, proclaimed an "anomie," a liberty from the Law, from good and evil, in terms that even Nietzsche's superman would not have dared to profess. Echoes of these anticipations are to be found in Jacopone da Todi himself, when in his *Hymn to Holy Poverty and Its Threefold Heaven*[6] he tells us "do not fear Hell, do not hope for Heaven," and that one should "not rejoice in any good, nor mourn any adversity"; when he refers to a "virtue that asks not why" and goes so far as to dispense with virtue itself, possessing all things "in freedom of spirit," this being for him the inner and symbolic sense of true "poverty."

The conclusion to be drawn from all of this is that a group of concepts considered in the Christian West as essential and indispensable for any "true" religion—the personal god of theism, the moral law with the sanctions of heaven and hell, the limited conception of a providential order and a "moral and rational" finalism of the world, faith resting on a largely emotional, sentimental, and subintellectual basis—all of these are foreign to a metaphysical vision of existence such as is well attested in the world of Tradition. The God who has been attacked is God conceived as the center of gravity of all this merely religious system. But in fact this may open the horizon of a new essentiality for those who accept as a trial of their strength—one might even say, of their faith in the higher sense—all the dissolving processes brought about by the direction that civilization has taken in recent times. The "moral skin" falls off a God who has finished up as opium of the people, or as the counterpart

of the petty morality that the bourgeois world substitutes for the greater morality. But the essential core, represented by metaphysical teachings such as those just mentioned, remains inviolate for those who can perceive and live them, remains inaccessible to all those nihilistic processes, and withstands any dissolution.

After this essential clarification and widening of perspectives, we are now ready to gather up everything from the themes considered hitherto that may have a positive value today for the human type with whom we are concerned.

As far as worldviews are concerned, we are dealing with a conception of reality freed from the categories of good and evil, but with a metaphysical foundation, not a naturalistic or pantheistic one. *Being* knows nothing of good or evil, nor do the great laws of things, nor the Absolute. A good or an evil exists solely in function of an end, and what is the standard by which to judge this end and thereby fix the ultimate legitimacy of an action or a being? Even the theology of Providence and the efforts of theistic theodicy to prop up the concept of the moral God cannot do away with the idea of the Great Economy that includes evil, in which evil is only a particular aspect of a higher order, transcending the little human categories of the individual and the collectivity of individuals.

The "other world" attacked by European nihilism, presented by the latter as sheer illusion or condemned as an evasion, is not *another* reality; it is another dimension of reality in which the real, without being negated, acquires an absolute significance in the inconceivable nakedness of pure Being.

In an epoch of dissolution, this is the essential basis of a vision of life that is appropriate for the man reduced to himself, who must prove his own strength. Its counterpart is to be central or to make oneself so, to know or discover the supreme identity with oneself. It is to perceive the dimension of transcendence within, and to anchor oneself in it, making of it the hinge that stays immobile even when the door slams (an image from Meister Eckhart). From this point on, any "invocation" or prayer becomes existentially impossible. The heritage of "God" that one dared not accept is not that of the lucid madness of Kirilov; it is the calm sense of a presence and an intangible possession, of a superiority to life whilst in the very bosom of life. The deeper sense of what has

been said about the "new nobility" is no different: "Divinity consists in precisely this: that the gods exist, but no God." We could use the image of a ray of light proceeding with no need to turn back, and carrying its luminous energy and the impulse from the center from which it originated. It is also the absolute claim to one's own position in terms that exclude the theme of religious crisis, "feeling oneself abandoned by God." In such a state, that would be equivalent to a God who had abandoned himself. Similarly, no negation of God is possible: to negate or doubt God would be to negate or doubt oneself. Once the idea of a personal God has disappeared, God ceases to be a "problem," an object of "belief," or a need of the soul; the terms "believer," "atheist," or "freethinker" appear nonsensical. One has gone beyond both attitudes.

Once this point is grasped, we can indicate the terms in which to deal with the existential challenge in relation to life's negativity, tragedy, pain, problems, and absurdities. Seneca said that no spectacle is more pleasing to the gods than that of the superior man grappling with adversity. Only thus can he know his own strength—and Seneca adds that it is the men of valor who are sent to the riskiest positions or on difficult missions, while the spineless and feeble are left behind. There is the well-known maxim: "That which does not destroy us makes us stronger."[7] In our case, the basis for this courage refers to the dimension of transcendence *in oneself*: it is attested and confirmed in all situations of chaos and dissolution, thus turning them to our own advantage. It is the antithesis of an arrogant hardening of the physical individuality in all its forms, whether unilaterally Stoic or Nietzschean. Instead, it is the conscious activation in oneself of the *other* principle and of its strength, in experiences, moreover, that are not merely undergone but also sought, as I shall explain later. This must be kept firmly in mind.

In some cases nowadays, the shock of reality and the consequent trauma may serve not to validate and increase a strength that is already present, but to reawaken it. These are the cases in which only a thin film separates the principle of being in a person from that of the merely human individuality. Situations of depression, emptiness, or tragedy whose negative solution is the return to religion may through a positive reaction lead to this awakening. Even in some of the most advanced

modern literature one finds curious testimonies of moments of liberation realized in the midst of disintegration. One example will suffice, from an author already cited. Henry Miller, after all the signs of the chaotic disintegration of a meaningless life, after stupefaction at "the grandiose collapse of a whole world," speaks of a vision that justifies everything as it is—"a sort of eternity in suspense in which everything is justified, supremely justified." One looks for a miracle outside, he says, "while a counter counts within and there is no hand that can reach it or stop it." Only a sudden shock can do it. Then a new current arises in the being. This makes him say: "Perhaps in reading this, one has still the impression of chaos but this is written from a live center and what is chaotic is merely peripheral, the tangential shreds, as it were, of a world which no longer concerns me."[8] This brings us back, in a way, to the rupture of levels mentioned above, which has the virtue of instilling a different quality in the circuit of mere "life."

10
Invulnerability
Apollo and Dionysus

Up to now we have been establishing the rule for being oneself. Now we must bring to light the rule for *proving* oneself, then unite and specify the two principles with particular reference to the human type that concerns us. Just as this type is dual in its essential structure—in its determination as an individual, and its dimension of transcendence—being itself, and knowing itself through proving itself, present two quite distinct degrees.

With regard to the first degree, we have already noted the difficulty, especially in our times, that the principle of being oneself encounters in the vast majority of individuals, given their lack of a basic unity or even of one predominant and constant tendency among a multitude of others. Only in exceptional cases are these words of Nietzsche's valid: "One does best never to speak of two very lofty things, measure and mean. A few know their powers and their signs, thanks to the mystery paths of inner experiences and conversions. They venerate something divine in them, and abhor speaking out loud."[1] But in an age of dissolution, it is difficult even for one who possesses a basic internal form to know it, and thereby to know "himself," otherwise than through an experiment. Hence we recall the line already mentioned, to be understood now as the search for, or the acceptance of, those situations or alternatives in which the prevailing force, one's own "true nature," is compelled to manifest and make itself known.

The only actions that can be valid for this purpose are those that arise from the depths. Peripheral or emotional reactions do not qualify, for those are like reflex movements provoked by a stimulus, arising "long before the depth of one's own being has been touched or

questioned,"[2] as Nietzsche himself said, seeing in this very incapacity for deep impressions and engagement, and in this skin-deep reactivity at the mercy of every sensation, a deplorable characteristic of modern man. For many people it is as though they have to relearn how to act in the true sense, actively, as one might say, and also typically. Even for the man whom we have in mind, taken in his worldly aspect, this is an essential requirement today. We might note the corresponding discipline that is so important in traditional "inner teachings": that of self-remembering or self-awareness.[3] G. I. Gurdjieff, who has taught similar things in our time, describes the contrary state as that of being "breathed" or "sucked" into ordinary existence without any awareness of the fact, without noticing the automatic or "somnambulistic" character that this existence has from a higher point of view. "I am sucked in by my thoughts, my memories, my desires, my sensations, by the steak I eat, the cigarette I smoke, the love I make, by the sunshine, the rain, by this tree, by that passing car, by this book." Thus one is a shadow of oneself. Life in a state of *being*, the "active act," "active sensation," and so on are unknown states. But this is not the place to digress further about this special method of realization.[4]

This trial through self-knowledge under the stimulus of various experiences and various encounters with reality may be associated in a certain sense with the maxim of *amor fati* (love of fate).[5] Karl Jaspers has rightly said that this is not so much a precept of passive obedience to a necessity presumed to be predetermined and knowable, as an injunction to face each experience and everything in one's existence that is uncertain, ambiguous, and dangerous with the feeling that one will never do anything other than follow one's own path. The essential thing in this attitude is a kind of transcendent confidence that gives security and intrepidity, and it can be included among the positive elements in the line of conduct that is gradually being delineated.

The problem of being oneself has a particular and subordinate solution in terms of a unification. Once one has discovered through experiment which of one's manifold tendencies is the central one, one sets about identifying it with one's will, stabilizing it, and organizing all one's secondary or divergent tendencies around it. This is what it means to give oneself a law, one's own law. As we have seen, the incapacity to do this,

"the many discordant souls enclosed in my own breast," and the refusal to obey even before one is capable of commanding oneself are causes of the disaster that may well end the path of a being driven toward the boundary situation in the world without God. There is a relevant saying: "He who cannot command himself must obey. And more than one can command himself, but is still far from being able to obey himself."[6]

There is an example from the world of Tradition that may be of interest here. In Islam, long before nihilism, the initiatic Order of the Ismaelis used the very phrase "Nothing exists, everything is permitted."[7] But it applied in this order exclusively to the upper grades of the hierarchy. Before attaining these grades and having the right to adopt this truth for oneself, one had to pass four preliminary grades that involved, among other things, a rule of unconditional, blind obedience, taken to limits that are almost inconceivable for the Western mentality. For example, at a word from the Grand Master one had to be prepared to throw one's life away without any reason or purpose.

This brings us to the consideration of the second degree of the trial through self-knowledge, which belongs to the transcendent dimension and which conditions the final solution of the existential problem. With the first degree, in fact, with the recognition of "one's own nature" and the making of one's own law, this problem is only resolved partially, on the formal plane. That is the plane of determination, or, if one prefers, individuation, which furnishes one with an adequate base for controlling one's conduct in any circumstances. But this plane has no transparency for one who wants to get to the bottom of things; absolute meaning is not yet to be found therein. When the situation remains at this stage, one is active in wanting to be oneself, but not with regard to the fact of being thus and not otherwise. To a certain type, this can seem like something so irrational and obscure as to set in motion a crisis that endangers everything he has gained hitherto along the lines indicated. It is then that he must undergo the second degree of self-proving, which is like an experimental proof of the presence within him, in greater or lesser measure, of the higher dimension of transcendence. This is the unconditioned nucleus that in life does not belong to life's sphere, but to that of Being.

It depends on this last trial to resolve, or not to resolve, the problem

of the ultimate meaning of existence in an ambience lacking any support or "sign." After the whole superstructure has been rejected or destroyed, and having for one's sole support one's own being, the ultimate meaning of existing and living *can spring only from a direct and absolute relationship between that being* (between what one is in a limiting sense) *and transcendence* (transcendence in itself). This meaning is not given by anything extrinsic or external, anything added to the being when the latter turns to some other principle. That might have occurred in a different world, a traditionally ordered world. But in the existential realm under consideration, such a meaning can only be given by the transcendent dimension directly perceived by man as the root of his being and of his "own nature." Moreover, it carries an absolute justification, an indelible and irrevocable consecration, which completely destroys the state of negativity and the existential problem. On this basis alone does "being what one is" cease to constitute a limitation. Otherwise every path will be limited, including that of "supermen" and any other kind of being that serves with its outward traits to deflect the problem of ultimate meaning, thereby hiding its own essential vulnerability.

This unity with the transcendent is also the condition for preventing the process of self-unification from taking a regressive path. There is in fact a possibility of a pathological unification of the being from below, as in the case of an elementary passion that takes over the whole person, organizing all his faculties to its own ends. Cases of fanaticism and possession are no different in kind. One must consider this possible reduction to absurdity of "being oneself" and of the unity of the self. This is a further reason to require our particular type of man to undergo the trial of self-knowledge at the second degree, which concerns, as we have said, the presence of the unconditioned and the supra-individual as his true center.

It is easy to see how this requires one to surpass and prove oneself, beyond one's own nature and one's own law. The autonomy of him who makes his own will coincide with his own being is not enough. Moreover, it requires a rupture of levels that can sometimes have the character of violence done to oneself, and one has to be sure to remain on one's feet even in the void and the formless. This is positive anomie, beyond autonomy. In less qualified types, in those in which the original

inheritance, as I called it, is not sufficiently alive existentially, this trial almost always requires a certain "sacrificial" disposition: such a man has to feel ready to be destroyed, if need be, without being hurt thereby. The result of trials or experiences of this kind remains undetermined, and has always been so, even when the ultimate consecration of inner sovereignty was sought within the institutional frameworks provided by Tradition. It is all the more so in today's social climate, in circumstances where it is almost impossible to create a magical circle of protection in this confrontation with transcendence, with that which is in fact not human.

But we repeat: In a meaningless world, the absolute sense of being depends almost exclusively on this experience. If it has a positive outcome, the last limit falls away; transcendence and existence, freedom and necessity, possibility and reality coincide. A centrality and invulnerability are realized without restriction in any situation, be it dark or light, detached or apparently open to every impulse or passion of life. Above all, the essential conditions are thereby created for adapting, without losing oneself, to a world that has become free but left to its own devices, seized by irrationality and meaninglessness. And this is exactly the problem with which we began.

Having established this basic point regarding the ultimate clarification of oneself, I turn now to some special aspects of the integrated man's orientation within current experience.

If we follow the method used up to now and take some of Nietzsche's categories as our provisional reference point, we might immediately relate this to "Dionysism." But in fact, the philosopher of the superman has given this term differing and contradictory meanings. One of the signs of his incomprehension of ancient traditions is his interpretation of the symbols of Dionysus and Apollo on the basis of a modern philosophy like Schopenhauer's. As I have already pointed out, he uses the term "Dionysus" for a sort of divinized immanence, an intoxicated and frenetic affirmation of life in its most irrational and tragic aspects. On the other hand, Nietzsche makes Apollo into the symbol of a contemplation of the world of pure forms, as though taking flight to free oneself from the sensations and tensions of this irrational and dramatic substratum of existence. All of this is without foundation.

Without entering into the special field of the history of religions and ancient civilization, I will limit myself to recalling that the Dionysian way was a way of the Mysteries, apart from a few decayed and spurious popular forms. Just like other Mysteries that correspond to it in other cultural areas, it can be defined in the terms already used: an experience of life raised to a particular intensity that emerges, overturns, and frees itself in something more than life, thanks to an ontological rupture of levels. But this conclusion, which is equivalent to the realization, revival, or reawakening of transcendence in oneself, can equally well be referred to the true content of the symbol of Apollo; hence the absurdity of Nietzsche's antithesis between "Apollo" and "Dionysus."

This serves as a preliminary to our real intention, which can only concern a "Dionysism" that is integrated, as one might say, with Apollonism. Here one possesses the stability that is the result of the Dionysian experience not as a goal before oneself, but in a certain sense behind oneself. Or else we can speak of a "Dionysian Apollonism," and define in these terms one of the most important ingredients of the attitude of the modern human type in his encounter with existence, beyond the special domain of his trials.

Naturally, we are not dealing here with normal existence, but with those possible forms of it that are already differentiated, that have a certain intensity, while still being defined in a chaotic ambience, in the domain of pure contingency. They are not infrequent today, and in the times to come they will surely proliferate. The state in question is that of the man who is self-confident through having as the essential center of his personality not life, but Being. He can encounter everything, abandon himself to everything, and open himself to everything without losing himself. He accepts every experience, no longer in order to prove and know himself, but to unfold all his possibilities in view of the transformations that they can work in him, and of the new contents that offer and reveal themselves on this path.

Nietzsche often spoke in similar terms of the "Dionysian soul," albeit with his usual dangerous confusions. It was for him "the soul that, having being, plunges into becoming"[8]; that which can run beyond itself, almost fleeing from itself, and find itself in a vaster

sphere; the soul that feels the need and joy of adventuring in the world of chance or even the irrational. In the process, "by transfiguring itself, it transfigures existence"[9]: existence here to be taken in all its aspects, just as it is, "without withdrawal, exception, or choice."[10] The domain of the senses is not excluded, but included. The Dionysian state "is the state in which the spirit rediscovers itself right down to the senses, while the senses rediscover themselves in the spirit."[11] This concerns superior types in which even experiences largely tied to the senses "end by turning into the image and inebriation of the highest spirituality."[12]

One could show many correspondences between the latter point and the doctrines, paths, and very elaborate practices of the world of Tradition.[13] One of the aspects of Dionysism in the broad sense can in fact be seen in its capacity to overcome the antithesis of spirit and senses, an antithesis typical of the previous Western religious morality that is now in crisis. That which enables this antithesis to be overcome is the *other* quality, introduced into the sense domain to transform its motive force as it were catalytically.

Moreover, the capacity to open oneself without losing oneself takes on a special importance in an epoch of dissolution. It is the way to master every transformation that may occur, even the most perilous ones. A passage in the Upanishads marks its extreme limit, speaking of him against whom death is powerless, because it has become part of his being.[14] In this state, outside events that might affect or upset his being can become the stimulus that activates an ever greater freedom and potential. The transcendent dimension, which holds firm through all turns of the tide, all ups and downs, will also play the part here of a transformer. It prevents any intoxicated self-identification with the life force, not to mention what might be induced by a thirst for life, or by the disorderly impulse to seek in mere sensation a surrogate for the meaning of existence, and to lose oneself in actions and "achievements." Detachment coexists with a fully lived experience; a calm "being" is constantly wedded to the substance of life. The consequence of this union, existentially speaking, is a most particular kind of lucid inebriation, one might almost say intellectualized and magnetic, which is the absolute opposite of what comes from the ecstatic opening to the world of elementary forces, instinct, and "nature." *In this very special*

inebriation, subtilized and clarified, is to be seen the vital element necessary for an existence in the free state, in a chaotic world abandoned to itself.

Later on, I may have occasion to enter into more detail about this inebriation. The important point here is to grasp the essential opposition between this state and attitudes that have taken shape in the modern world alongside the rebellion against rationalism or puritanism. It often calls itself a new "paganism" and follows a path like that of Nietzsche's worst "Dionysism" ("exuberance, innocence, plenitude, the joy of life," the *agape*, ecstasy, eros, cruelty, intoxication, springtime,[15] "a whole scale of lights and colors going from semidivine forms, in a sort of divinification of the body, to those of a healthy semi-animality and the simple pleasures of uncorrupted natures"[16]—as he wrote with particular reference to the ancient world). We have noticed a similar spirit pervading much of the modern cult of action, despite the mechanical and abstract traits often present in it. But the perspective that interests us here is one of clarity and presence of mind in every encounter and evocation, and a calm that coexists with movement and transformations. It imparts stability to every step of the way, and a continuity that is also that of invulnerability and an invisible sovereignty.

This also demands a kind of freedom from the past and the future, the intrepidity of a soul free from the bonds of the lesser I, the "being" that manifests itself in the form of "being in action." The naturalness required by this mode of being prevents us from using the term "heroism" to describe some of its incidental features, for there is nothing in it of the pathos, romanticism, individualism, rhetoric, and even exhibitionism that nearly always accompany the current idea of heroism. And we hardly need underline the difference between this use of the word "act" and a certain empty academic philosophy, an outmoded neo-Hegelianism that took the concept as its center.[17]

11
Acting without Desire

The Causal Law

I now address a particular aspect of the attitude in question, applicable to a wider and less exclusive field: that of life seen as the field of works, activities, and achievements in which the individual deliberately takes the initiative. We are not dealing now with simple, lived experiences, but with procedures aimed at a goal. The character of the human type I have been describing must result in a certain orientation whose essence was defined in the traditional world by two basic maxims.

The first of these is to act without regard to the fruits, without being affected by the chances of success or failure, victory or defeat, winning or losing, any more than by pleasure or pain, or by the approval or disapproval of others. This form of action has also been called "action without desire." The higher dimension, which is presumed to be present in oneself, manifests through the capacity to act not with less, but with more application than a normal type of man could bring to the ordinary forms of conditioned action. One can also speak here of "doing what needs to be done," impersonally.

The necessary coexistence of the two principles is even more distinct in the second traditional maxim, which is that of "action without acting." It is a paradoxical, Far Eastern way of describing a form of action that does not involve or stir the higher principle of "being" in itself. Yet the latter remains the true subject of the action, giving it its primary motive force and sustaining and guiding it from beginning to end.[1]

Such a line of conduct obviously refers to the domain in which one's own nature is allowed to function, and to that which derives from the particular situation that one has actively assumed as an individual. This

is the very context in which the maxims of "acting without regard to the fruits" and of "doing what needs to be done" apply. The content of such action is not what is given by initiatives that arise from the void of pure freedom; it is what is defined by one's own natural inner law.

Whereas the Dionysian attitude mainly concerns the receptive side of the testing and confirmation of oneself while in the midst of becoming, and perhaps when facing the unexpected, the irrational, and the problematic, the orientation of which I have been speaking concerns the active side, in the specific and, in a way, external sense of personal behavior and expression. Another saying from the world of Tradition may apply here: "Be whole in the broken, straight in the bent."[2] I have already alluded to it when evoking a whole category of actions that are really peripheral and "passive," which do not engage the essence but are automatic reflexes, unreflecting reactions of the sensibility. Even the supposed plenitude of pure "living," which is largely biologically conditioned, does not belong to a much higher plane. Very different is the action that arises from the deep and in a way supra-individual core of being, in the form of "being inasmuch as one acts." Whatever their object, one is involved in these actions. Their quality never varies, divides, or multiplies: they are a pure expression of the self, whether in the humblest work of an artisan or in precise mechanical work, in action taken in situations of danger, of command, or of controlling powerful material or social forces. Charles Péguy was only stating a principle of broad application in the world of Tradition when he said that a work well done is a reward in itself, and that the true artisan puts the same care into a work to be seen, and into one that remains unseen. I will return to this theme in a later chapter.

A particular point that deserves to be highlighted concerns the real significance of the idea that neither pleasure nor pain should enter as motives when one must do what must be done. It might easily make one think along the lines of a "moral stoicism," with all the aridity and soullessness inherent in that concept. In fact, it will be difficult for someone who is acting from a basis in "life" and not from "being" to imagine the possibility of this kind of orientation, in which one obeys no abstract rule, no "duty" superimposed on the natural impulse of the individual, because his impulse would instead be to seek pleasure

and avoid pain. This, however, is a commonplace derived from the false generalization of what only applies to certain situations, where pleasure and pain are rightly viewed as detached ideas, which a preliminary rational consideration transforms into goals and motives of action. Situations of this kind are rarer than one might think in any "sane" nature (and the expression rightly applies here); there are many cases in which the starting point is not a reflection, but a vital motion that resonates as pleasure or pain as it develops. One can in fact speak of a vital "decadence" when values of hedonism and comfort take first place in one's conduct of life. It implies a splitting and a loss of soul that are analogous to the form sexual pleasure takes for depraved and vicious types. In them, what otherwise arises naturally from the motion of eros and concludes with the possession and embrace of the woman becomes a separate end, to which the rest serves as a means.

In any case, the important thing is to make the distinction, well known to traditional teachings, between the happiness or pleasure that is ardent, and that which is heroic—using the latter term with due reservation. The distinction corresponds to that between two opposite attitudes and two opposite human types. The first type of happiness or pleasure belongs to the naturalistic plane and is marked by passivity toward the world of impulses, instincts, passions, and inclinations. Tradition defines the basis of naturalistic existence as desire and thirst, and ardent pleasure is that which is tied to the satisfaction of desire in terms of a momentary dampening of the fire that drives life onward. Heroic pleasure, on the other hand, is that which accompanies a decisive action that comes from "being," from the plane superior to that of life, and in a way it blends with the special inebriation that was mentioned earlier.

The pleasure and pain that are not to be taken account of, according to the rules of pure action, are those of the first type, the naturalistic. Pure action involves the other kind of pleasure or happiness, which it would be wrong to imagine as inhabiting an arid, abstracted, and soulless climate. There, too, there can be fire and vigor, but of a very special kind, with the constant presence and transparency of the higher, calm, and detached principle—which, as I have said, is the true acting principle here. It is also important in this context not to

confuse the form of action (that is, its inner significance, the mode of its validity for the I) with its *content*. There is no object of ardent or passive pleasure that cannot in principle be also the object of heroic or positive pleasure, and vice versa. It is a matter of a different dimension, which includes everything but which also includes possibilities that fall outside the realm of natural, conditioned existence. In practice, there are many cases in which this is true and possible on the sole condition of this qualitative change, this transmutation of the sensible into the hypersensible, in which we have just seen one of the principal aspects of the orientation of an integrated and rectified Dionysism.

Finally there is an analogy between positive or heroic pleasure and that which, even on the empirical plane, accompanies any action in its perfection, when its style shows a greater or lesser degree of diligence and integrity. Everyone has experienced the particular pleasure obtained from the exercise of an acquired skill, when after the necessary efforts to develop it (without being driven by the idea of "ardent pleasure") it becomes an ability, a spontaneity of a higher order, a mastery, a sort of game. Thus all the elements considered in this paragraph complement each other.

There are some further observations to be made in a more external field: that of the interactions to which the individual is exposed, even if he is integrated in our sense, by virtue of being placed in a specific society, a civilization, and a cosmic environment.

Pure action does not mean blind action. The rule is to care nothing for the consequences to the shifting, individualistic feelings, but not in ignorance of the objective conditions that action must take into account in order to be as perfect as possible, and so as not to be doomed to failure from the start. One may not succeed: that is secondary, but it should not be owing to defective knowledge of everything concerning the conditions of efficacy, which generally comprise causality, the relations of cause to effect, and the law of concordant actions and reactions.

One can extend these ideas to help define the attitude that the integrated man should adopt on every plane, once he has done away with the current notions of good and evil. He sets himself above the moral plane not with pathos and polemics but with objectivity, hence through *knowledge*—the knowledge of causes and effects—and through conduct

that has this knowledge as its only basis. Thus for the moral concept of "sin" he substitutes the objective one of "fault," or more precisely "error."[3] For him who has centered himself in transcendence, the idea of "sin" has no more sense than the current and vacillating notions of good and evil, licit and illicit. All these notions are burnt out of him and cannot spiritually germinate again. One might say that they have been divested of their absolute value, and are tested objectively on the basis of the consequences that in fact follow from an action inwardly free from them.

There is an exact correspondence with traditional teachings here, just as there was in the other behavioral elements suggested for an epoch of dissolution. To name a well-known formula that is nearly always misunderstood, thanks to overblown moralizing, there is the so-called law of karma.[4] It concerns the effects that happen on all planes as the result of given actions, because these actions already contain their causes in potentiality: effects that are natural and neutral, devoid of moral sanction either positive or negative. It is an extension of the laws that are nowadays considered appropriate for physical phenomena, laws that contain no innate obligation concerning the conduct that should follow once one knows about them. As far as "evil" is concerned, there is an old Spanish proverb that expresses this idea: "God said: take what you want and pay the price"; also the Koranic saying: "He who does evil, does it only to himself." It is a matter of keeping in mind the possibility of certain objective reactions, and so long as one accepts them even when they are negative, one's action remains free. The determinism of what the traditional world called "fate," and made the basis of various forms of divination and oracles, was conceived in the same way: it was a matter of certain objective directions of events, which one might or might not take into account in view of the advantage or risk inherent in choosing a certain course. By analogy, if someone is intending to make a risky alpine climb or a flight, once he has heard a forecast of bad weather he may either abandon or pursue it. In the latter case, he accepts the risk from the start. But the freedom remains; no "moral" factor comes into play. In some cases the "natural sanction," the karma, can be partially neutralized. Again by analogy: one may know in advance that a certain conduct of life will probably cause

harm to the organism. But one may give it no thought and eventually resort to medicine to neutralize its effects. Then everything is reduced to an interplay of various reactions, and the ultimate effect will depend on the strongest one. The same perspective and behavior are also valid on the nonmaterial plane.

If we assume that the being has reached a high grade of unification, everything resembling an "inner sanction" can be interpreted in the same terms—positive feelings will arise in the case of one line of action, negative in the case of an opposite line, thus conforming to "good" or "evil" according to their meanings in a certain society, a certain social stratum, a certain civilization, and a certain epoch. Apart from purely external and social reactions, a man may suffer, feel remorse, guilt, or shame when he acts contrary to the tendency that still prevails in his depths (for the ordinary man, nearly always through hereditary and social conditioning active in his subconscious), and which has only apparently been silenced by other tendencies and by the dictate of the "physical I." On the other hand, he feels a sense of satisfaction and comfort when he obeys that tendency. In the end, the negative "inner sanction" may intervene to cause a breakdown in the case mentioned, where he starts from what he knows to be his deepest and most authentic vocation and chooses a given ideal and line of conduct, but then gives way to other pressures and passively recognizes his own weakness and failure, suffering the internal dissociation due to the uncoordinated plurality of tendencies.

These emotional reactions are purely psychological in character and origin. They may be indifferent to the intrinsic quality of the actions, and they have no transcendent significance, no character of "moral sanctions." They are facts that are "natural" in their own way, on which one should not superimpose a mythology of moral interpretations if one has arrived at true inner freedom. These are the objective terms in which Guyau, Nietzsche, and others have treated in realistic terms such phenomena of the "moral conscience," on which various authors have tried to build a kind of experimental basis—moving illegitimately from the plane of psychological facts to that of pure values—for an ethics that is not overtly founded on religious commandments. This aspect disappears automatically when the being has become one and

his actions spring from that unity. In order to eliminate anything implying limitation or support I would rephrase that: when the being has become one *through willing it*, having *chosen* unity; because a choice is implied even here, whose direction is not obligatory. One might even accept and will nonunity, and in the same class of superior types that we are concerned with here, there may be those who permit themselves to do so. In such a case their basal unity does not cease to exist, but rather dematerializes and remains invisibly on a deeper plane.

Incidentally, in the same tradition to which the doctrine of karma belongs there is the possibility not only of eliminating the emotive reactions mentioned above (through "impeccability," inner neutrality toward good and evil), but also of the "magical" neutralization of karmic reactions in the case of a being who has really burnt out his naturalistic part, and thereby become actively de-individualized.

This partial digression may serve to clarify how the "moral" plane can be eliminated impersonally, without any pathos, through considering the law of cause and effect in its fullest extension. Earlier on, I examined the field of external actions in which this law must be taken into account. In the inner realm it is a question of knowing what "blows to one's own self" may result from certain behaviors, and of acting accordingly, with the same objectivity. The "sin" complex is a pathological formation born under the sign of the personal God, the "God of morality." The more metaphysical traditions, on the other hand, are characterized by consciousness of an error committed, rather than by the sense of sin; and this is a theme that the superior man of our own time should make his own, beyond the dissolution of religious residues, by following the course I have described. An additional clarification comes from these observations of Frithjof Schuon: "The Hindus and Far Easterners do not have the notion of 'sin' in the Semitic sense; they distinguish actions not according to their intrinsic value but according to their opportuneness in view of cosmic or spiritual reactions, and also of social utility; they do not distinguish between 'moral' and 'immoral,' but between advantageous and harmful, pleasant and unpleasant, normal and abnormal, to the point of sacrificing the former—but apart from any ethical classification—to spiritual interests. They may push renunciation, abnegation, and mor-

tification to the limits of what is humanly possible, but without being 'moralists' for all that."[5]

With that we can conclude the principal part of our investigation. To sum up, the man for whom the new freedom does not spell ruin, whether because, given his special structure, he already has a firm base in himself, or because he is in the process of conquering it through an existential rupture of levels that reestablishes contact with the higher dimension of "being"—this man will possess a vision of reality stripped of the human and moral element, free from the projections of subjectivity and from conceptual, finalistic, and theistic superstructures. This reduction to pure reality of the general view of the world and of existence will be described in what follows. Its counterpart is the return of the person himself to pure being: the freedom of pure existence in the outside world is confirmed in the naked assumption of his own nature, from which he draws his own rule. This rule is a law to him to the degree that he does not start from a state of unity, and to the degree that secondary, divergent tendencies coexist and external factors try to influence him.

In the practical field of action, we have considered a regime of experiments with two degrees and two ends. First there is the proving knowledge of himself as a determined being, then of himself as a being in whom the transcendent dimension is positively present. The latter is the ultimate basis of his own law, and its supreme justification. After everything has collapsed and in a climate of dissolution, there is only one solution to the problem of an unconditioned and intangible meaning to life: the direct assumption of one's own naked being as a function of transcendence.

As for the modes of behavior toward the world, once a clarification and confirmation of oneself has been achieved as described, the general formula is indicated by an intrepid openness, devoid of ties but united in detachment, in the face of any possible experience. Where this involves a high intensity of life and a regime of achievement that enliven and nourish the calm principle of transcendence within, the orientation has some features in common with Nietzsche's "Dionysian state"; but the way in which this state should be integrated suggests that

a better term would be "Dionysian Apollonism." When one's relations with the world are not those of lived experience in general, but of the manifestation of oneself through works and active initiatives, the style suggested is that of involvement in every act, of pure and impersonal action, "without desire," without attachment.

Attention was also drawn to a special state of lucid inebriation that is connected with this entire orientation and is absolutely essential for the type of man under consideration, because it takes the place of that animation that, given a different world, he would receive from an environment formed by Tradition, thus filled with meaning; or else from the subintellectual adhesion to emotion and impulses at the vital base of existence, in pure *bios*. Finally, I devoted some attention to the reality of actions and the regime of knowledge that should take the place of the mythology of inner moral sanctions and of "sin."

Those who know my other works will be aware of the correspondence between these views and certain instructions of schools and movements in the world of Tradition, which almost always concerned only the esoteric doctrine. I repeat here what I have said already: that it is only for incidental and opportune reasons that I have taken into consideration themes from modern thinkers, especially Nietzsche. They serve to create a link with the problems that preoccupy Europeans who have already witnessed the arrival of nihilism and of the world without God, and have sought to go beyond these in a positive way. It must be emphasized that such references could have been dispensed with altogether. With the intention of creating a similar link to what some contemporary thinkers have presented in a more or less muddled way, it seems useful to treat briefly that contemporary current known as existentialism, before proceeding to some particular sectors of today's culture and lifestyles, and to the proper attitude to take toward them.

Part 3

The Dead End of Existentialism

12

Being and Inauthentic Existence

It is well known that there are two different types of existentialism. The first belongs to a group of philosophers by trade, whose ideas until recently were unknown outside their narrow intellectual circles. Second, there is a practical existentialism that came into vogue after World War II with groups that borrowed a few themes from the philosophical existentialists. They adapted them for literary purposes or as grounds for anticonformist, pseudo-anarchist, or rebellious behavior, as in the well-known case of yesterday's existentialists of Saint-Germain-des-Près and other Parisian locales, inspired above all by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Both types of existentialism have value essentially as signs of the times. The second type, for all its forced and snobbish nature, still has this value no less than the "serious," philosophical existentialism. In fact, the practical existentialists are presented, or present themselves, as a variety of that "generation at risk," victims of the final crisis of the modern world. Thus they may actually find themselves at an advantage over the philosophical existentialists, who are mostly professors, and whose academic table talk certainly reflects some motifs of the crisis of contemporary man, but whose lifestyle has remained petit bourgeois, far from the practical, personal, anticonformist conduct that the second existentialist current displays.

Nevertheless, it is the philosophical existentialism that concerns us here. Let it be understood that I certainly do not intend to discuss its positions "philosophically," to see if they are speculatively "true" or "false." Apart from the fact that this would require a much longer treatment than I can give it here, it would be of no interest for our purposes.

I will examine instead a few of the more typical motives of existentialism in terms of their symbolic and, indeed, "existential" significance, that is, as indirect testimonies on the abstract and discursive level of the sensation of existence belonging to a certain human type of our time. Moreover, this examination is necessary for drawing the line between the positions defined so far and the existentialists' ideas, which is all the more important since my usage of a certain terminology could give rise to the mistaken idea of nonexistent affinities.

Apart from their systematizing and their more elaborate philosophical apparatus, the philosophical existentialists' situation is analogous to Nietzsche's: they too are modern men, that is, men severed from the world of Tradition and devoid of any knowledge or comprehension of that world. They work with the categories of "Western thought," which is as much as to say profane, abstract, and rootless. Noteworthy is the case of Karl Jaspers, perhaps the only one among the existentialists to make a few superficial references to "metaphysics,"[1] confused by him with mysticism; at the same time he exalts "rational illumination," "the liberty and independence of the philosophical," and is intolerant of any form of spiritual and secular authority, and of any claim to obedience for men "believed to be God's microphones"—as if nothing else were imaginable.[2] These are the typical horizons of the intellectual of liberal-bourgeois origin. I, on the contrary, even though I have considered and will be considering modern problems, will not use modern categories to clarify or dismiss them. Moreover, even when the existentialists partially follow the right path, it happens as if by chance, not based on sound principles but with inevitable waverings, omissions, and confusions, and above all in a state of internal surrender. Worse yet, philosophical existentialists use an arbitrary terminology that they have specially invented, and which, especially in Heidegger, is of an inconceivable abstruseness, both superfluous and intolerable.

The first point to be emphasized in existentialism is the affirmation of the "ontic-ontological" primacy of that concrete and irreplicable being that we always are. This is also expressed by saying that "existence precedes essence." The "essence" here is equivalent to everything that can be judgment, value, and name. As for existence, it is immediately related to the "situation" in which every individual locates himself concretely in

space, time, and history. The expression used by Heidegger for this elementary reality is "being-there" or "being-here" *(Da-sein).*[3] He connects it closely to "being-in-the-world," to the extent of seeing it as an essential constituent element of the human being. To recognize the conditionality imposed by the "situation" in the treatment of every problem and the vision of the world is necessary, he says, in order not to fall into mystification and self-deception.

Whatever value they may have, the consequences of this first basic existentialist motif add little to what we have already established regarding the affirmation of one's own nature and one's own law, and regarding the rejection of all doctrines and norms that claim universal, abstract, and normative validity. Obviously it confirms the direction in which to seek the only support in a climate of dissolution. Jaspers, especially, brings to light the fact that every "objective" consideration, when detached from the context of the problems and visions of the world, leads inevitably to relativism, skepticism, and ultimately to nihilism. The only viable path is that of an "elucidation" *(Erhellung)* of the ideas and principles on the basis of their existential foundation, or of the truth of the "being" that each one is. It is like enclosing oneself in a circle. Heidegger, however, says of this, and not unjustly, that the important thing is not to leave the circle, but to remain there in the right way.

The relation between this orientation and an environment by now devoid of meaning is given by the existential opposition between *authenticity* and *inauthenticity.* Heidegger speaks of the state of inauthenticity, of swooning, of "covering" oneself or fleeing from oneself to find oneself, of "being flung"[4] into the anodyne existence of everyday life with its platitudes, chattering, lies, entanglements, expedients, its forms of "tranquilization" and "dejection," and its escapist diversions.[5] Authentic existence is seen and sought when one senses the emptiness underlying that existence and is recalled to the problem of one's own deepest being, beyond the social I and its categories. Here we have a recapitulation of all the critiques that conclude by showing the absurdity and insignificance of modern life.

The affinity of these ideas with the positions already defined here is, however, relative, because existentialism is characterized by an unacceptable overvaluation of "situationality." "Dasein" for Heidegger is

always "being-in-the-world."[6] The destiny of the "boundary situation"[7] is, for Jaspers as well as for Marcel, a liminal fact, a given in the face of which thinking halts and crashes. Heidegger repeats that the characteristic of "being-in-the-world" is not accidental for the Self: it is not as though the latter could exist without it, it is not that man firstly *is*, and then has a relation with the world—a causal, occasional, and arbitrary relationship with that which is. All this might well be the case, but only for a human type different from that which concerns us. As we know, in this human type an inner detachment, albeit coupled with an absolute assumption of his determined nature, limits any "situational" conditions and, from a superior point of view, minimizes and relegates to contingency any "being-in-the-world."

There is an evident incongruence in the existentialists, since at the same time they generally consider a rupture of that "enclosure" of the individual, and an overcoming of that simple immanence, which, as we have seen, gravely prejudice the positions of Nietzsche. Already in Søren Kierkegaard, considered as the spiritual father of the existentialists, "existence" is presented as a problem; with a special use of the German term *Existenz*, different from current usage, he defines *Existenz* as a paradoxical point in which the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, are copresent, meeting but mutually excluding each other. So it would seem to be a matter of recognizing the presence in man of the transcendent dimension. (Following the abstract habit of philosophy, the existentialists too speak of man in general, whereas one should always refer to one or another human type.) Still, we can accept the conception of *Existenz* as the physical presence of the I in the world, in a determined, concrete, and unrepeatable form and situation (cf. the theory of one's own nature and law in chapter 7) and, simultaneously, as a metaphysical presence of Being (of transcendence) in the I.

Along these lines, a certain type of existentialism could also lead to another point already established here: that of a positive antitheism, an existential overcoming of the God-figure, the object of faith or doubt. Since the center of the I is also mysteriously the center of Being, "God" (transcendence) is a certainty, not as a subject of faith or dogma, but as *presence* in existence and freedom. The saying of Jaspers: "God is a certainty for me inasmuch as I exist authentically,"[8] relates in a certain

way to the state already indicated, in which calling Being into question would amount to calling oneself into question.

From this first dissection of existentialist ideas we can reckon on the positive side its highlighting of the dual structure of a given human type (not of man in general) and the piercing of the plane of "life" to admit a higher type of presence. But we shall see the problem that all this entails, and that existentialism does not resolve.

13
Sartre: Prisoner without Walls

Of all the existentialists, Sartre is perhaps the one who has most emphasized "existential freedom." His theory essentially reflects the movement toward detachment that has led to the nihilistic world. Sartre speaks of the nihilating *(néantisant)* act of the human being, which expresses his freedom and constitutes the essence and the ultimate meaning of every motion directed at a goal, and, in the final instance, of his whole existence in time. The speculative "justification" of such an idea is that "in order to act it is necessary to abandon the plane of being and resolutely attack that of nonbeing," because every goal corresponds to a situation not yet in existence, hence to a nothingness, to the empty space of that which is mere possibility. Freedom in action introduces, then, the "nothingness" into the world: "the human being first rests in the bosom of being, then detaches himself from it with a nihilating recoil" *(recul néantisant)*. This occurs not only when freedom calls being into question by doubting, interrogating, seeking out, and destroying it, but also in any desire, emotion, or passion, without any exception. Freedom is then presented to us as "a nihilating rupture with the world and with oneself," as pure negation of the given: not being that which is, but being that which is not.[1] Through repetition, this process of rupture and transcendence that leaves nothing behind itself and goes forward toward nothing, gives rise to the development of existence in time (to "temporalization.") Sartre says precisely: "Freedom, choice, nihilation, and temporalization are one and the same thing."[2]

This view is shared by other existentialists, especially by Heidegger,

when he locates in "transcendence" the essence, the fundamental structure of the subject, the self, the ipseity, or whatever else one wants to call "the entity that we always are." But it is Sartre who is responsible for relating such views to their "existential" underpinning, made from the specific experience of the last man who, having burned every support or bond, finds himself consigned to himself.

Sartre employs every subtle argument to demonstrate "objectively" that the final ground of any human action is absolute freedom, that there is no situation in which man is not compelled to choose, having no other basis in his choice outside of himself. Thus Sartre points out that even *not* choosing is a choice, so that basically the act of volition entails no more freedom than the impassioned act, than surrendering oneself, obeying, or giving way to instinct. Referring to "nature," "physiology," "history," and so on, is not a valid excuse, because according to the given terms one's own fundamental freedom and one's own responsibility still subsist. Thus what in Nietzsche was an imperative—that the superior man should know nothing to which to consign his responsibility and sensation of living—is here posited as a given fact proven by philosophical analysis. But Sartre's state of mind is very different. For him, man is like someone in a prison without walls; he cannot find, either in himself or outside himself, any refuge from his freedom; he is destined, is *sentenced* to be free. He is not free to accept or refuse his freedom; he cannot escape it. I have already mentioned this state of the mind as the most characteristic evidence of the specific, negative sense that freedom has assumed in a certain human type in the epoch of nihilism. Freedom that cannot cease to be such, that cannot choose to be or not to be freedom, is for Sartre a limitation, a primordial, insuperable, and distressing "given."

In his philosophy, everything else, including the outside world, the totality of limitations belonging to men, things, or events, is supposedly never a real constriction; every impotence, every tragedy, even death itself, can be assumed, in principle, within freedom. In most cases, everything will be reduced to factors that one must still take into account, but that are not internally binding (as if following the objective line of conduct considered below in chapter 16). Here Sartre has taken from Heidegger the concept of "instrumentality" *(Zuhandenheit),* of

the character of "mere usable means" that everything that comes to us from the outside, from people and things, may present to us: it always presupposes not only my particular structure or formation, but also any attitude, goal, or direction selected or accepted by me alone, to which the external factors cease to have a neutral character and make themselves known as favorable (usable) or adverse. Any of these characters may be inverted to the point at which they change my position, the order of my goals and tendencies. Once again, there is no exit from the enclosed circle of one's own basic freedom. "[Man] has only done what he willed; he has only willed what he has done."

I will not digress here over the details of Sartre's often paradoxical arguments on this subject. It is more interesting to realize that all these describe the specific image of the free, "nihilating" man, alone with himself. Sartre writes: "We do not have behind or before us the luminous realm of values, justifications, or causes." I am abandoned to my freedom and responsibility, without refuge in or outside of me, and without excuse.

As for the emotional tone, it amounts to feeling absolute freedom not as a victory, but as a burden. Heidegger even uses the term "weight" *(Last)* to characterize the sensation that one feels, once finding oneself "hurled" into the world: one is very alive to the sense of "being-here" but in the dark as to "whence" and "whither." Moreover, the introduction of the concept of responsibility already reveals one of the principal flaws of all existentialism: to whom is one responsible? A radical "nihilation," when interpreted with regard to our special human type as an active manifestation of the dimension of transcendence, should not tolerate anything that could give the word "responsibility" such a sense: naturally, we mean a "moral" sense, aside from the consequences, external repercussions, either physical or social, that can be expected for a given act, internally free. One finds oneself already faced with the well-known situation of a freedom that is *suffered*, rather than *claimed*: modern man is not free, but *finds himself* free in the world where God is dead. "He is delivered up to his freedom." It is from this that his deep suffering comes. When he is fully aware of this, anguish seizes him and the otherwise absurd sensation of a responsibility reappears.

14

Existence, "A Project Flung into the World"

We now consider another characteristic and symptomatic theme of existentialism: that of the problematical nature of "Dasein."[1] For Heidegger, the basis of Dasein is nothingness; one is only flung into the world as a mere possibility of being. In existence, for the entity that I am, the metaphysical question concerns my own being: I may either attain it, or fail to do so. Heidegger's odd definition of what the individual represents is "an existent potentiality of being," and also "a project flung into the world" (and a mere project is not necessarily realized). Sartre: "The I which I am depends, in itself, on the I that I have not yet become, precisely as the I that I have not yet become depends on the I that I am."[2] Here we meet the existential *angst*, which Heidegger rightly distinguishes from fear. Fear arises in the face of the world, due to external, physical situations or perils; it would not exist if *angst* did not exist, caused by the feeling of the generally problematic nature of one's own being, and by the feeling that one not yet *is*; that one might be, but also might not be. This theory is another witness to the climate of modern existence and to a basic traumatization of being. It goes without saying that it would be absolutely incomprehensible in an integrated human type, who is ignorant of *angst*, hence also of fear.

In the existentialism that knows no openings on a religious basis, a grave but logical consequence of the conception of the Self as a mere uncertain possibility of being is the temporality or historicity of existence. If I am nothing, if I lack a preexistent metaphysical basis, if I only *am* if that mere project of myself becomes realized, evidently I exist only in time, wherein that actuation of my project of being will unfold—or not, as the case may be. Thus the eventual process of "transcendence"

envisaged by this type of existentialism is purely horizontal, not vertical in character. As we shall see, Heidegger speaks of a "horizontal ecstasy in the temporal,"[3] meaning that the entity of each of us is not temporal because it happens to find itself within history, but because it is so in its own basic nature: it is able to *be* solely within time. Given this anguished resort to becoming for the source of one's being, and also given the recognition of the insignificance of "inauthentic" existence in a life that is socialized, superficial, and anodyne, we have evidently reached the extreme limit of a true "philosophy of crisis," which we could have included among the varieties of modern nihilism.

Quite obviously, we cannot harvest anything worthwhile from these existential themes to bear on the problems and orientation of the man who concerns us. Just as we have excluded the intrinsic and fundamental value of "being-in-the-world," we must also exclude, for the integrated man, temporality in the limiting sense used up to now. The idea of the simple possibility of being, of my being ontologically my own project, realizable or otherwise, is only acceptable to us within precise limits. What is in question is not "being," but one of its determined modalities: recognized, willed, and assumed. Since *being* in the transcendent dimension is not at stake, the sense of one's own problematic nature is relativized and defused, and one does away with the metaphysical *angst* that the existentialists' man, having a different internal constitution, feels, and indeed is bound to feel.

Turning to another point, existentialism, by introducing the concept of a "project," finds that it has to admit a nondeducible act that took place before individual existence in the world: a mysterious decision that has determined the scheme of this existence. Yes, it is only a possibility of existence, but it is always determined and incontrovertible in the case when it is realized. We can see here how a motif belonging to traditional metaphysics, in both East and West (for the latter, see Plotinus) has fallen onto most unsuitable soil. Traditional doctrines accepted a predetermination that is in a way timeless, precosmic, and prenatal, and connected with it the concept of one's "own nature" (the Hindu *svadharma*, the "original face" of Far Eastern philosophy). They thereby justified within certain limits the precepts of fidelity to oneself, self-election, and responsibility. But on these grounds one can no longer

hold to the existentialist principle: "existence precedes essence." Essence should rightly refer to the preformation that contains potentially that which is to be realized in human existence if one follows a path of "authenticity," that is, of profound unity with oneself.

Even Sartre, for all his emphasis on the "nihilating" freedom of the I, arrives at this order of ideas without ever suspecting that they belong to a millenary wisdom. He speaks of a "fundamental project,"[4] due to an original freedom, which is the basis of all the particular plans, goals, and passional or voluntary motions that may take form in my "situation." Even for him there is a pretemporal, timeless choice, "a unitary synthesis of all my present possibilities," which remain in the latent state in my being until "particular circumstances bring them to light, without thereby suppressing their membership in a whole." We might think of an analogy of such ideas with what was said about the testing self-knowledge, the *amor fati*, and even the Dionysian state, but always as limited to that part of my being that is tied to form. There is, however, an essential difference in the fact that for existentialist consciousness the way leading "back" is blocked: it strikes against something that seems impenetrable, unjustifiable, indeed fatal to it. Sartre even says drastically that any particular use of that inescapable freedom, whether in voluntary or passionate, rational or irrational decisions, occurs "when the bets are already laid." Thus he compares the original choice to the act of throwing the ball onto the roulette wheel, an act with which everything is already potentially decided.

We therefore face a curious contrast between two distinct themes: that of formless freedom having nothingness as its basis, and that of a species of destiny, a primal determination that basically annuls the former or renders it as illusory as ever. This mirrors an inner sensation typical of a period of dissolution.

Against this background, two motifs of Heidegger's seem fairly insignificant, which might otherwise correspond to the elements already mentioned for the attitude of the integrated man. One is his concept of decision *(Entschlossenheit),* which corresponds to acts that are true to one's own Self and awaken one from the state of anodyne and semiconscious living among others. The other is the concept of the *instant* as an active and continuous opening in time to circumstances as they present

themselves, as chances for realizing one's own possibilities. The correspondence is only an outward one. In fact, the existentialist perspectives do not seem much different from those of theistic theology when it talks about the "freedom of the creature," meaning the freewill that God has given to man while leaving him the sole alternatives of either renouncing it, or else being banished and damned if he makes real use of it by deciding and acting in any way but to accept and follow the divine will and law.

This religious framework is obviously lacking when existentialism reflects the climate of the world without God, but the same situation exists in covert form, with the same emotional complexes. It is directly admitted in the existentialism that has deviated in the religious direction (Jaspers, Marcel, Wust, not to mention the Italian epigones of this trend). Jaspers, for example, ends by limiting existential freedom to that which enables the project presented as a given possibility to be actuated or not actuated, but not changed. He draws from this a moral imperative in these terms: "This is how you must be, if you are faithful to yourself."[5] Evil, the non-value, is referred instead to the will that denies itself because it contradicts itself, because it does not choose that which it has already chosen to be. This may again appear to be partly the path that we have traced, until we reach the moment of divergence, which is Jaspers's passivity in the face of a "boundary situation" whose opaqueness causes him to swerve and abdicate. He even cites the Christian saying: "Thy will be done," and adds: "I feel with certainty that in my freedom I am not free by virtue of myself, but that I am therein given to myself; I can even fail in myself and not attain my freedom."[6] For him, the supreme freedom is to be "aware of oneself as freedom from the world and as supreme dependence on the transcendent," and he also mentions the "hidden and ever uncertain demand that comes from the divinity."[7]

Heidegger also speaks of having oneself before one as "an inexorable enigma,"[8] of the possible being (of the I) delivered or entrusted to itself, involved in a given possibility about which freewill can no longer be indifferent. Yet this author denies that there is any entity from which to derive "Dasein," that is, my concrete and determined being in the world and in time. Worse yet, Heidegger can find nothing better

than to revive the concept of the "voice of conscience,"[9] interpreted as "a call that comes from myself, *and yet from above me*,"[10] when I am deafened by the din of inauthentic, anodyne, exterior life, and have no heart for the choice already made. The fact that Heidegger sees in the voice of conscience an objective, constitutional phenomenon of Dasein and abstains, following his phenomenological method, from interpreting it in a religious or moral sense, does not in the least affect the passivity of the experience and the relative transcendence ("above me") of this voice. Thus he treats as nonexistent the critical effort of the nihilistic period, which showed how indeterminate and relative this "voice" is, lacking any normative, objective, or unequivocal value.

When Sartre treats the "original project" and says "I choose the whole of myself in the whole of the world,"[11] he admits the possibility of a change affecting the original choice, but in terms of a breakdown, an abyssal menace that looms over the individual from birth till death. We, on the other hand, have seen that it is only through such awakenings that the norm of absolutely being oneself can receive its confirmation and its supreme legitimization as freedom, unconditionality, and transcendence. It is the second degree of the testing knowledge of oneself that was considered earlier. How distant it is from the existentialists' horizons will become clear from once more addressing Jaspers.

Jaspers speaks of the "unconditioned demand" through which is manifested "the Being, the eternal, or whatever one likes to call the other dimension of being." It is a command to act in a way that has no motive or justification in objective, rational, or naturalistic terms. One might almost think that it was the detached, "pure action" that I have described.

The framework, in itself, is acceptable: "The loss of positions falsely believed to be safe opens up a possibility of wavering that reveals not an abyss but a realm of freedom; that which appeared to be nothingness manifests as the place from which the most authentic being speaks." But when we try to see what Jaspers means by "the hidden unconditioned, which only in extreme situations governs the course of life with tacit decision," we find the categories of "good" and "evil" reappearing, at three levels. At the first level, what appears as "evil" is the existence of the man who remains in the conditioned state where

animal life unfolds, ruly or unruly, mutable, and void of decision. Up to this point I might agree, if Jaspers did not add that such an existence must be subject to "moral values" (where do these come from? what justifies them?), and if he would make it clear that this is not a matter of the particular contents of action, but of the various *forms* in which any action whatever, without restrictions or exclusions, can be lived. Thus it would not necessarily exclude those actions that in a different human type would belong to "naturalistic" or conditioned life.

At Jaspers' second level, "evil" is human weakness in the face of what ought to done; it is the self-deception and impurity of motives with which we justify certain actions and behaviors in our own eyes. Here too I find nothing to object to. But at the third level, "evil" is the "will to evil,"[12] defined as "the nihilistic will to destruction for its own sake," the impulse to cruelty, "the nihilistic will to destroy all that is and has value." On the other hand, "good" is love, which carries one toward being and creates a relationship with transcendence that in the opposite case would be dissolved in the egotistic affirmation of the I. No comment is needed to indicate how little unconditioned is the "unconditioned demand" of which Jaspers speaks. One does not have to go as far as Nietzsche in exalting the opposite kind of behavior, such as lawlessness, cruelty, and "superhuman" hardness, in order to realize that Jaspers has fallen headfirst into the orbit of religious or social moralizing, and that the case of a deconditioning rupture that I have described, which incurs the extreme test of one's own ontological status and the verification of one's sovereignty, has no place in his system.

To conclude this part of my analysis, it can be said that existentialism leaves the fundamental problem unresolved: that of a specific, positive, and central relationship with the transcendent dimension. For it is only the *place of transcendence within us* that can decide on the value and ultimate sense of the existential tasks relating to the absolute mastery of Dasein, that is, what I am or can be in a determinate way. That we have to call a draw in this regard is evident from the way the existentialists conceive of the pretemporal act (if they do conceive of it, and not simply leave it to the oblivion of absurdity), which they have rightly posited as the origin of individuation, real or possible as the case may be. We see motifs here that seem to replicate those of Orphic or

Schopenhauerian pessimism: existence, Dasein, is felt not only as expulsion and as "being flung" *(Geworfenheit)* irrationally into the world, but also as a "fall" (Heidegger's *Ab-fallen*, *Verfallen*) and even as a debt or a fault (which is the double meaning of the German word *Schuld*). Existential *angst*, then, is caused by the act or choice with which one obscurely willed to be what one now is, or what one ought to be (if one can); it is caused by the use made of a freedom that is in a way transcendent, for which there is no meaning or explanation but for which one remains responsible.

None of the philosophical efforts of the existentialists, especially Heidegger and Sartre, have managed to give meaning to such notions, which really derive from a covert, tenacious residue of an extroverted religious attitude, specifically from the offshoot of the idea of original sin as given in Spinoza's axiom: *Omnis determinatio est negatio* (every determination is a negation). This comes down to saying that Dasein is blameworthy "just by the simple fact of existing"; existence, both in fact and as a simple project, is in every case determined and finite, hence it necessarily excludes all the infinite possibilities of pure being, which might equally well have been the object of the original choice. That is why it is "guilty." Jaspers in particular underlines this point: My guilt lies in the destiny of having chosen (and of not having been able not to choose) only the *one* direction that corresponds to my real or possible being, and negating all the others. This is also the source of my responsibility and "debt" toward the infinite and the eternal.

Such an order of ideas could obviously only appeal to a human type who was so off center with regard to transcendence as to feel that it was external to himself. This makes him incapable of identification with the principle of his own choice and his own freedom before time; and hence, as counterpart, the Sartrean sensation of freedom as something alien to which one is condemned. A further and more particular implication appears in a rigid, false, substance-bound concept of transcendence—of the Absolute, Being, the Infinite, or whatever one prefers to call the principle in which occurred the original individualizing and finalizing act that is presented as a fall. The absurdity of this view can be illustrated by a parallel from everyday life. It is as though I had been left entirely to myself in deciding how to pass the evening—going to a

concert, staying at home to read, going out to dance or drink, and so on—and then made to feel guilty and indebted simply because I had decided for one of these possibilities and excluded the others. Someone who is really free, when he does what he wants, has no "complexes" or soul-searching of this kind, nor does he feel "finalized" and fallen because he thereby excludes other possibilities. He knows that he could have done otherwise, but only a hysteric or neurotic would be driven by such a thought into "existential anguish." Admittedly, the transparency in oneself of one's own original basis, the *Grund*, may be of very different degrees, but it is the orientation that counts here. Measured by this touchstone, existentialism condemns itself.

Making a short digression to the abstract, metaphysical plane, I find false and constricting the conception of an absolute and an infinite that are condemned to indetermination and to fluctuation in the merely possible. Rather, the truly infinite is free power: the power of a self-determination that is not at all its own negation, but its own affirmation. It is not the fall from a sort of substantialized "totality," but the simple use of the possible. Arising from this idea, one can see the absurdity of speaking of existence as a fault or sin, merely by virtue of being a determined existence. Nothing prevents us from adopting the contrary point of view, for example, that of classical Greece, which sees in limit and form the manifestation of a perfection, a completion, and a kind of reflection of the Absolute.

The human type to whom all these existentialist ideas appeal is characterized by a *fractured will* and remains so; the will (and the freedom) of the "before" to which the mystery of Dasein refers, and the will (and the freedom) of this same Dasein in the world and in the "situation," are not rejoined (rejoining the two parts of a broken sword was an esoteric theme used in the symbolism of medieval chivalric literature).[13] When Jaspers asserts that knowing my own origin as an existence determined by a choice does not "possibilize" me, that is, does not release the obscure bonds and the irrationality that this represents and thereby give me freedom (or the presentiment of freedom), this evidently derives from the fact of feeling separated from that origin, cut off from the transcendent dimension, sundered from the original being. For the same reason, Kierkegaard conceived the coexistence of the temporal

and the eternal, of the transcendent and the unrepeatable individuation in existence, as a paradoxical "dialectic" situation, anguishing and tragic, to be accepted as it is rather than overcome by posing the second term in function of the first, so as to restore to unity that which in man "is fragment and mystery and terrible chance."

When Jaspers himself says that without the presence of transcendence, freedom would be purely arbitrary without any sense of blame, he confirms in the clearest way possible how existence senses transcendence—namely, as a species of paralyzing and anguishing "stone guest." By projecting it outside oneself, one's relationship to transcendence is off center, exterior, and dependent. This is so much like the relationship in religious consciousness that one might well accuse this philosophy of making a lot of fuss about nothing, and of being just a prolongation of the religious world in crisis, not a space that can open itself affirmatively beyond that world. Transcendence, like freedom, ought to furnish existence with a foundation of calm and incomparable security, with a purity, a wholeness, and an absolute decisiveness in action. Instead, it feeds all the emotional complexes of the man in crisis: angst, nausea, disquiet, finding his own being problematical, the feeling of an obscure guilt or fall, deracination, a feeling of the absurd and the irrational, an unadmitted solitude (though some, like Marcel, fully admit it), an invocation of the "incarnate spirit," the weight of an incomprehensible responsibility—incomprehensible, because he cannot resort to overtly religious (and hence coherent) positions like those of Kierkegaard or Barth, where *angst* refers to the sentiment of the soul that is alone, fallen, and abandoned to itself in the presence of God. In all of this, feelings appear like those that Nietzsche warned about in the case of a man who has made himself free without having the necessary stature: feelings that kill and shatter a man—modern man—if he is incapable of killing them.

15

Heidegger: "Retreating Forwards" and "Being-for-Death"

Collapse of Existentialism

To complete this "existential" analysis of the basis of existentialism, it will be useful to return to Heidegger, who, like Sartre, excludes the "vertical opening" of religion and claims to be "phenomenologically" agnostic.

We have seen that the obscurity already inherent in existentialism is exacerbated in Heidegger by his view of man as an entity that does not include being *within* itself (or behind it, as its root), but rather *before* it, as if being were something to be pursued and captured. Being is conceived here as the totality of possibilities, with regard to which one is to blame, or, taking the other meaning of *Schuld*, in debt. The existentialists never explain why this is the case, or why one should feel this destiny of seizing a pandemic totality at all costs. We can explain it with reference to what I have already said: that it is all symptomatic of someone who suffers the unfolding or activity of the transcendent as a coercive force, with no feeling of freedom. It is as though the possibilities necessarily excluded from a finite being (finitude being negation, as explained in chapter 14) were projected onto goals and situations deployed in time; as though man had being before him, running ahead of him (the term used is actually *Sich-vorweg-sein*) in a process that can never lead to a real possession, in a "horizontally ecstatic"[1] succession (ecstasy here in the literal meaning of exit from a stasis) that constitutes "authentic temporality." This is how Heidegger presents things;

no other meaning is permitted for man's being, as long as he is alive, because he always suffers from nontotality.

The prospects could not be darker. Dasein, the I, which is nothing in itself, pursues being that is outside and before it, and thus runs through time, in the same dependent relationship as the thirsty man seeking water—with the difference that it is inconceivable that he will ever reach Being, when he does not already possess it (as the Eleatic philosophers said, no violence can make that to be which is not). The view of life in Heideggerian existentialism could well be characterized by Bernanos's expression: a retreat forward *(une fuite en avant).* It also underlines the absurdity of speaking of a "decision" *(Entschlossenheit),* in a really affirmative sense, for any action or moment in which the "horizontal ecstasy" is developing, whereas that is exactly what applies to the human type who interests us: becoming and existing in time are substantially transformed in their structure and significance. The dark downward pull, the neediness, compulsion, and unquiet tension are destroyed, and existence takes on a character of acting and living decisively, arising from an *existing* principle that is detached and free with regard to itself and its determined action. This happens naturally when the accent falls away from the I, or is transferred to the transcendent dimension—to Being.

Someone has spoken of a "frenetic desire to live, to live at any price, which is not the result of the rhythm of life within us, but of the rhythm of death." This is one of the principal traits of our time. One would not be rash in saying that this is the ultimate meaning of Heidegger's existentialism, when thought through to its foundations, that is, of existentialism that admits no religious opening. This is its effective "existential" content, however it may seem to the philosopher himself.

This significance seems to be confirmed by the ideas one meets with in Heidegger concerning death, which are otherwise fairly strange. Basically, it is only in death that he sees, and problematically confines, the possibility of capturing this that is always escaping and fleeing before us in time. Therefore Heidegger speaks of existence in general as a "Being-towards-death," as a "Being-for-the-end."[2] Death overcomes being because it halts its constant, irremediable privation

and non-totality, and offers it "its very own possibility, unconditioned and insuperable." And the individual's anguish in the face of death, which deals the deathblow to Dasein, is the anguish in the face of this possibility. This emotional coloring is again typical and significant, showing how the condition of passivity persists even here, in the face of that "end" that represents the "accomplishment," as in the dual sense of the Greek word *telos*, in the context of the traditional doctrine of *mors triumphalis* (triumphal death). Heidegger proceeds with an accusation of a form of "inauthenticity" and diversionary tranquilization aimed not only at the stupid indifference to death but also at the attitude that judges the preoccupation with death, and anguish in the face of it, as effeminate and cowardly, preferring to face it with impassibility. He speaks of the "courage to have anguish in the face of death,"[3] which is absolutely inconceivable, not to say ridiculous, for an integrated human type.

The negative character of the whole existential process, which includes death and gravitates around it, is once again confirmed by Heidegger's talk of "dying as *being flung* into one's very own possibility of being, unconditioned and insuperable."[4] It sounds like a destiny of the most somber kind. And just as what lies before Dasein, the prior state of what we are, falls outside the zone illuminated by Heideggerian (and non-Heideggerian) existential awareness, so everything "after death" is left in obscurity, including the problems of survival and posthumous states, of a higher or lower existence after this mortal one. Even less attention is given to that "typology of death" that has had such an important part in traditional doctrines: they have seen in the various ways of approaching death a most important factor regarding what death itself might represent, and, moreover, what may occur postmortem in each case.

The few positive motifs casually touched on by Heidegger are thus neutralized by an essential limitation. Remarks such as that freedom "is the foundation" (that is, the basis of "that being which is our truth") "and as such is also the bottomless abyss of Dasein," turn out to lack any real significance, no more than the need to "free oneself from Egoity [*Ichheit*, the quality of being an I] to conquer oneself in an authentic selfhood" (which would return to that abyssal free-

dom). Replying to the accusation of affirming an "anthropocentric" freedom, Heidegger hastens to recall that for him the essence of Dasein is "ecstatic, hence *eccentric*" *(sic!),* and that thus the feared freedom is an error; so that after all there remains the simple alternative of inauthentic existence, which is fleeing from oneself and dissolving in the irrelevant and anodyne life of everyday society, or else the obedience to the demand of being that translates into accepting one's "Being-towards-death," after spending one's life in the vain pursuit of that fata morgana, the totality of being; that is, after having experienced transcendence solely as that which unfolds and urges from within the individual and his becoming, acting almost as a *vis a tergo* (force from behind).

As a last point, I would mention the final collapse of existentialism as seen in Jaspers's views on foundering, defeat, and failure *(das Scheitern).* One must first accept two fairly incompatible conditions. One concerns that free realization of the being that we are not, but are able to be—and strictly speaking, we could stop here and resolve the existential problem in these terms, which is the elementary or partial solution that I have repeatedly considered. At the same time, Jaspers, like Heidegger, speaks of man's impulse to embrace being, not as this or that particular being, but as pure and total being. This impulse is destined to fail in all its positive forms. Pure being may present itself outside us through a "ciphered language," by means of symbols, but in its essence it is "transcendent" in the negative sense, thus impossible to be attained in any way. This character of the object of our deepest metaphysical impulse manifests itself in the "boundary situations" against which we are powerless. For Jaspers, examples of these are guilt, chance, death, the ambiguity of the world, and being taken by surprise. In the face of all these situations that "transcend" us, one can supposedly react either inauthentically with self-mystifications, deceptions, and attempted evasions, or else authentically, facing up to reality with desperation and anguish.

It is hardly necessary here to point out the absolute falsity of these alternatives, because there are other reactions possible, such as those I have defined for the integrated man—not to mention everything Sartre has discovered about the fundamental freedom and intangibility of the

I. But it is interesting to see what solution appears to Jaspers as the "authentic" reaction. This solution consists of recognizing one's own defeat, one's own checkmate or foundering, even in the effort of gaining or somehow attaining being: only at that point, as the negative somersaults into the positive, does one enter the presence of being, and existence opens itself to being. "It is decisive how man lives defeat (or failure or foundering—*Scheitern*): whether it remains hidden in order to crush him in the end, or whether it appears unveiled, placing itself in front of the inescapable limits of his own Dasein; either he seeks solutions and palliatives that are inconsistent and fantastic, or else he frankly keeps silence on account of the presence of the inexplicable." At that point, nothing is left but faith. For Jaspers, the way consists precisely in desiring one's own defeat, one's foundering, more or less like the Gospel principle of losing one's life in order to find it. Let go, quit the game: "the will to eternity, far from refusing failure, recognizes there its own goal." The tragic collapse of the self is identified with the epiphany or opening to transcendence. At the very moment when I, as myself, see Being escaping me, it reveals itself to me, and thereupon I attain the supreme enlightenment of the existential duplicity in itself—the point of departure for all existentialism since Kierkegaard—which is supposed to clarify the relationship between my finite existence and transcendence. It is a sort of ecstatic and believing opening, in defeat. This is the price of superseding the anguish and disquiet of living, seeking, and striving, with a state of peace, of which one can hardly miss its basis in Christianity, and specifically in the dialectical theology of Protestantism.

Jaspers's only attempt to go beyond this truly creaturely level concerns the concept of the "All-encompassing" *(das Umgreifende)*. This is a far echo of ideas that also belong to traditional teaching. The problem is posed by that dual consciousness that is always led to objectivize, to juxtapose an object to the I as subject, and can therefore never grasp the ultimate root of being, the reality in which we are contained, which is anterior and superior to this duality. Jaspers seems to allow the possibility of overcoming the subject-object division and experiencing unity, the "All-encompassing." It is necessary for every object (anything juxtaposed to myself as I) to disappear, and for the I to dissolve. But

given the sentiment of oneself that, as we have seen exhaustively, is the only one known to the human type considered by this philosopher, it is natural that everything would be reduced to another sort of foundering, to the simple mystical experience of "diving into the All-encompassing" (these are Jaspers's words). It is the equivalent of Heidegger's confused, passive, and ecstatic bursting into Being through death, after "living for death." It is just as antithetical to any positive, clear, and sovereign realization or opening to the transcendent as the true ground of being and of Dasein, in an effective and creative conquest of the dual state.

With this, we can conclude our analysis of existentialism. To summarize it, existentialism takes over some of the Nietzschean demands, but cannot go beyond them except as concerns the point highlighted in the preceding examination: by including transcendence as a constitutive element. Only here can existentialism relate to the human type who concerns us; and the logical consequence should have been the break with all naturalism and with every immanent religion of life. Including this dimension in existentialism, however, causes it to fall right into crisis, and none of the solutions offered on the grounds of emotional and subintellectual complexes—anguish, guilt, destiny, extraneity, solitude, disquiet, nausea, the problem of Dasein, and so on—go beyond the point one could have reached by developing and rectifying the postnihilist positions of Nietzsche, or even go as far as that.

As we have seen, in Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Marcel, not to mention other exponents of a "Catholic existentialism" that passes for "positive existentialism," the transcendent in question ends up as the object of faith and devotion. It makes little difference that they use a novel, abstract, and abstruse terminology instead of the more honest one of orthodox theistic theology. The "free" man again looks backward to the abandoned earth, and with an "invocation" (the actual term used by Marcel) tries to reestablish a tranquilizing contact with the dead God.

Taken as a whole, the existential balance adds up to a negative. It acknowledges the structural duality of existence and transcendence, but the center of gravity of the I does not fall on the transcendent, but on the existent side. Transcendence is basically conceived as the

"other," whereas one ought rather to conceive it the other way around, with one's own determined, "situational" being, one's Dasein, as "other" to the true Self that one is. The former represents a simple manifestation in the human state, and is subject to the corresponding conditions, which are relative because they often act in various ways according to the attitudes one assumes. (As I have said, this is the positive contribution of Sartre's analysis.) Even though the relation between the terms may often seem obscure and problematic—and that is the only real problem of the inner life—it does not destroy the feeling that the integrated man has of centrality, calm, sovereignty, superiority over himself, and "transcendent confidence."

This confirms the fundamental difference between the human type who finds his reflection in existential philosophy, and the one who still preserves, as an indelible character, the substance of the man of Tradition. Existentialism is a projection of modern man in crisis, rather than of modern man beyond crisis. Anyone who already possesses that inner dignity described above, as natural as it is detached, or who "has long wandered in a strange land, lost among things and contingencies," finds this philosophy absolutely alien to him. Through crises, tests, errors, destructions, and successes he has rediscovered the Self, and he is reestablished in the Self, in Being, in a calm and unshakable mode. Equally distant is the man who has learned to give a law to himself from the heights of a superior freedom, so that he can walk on that rope stretched over an abyss, of which it is said: "It is perilous to cross from one side to the other, perilous to find oneself in the middle, perilous to tremble or to stop."

It is perhaps not so unkind to think that little else was to be expected from the speculations of men who, like almost all the "serious" existentialists (as distinct from those of the new "generation at risk"), are professors, mere armchair intellectuals whose lifestyle, aside from their so-called problems and positions, has always been of the petit bourgeois type. They are far from being "burned out" or beyond good and evil in their actual existence, which is conformist except in the few cases that flaunt a political plumage, sometimes liberal, sometimes communist.

Men in revolt within the chaotic life of the great cities, or men who have passed through the storms of steel and fire and the destructions of

the last total wars, or have grown up in the bombed-out zones, are the ones who possess in greater measure the premises for the reconquest of a higher sense of life and for an existential overcoming, not theoretical but genuine, of all the problems of man in crisis; and these are also the points of departure for any corresponding speculative expressions.

In conclusion, it may be interesting to give an example of the value that some themes touched on in existentialism may have, when assimilated to a different human type and integrated into traditional teaching. The example is offered by the idea of that sort of transcendent decision or choice that, as we have seen, many existentialists place at the foundation of every individual's Dasein in the world. It underlies his having a certain range of possibilities and types of experience, and not others, and his awareness of having come from far away; thus it also supplies him at least with a line of less resistance, and maybe even with the basis for authentic existence and fidelity to himself.

I have already mentioned the presence of a similar teaching in the traditional world. I would add that it is not only part of the esoteric doctrine of that world, but often of the general, exoteric view of life, where it takes the form of the doctrine of preexistence (not to be confused with that of reincarnation, which is only a popular symbolic formulation, and absurd if taken literally). The rejection of the doctrine of preexistence must be counted among the limitations of the theistic and creationist theology that has come to predominate in the West. On the one hand, this has mirrored, and on the other, it has furthered a suppression or silence about the prehuman and nonhuman dimension of the person, of Dasein.

Now, we have seen that existentialism often exhibits a presentiment of this ancient truth, giving rise either to the anguishing sensation of an insuperable limitation that is obscure if not absurd, or else to the abdication and retreat into a creatural attitude in a more or less religious sense. In the differentiated type who interests us, on the contrary, the same presentiment can only act as it has always acted in the upper strata of the traditional world, being a most essential part of the attitude required for staying on one's feet and "riding the tiger." As an opening to the doctrine of preexistence, it generates an unequalled force. It reawakens the consciousness of one's origins and of a higher

freedom in the heart of the world, the awareness of having come from far away, thus also that of a *distance.* The natural effects will be along the lines indicated: the relativization of everything that seems so important and decisive in human existence as such, but in terms absolutely opposed to indifference, sloth, and alienation. It is only on the basis of this sensation that the dimension of Being can open up more and more, beyond the physical I, thereby strengthening the capacity for involving and giving one's whole self, not for the sake of exaltation, ecstasies, or a merely vital task, but according to the duality already mentioned when speaking of pure action. In fact, the ultimate criterion of being able to be destroyed, even, without thereby being wounded—which can easily present itself in an epoch such as we live in, and such as will very likely continue—is closely related to the lived experience of pre-existence, which indicates the direction in which the "two parts of the sword" may be reunited.

Part 4

Dissolution of the Individual

16
The Dual Aspect of Anonymity

Turning to a more concrete realm than that of the last chapter, I shall now examine the problem of the personality and the individual in the contemporary world. There are many today who deplore the "crisis of the personality," and while they still pose as defenders of Western civilization, they often appeal to the "values of the personality," holding them to be a most essential part of the European tradition.

Thus a problem presents itself, one that cannot simply be solved by the facile polemic against the collectivism, mechanization, standardization, and soullessness of modern existence. Moreover, we must make it very clear: What exactly is to be saved? Today's intellectuals who have at heart the "defense of the personality" give no satisfactory reply, because they hold on to what I have called the regime of residual forms (see chapter 1), and, almost without exception, they think and evaluate in terms of liberalism, natural law, or humanism.

The true point of departure should instead be the distinction between *person* and *individual*. Strictly speaking, the concept of the individual is that of an abstract, formless, numerical unity. As such, the individual has no quality of its own, hence nothing that really distinguishes it. Considered simply as individuals, one can assume that all men and women are equal, so that we can ascribe equal rights and responsibilities to them and presumably equal "dignity" as "human beings" (the concept of "human being" is only a dignified version of that of the individual). In social terms, this defines the existential level proper to "natural rights," liberalism, individualism, and absolute democracy. One of the principal and most apparent aspects of modern decadence refers, in fact, to the advent of individualism as a conse-

quence of the collapse and destruction of the former organic and traditionally hierarchical structures, which have been replaced primarily by the atomic multiplicity of individuals in the world of quantity, that is to say the masses.

The "defense of the personality" appears insignificant and absurd when measured on any individual basis. It makes no sense to position oneself against the world of the masses and of quantity without realizing that it is individualism itself that has led to it, in the course of one of those processes of "liberation" that historically have ended by taking the opposite direction. In our epoch this process has already had irreversible consequences.

When we turn from the social to the cultural arena, things only seem to present themselves in a different way. The cultural field has remained somewhat isolated, detached from the larger forces in motion today, and that is the only reason the misunderstanding exists. Although atomized individualism is not in question here, the idea of the personality is still bound to a subjectivism based on the individual, in which the poverty, or even the nonexistence of a spiritual basis is concealed by literary and artistic talent, by an intellectualism and rootless originality, and by a creativity devoid of any profound significance.

In fact, in the West there has been a collusion between individualism, subjectivism, and "personality" that goes back to the Renaissance period and which developed in the light of that "discovery of man" exalted by antitraditional historiography. Historians have carefully ignored, or considered as positive, the counterpart, that is, the more or less conscious and complete separation from transcendence. All the splendor and power of "creativity" of that period should not blind us to this basic tendency. Schuon has clarified the true state of affairs regarding the artistic realm as follows: "Speaking in human terms, certain Renaissance artists are without a doubt great, but their grandeur becomes insignificant when faced with the grandeur of the sacred. In the sacred, it is as if the genius is concealed; what predominates is an impersonal, vast, mysterious intelligence. The sacred work of art has a perfume of infinitude, the imprint of the absolute. The individual talent is there disciplined; it mingles with the creative function of the entire tradition, which cannot be substituted, much less surpassed by the mere

resources of man."[1] One can say the same regarding self-affirmation on other levels of the "personality" in that epoch: from the Machiavellian Prince type, with its more or less perfect historical incarnations, to the *condottieri* and demagogues and, in general, all those who received Nietzsche's approbation for their prodigious yet unformed accumulation of power.

Later, the emphasis on the human and individual I, the basis of humanism, would survive only in the by-products of the nineteenth-century bourgeois cult of the I, associated with a certain aesthetic cult of heroes, geniuses, and "nobility of spirit." But to meet many of the current defenders of "personality" one must descend yet another degree, to where all the vanity of the I predominates: its exhibitionism, worship of one's own "interiority," the craze of originality, the boastfulness of brilliant literati and ambitious belletrists. Even with regard to art alone, this "personalism" almost always appears joined to an inner impoverishment. Lukács, though generally opposed to our position, made this legitimate remark: "The present-day practice of overestimating and exaggerating the importance of creative subjectivity actually betrays the weakness and poverty of the writers' individuality. They distinguish themselves merely by 'eccentricity,' either spontaneous or painstakingly cultivated; their worldview is at such a low level that any attempt they make to go beyond subjective immediacy threatens to leave their 'personality' completely flat. The more that this is the case, the more weight is placed on pure, immediate subjectivity, which sometimes is in fact identified with literary talent."[2] The character of "normative objectivity" that was proper to true, traditional art is altogether lacking. The category that Schuon has effectively characterized as "intelligent stupidity"[3] includes almost all the intellectual efforts in this area. But I will not dwell further on considerations at this level—I will return to the subject later—beyond pointing out that in contemporary celebrity worship we can see the popular, updated edition that takes the former "cult of the personality" to ridiculous lengths.

Whether one is speaking of social individualism, artistic individualism, narcissistic individualism, or humanistic individualism, it is certain that manifold, objective processes of recent times tend to eliminate and dissolve these forms of the individualistic personality. In view of the only

human type who concerns us, and of the general situation, we cannot see this as a negative phenomenon, but on the contrary, I would even say that the further the dissolution of the "values of the personality" goes, whether due to intrinsic or extrinsic causes, the better it will be.

This is the premise. In order to go further in our analysis, we need to leave ambiguity behind and clarify its terms, which is only possible if we restore the original and proper meaning to the term "person." Originally *persona* signified "mask": the mask that ancient actors wore in playing a given part, in incarnating a given personage. Thereby the mask possessed something *typical*, nonindividual, especially in the case of divine masks and even more clearly when used in many archaic rites. At this point I can resume and apply the ideas of the preceding chapter about the dual structure of the being: the "person" is that which the man presents concretely and sensibly in the world, in the position he occupies, *but always signifying a form of expression and manifestation of a higher principle in which the true center of being is to be recognized*, and on which falls, or should fall, the accent of the Self.

A "mask" is something very precise, delineated, and structured. So man as person (= mask) is already differentiated thereby from the mere individual; he has a form, is himself, and belongs to himself. Consequently, whenever a civilization has had a traditional character, the values of the "person" have made of it a world of quality, diversity, and types. And the natural consequence has been a system of organic, differentiated, and hierarchical relationships: something that cannot be said of mass regimes, but also not of regimes of individualism, of "values of the personality," or of real or pretended democracy.

Like the individual, the person itself is in a certain sense closed to the external world, and in relation to it, all the existential situations whose legitimacy we have already recognized can be of value in the present age. Unlike the individual, the person *is not closed to the above.* The personal being *is* not himself, but *has* himself (like the relation between the actor and his part): it is *presence* to that which he is, not coalescence with that which he is. Moreover, a kind of antinomy is brought to light: in order to be truly such, the person needs a reference to something more than personal. When this reference is absent, the person transforms itself into an "individual," and individualism and

subjectivism come into play. Then, in a first phase, the impression may even arise that the values of personality have survived and are even stronger, because the center, so to speak, is more displaced toward the outside, is more externalized—and this is in fact the position of the cultural and creative humanism just mentioned, and in general of the so-called great individuals. One can see, however, that the "defense of the personality" at this level is a precarious thing, because it has already passed into the realm of contingency; nothing acts anymore that has deep roots and the force of the original. Henceforth, that which is personal loses its symbolic value, its value as a sign of something that transcends it and by which it is sustained; it loses also, little by little, the typical characteristics, that is, the positively anti-individualistic ones due solely to that higher reference. Where an independent and distinct form still subsists, it affirms itself in a disordered, arbitrary, and purely subjective regime.

As a last aid to orientation, I shall now define the meaning of "typicality" in a traditional environment. It represents the meeting point between the individual (the person) and the supra-individual, the boundary between the two corresponding to a perfect form. Typicality de-individualizes, in the sense that the person then essentially incarnates an idea, law, or function. In such a case, one cannot speak of the individual in the modern sense; the individual disappears in its casual features, when faced with a meaningful structure that could even reappear almost identically wherever the same perfection is reached. The individual is in fact made "typical," that is to say suprapersonal. By virtue of the Far Eastern saying, "The absolute Name is no longer a name,"[4] he is likewise anonymous. Traditionality in the higher sense is a type of confirmation of such anonymity, or an approach to it within a particular field of action. One could even speak of the universalization and eternalization of the person; but these expressions have deteriorated through rhetorical and abstract usages that have concealed any possible concrete or existential meaning. It would be better to define the situation in question as that of a being in which the supra-individual principle—the Self, transcendence—remains conscious, and gives to the developing "part" (the person) the *objective* perfection corresponding to a given function and a given meaning.

As a result, two concepts of impersonality exist, related through analogy and at the same time through opposition: on the personal level, one is inferior, the other superior. One has for a limit the individual, in the formlessness of a numerical and undifferentiated unity that through multiplication produces the anonymous mass; the other is the culmination typical of a sovereign being, the *absolute person.*

The latter possibility rests on a foundation of active anonymity that appears in traditional civilizations, defining a position opposed to every activity, creativity, or affirmation based merely on the I. And the aforementioned conversion, apparently paradoxical, of the personal being into an impersonal being, makes itself known in the fact that a grandeur of the personality indeed exists, in which the work is more visible than the creator, the objective more than the subjective; where in the human field something is reflected of that nudity and purity that belongs to the grand forces of nature: in history, art, politics, spiritual disciplines, and in all the degrees of existence. One could speak of a "civilization of anonymous heroes"; but the style of anonymity is also realized in the speculative domain, where it goes without saying that what is thought according to the truth cannot be signed with the name of an individual. One also recalls the custom of abandoning one's own name and taking another that no longer refers to the individual, to the man, but to the function or superior vocation, where the personality is summoned to a higher obligation (for instance, royalty and pontificate, monastic orders, and so on).

All this finds its full significance in a traditional environment. In the modern world, in an epoch of dissolution, even in this regard only the essential orientation can be preserved. And we find that its principal aspect faces us with an alternative, and a test.

17

Destructions and Liberations in the New Realism

It is said that the crisis of individual and personal values seems destined to become an irreversible process throughout the modern world, despite the existence of residual oases or reservations that withdraw into "culture" and empty ideologies, and still accord to these values a semblance of life. In practice, the mortal blow to the individual has not been dealt by materialism alone, by the world of the masses and modern metropolises, but even more by the realm of technology: by elementary energies reawakened and controlled in objective processes. Also the existential effects of collective, catastrophic experiences, such as total warfare with all its cold destruction, have acted in a dehumanizing way, eliminating everything from the old bourgeois world that was varied, personal, subjective, arbitrary, and intimate.

The best illustration of these processes is that of Ernst Jünger, in his work *Der Arbeiter.*[1] I can certainly agree with Jünger when he says that these processes of the current world have caused the individual to be superseded by the "type," together with an essential impoverishment of his traits and ways of life, and a dissolution of cultural, human, and personal values. In the vast majority of cases, the destruction is suffered passively: the man of today is the mere object of it. The result is an empty, mass-produced human type, marked by standardization and flat uniformity; a "mask" in the negative sense; an insignificant, multiple product.

The de-individualization that stems, however, from these very causes, this environment, these spiritual ravages, may actually take an active and positive course. This is the case that concerns us, and which the differentiated type of man whom we have in view should consider.

Jünger himself refers to that which sometimes manifested in recent times in extreme, life-threatening situations, mainly in modern warfare. In the material battle, in which technology seems to turn against man with its systematic destruction and its activation of elementary forces, the individual as combatant cannot face it without being blown apart—not only physically but spiritually—unless he passes into a new form of existence. This form is characterized by two things: first, by an extreme lucidity and objectivity, and second, by a capacity to act and stay upright that is drawn from profound forces, beyond the categories of the individual, of ideals, of values, and of the goals of bourgeois civilization. What is important here is a natural union of life with risk, beyond the instinct of self-preservation, including situations in which one's own physical destruction is parallel to the attainment of the absolute sense of existence, and actualizes the "absolute person." We might call this the ultimate case of "riding the tiger."

Jünger believed that he could recognize a symbol of this style in the "unknown soldier" (adding that there are not only unknown soldiers, but also unknown officers). Apart from situations of which no report ever comes to light, anonymous actions at the limits of the life of the physical individual that remain without spectators and have no pretence to recognition or glory, nor are attributable to romantic heroism—apart from these, Jünger showed that through processes of this kind men of a recognizably new type often tend to take form and differentiate themselves, not only by their behavior but by their actual physical traits, their "mask." This modern type contains the destruction within himself and is no longer comprehensible in terms of the "individual": he is outside the values of humanism. But the essential thing is to recognize the reality of processes that, if they act in extreme mode during modern total warfare, may repeat in other forms and other degrees of intensity when they encounter a suitable substance. This can even occur in peacetime, in all of today's highly mechanized existence, striking the individual and supplanting him with an impersonal "type" marked by a certain uniformity. The faces of men and women take on the appearance of masks, "metallic masks in the one, cosmetic masks in the other." In their gestures and expressions there is a sort of "abstract cruelty," correlating with the ever-increasing

space in today's world that is taken up by technology, quantity, geometry, and everything that refers to objective relationships.

These are indubitably some of the essential aspects of contemporary existence, in view of which people have spoken of a new barbarism. But what, then, is the culture that might oppose it and serve as refuge for the person? There is truly a lack of valid reference points. Jünger was certainly mistaken in thinking that the active process of depersonalization is the main trend in the postbourgeois world; and later he himself had to return to a very different order of ideas. The prevalent and determining trends are, and will be increasingly in future, the passive destructive processes from which can only arise a squalid uniformity, a reduction to types that lack the dimension of depth and any metaphysical quality, defining themselves at an existential level even lower than the already problematic one of the individual and the person.

The positive possibilities can only apply to a small minority: to those beings in whom the transcendent dimension is preexistent or can be awakened. This brings us back, of course, to the one problem that concerns us. These are the only ones who can give new values to a soulless world of machines, of technology, of modern mega-cities, and of all that is sheer reality and objectivity, which appears cold, inhuman, menacing, devoid of intimacy, depersonalizing, and barbaric. By fully accepting this reality and these processes, the differentiated man can essentialize and form himself according to a valid personal equation, activating the transcendent dimension within, burning out the dregs of individuality, and thus revealing the absolute person.

For this it is not necessary to consider only exceptional and borderline situations. It is a matter of the general style of a new active realism that opens up pathways even in the midst of chaos and mediocrity. Among other things, the machine itself may appear as a symbol, and everything that has taken form in certain sectors of the modern world in terms of pure functionality, especially in architecture. The machine symbolizes a form born from an exact, objective adjustment of the means to the end, with the exclusion of everything superfluous, arbitrary, irrelevant, or subjective. It is a form that precisely realizes an idea: the idea, in this case, of the purpose for which it is made. On its own plane, it reflects in a way the same value as the classical world

knew through geometrical form, number as entity, and the whole Doric principle of "nothing in excess." Some have spoken of a metaphysics of the machine, and of new archetypes heralded in the perfect functional forms of our time. If this is meaningless on the prosaic plane of everyday modern reality, it may have meaning on its own, symbolic plane, where one certainly does not envisage mechanization, rationalization, and utility, but rather the value of form and the love of form. Here the style of objectivity should not be confused with that of disanimation, but can be taken along the lines already mentioned: of impersonal perfection in every work.

It is interesting to notice an orientation of this kind among the currents of the post–World War I period, whose slogan was "new objectivity" *(Neue Sachlichkeit)*. Books like F. Matzke's *Jugend bekennt: so sind wir!* (Youth admits: That's how we are!) do not deal with demands satisfiable on the artistic and literary plane, but with the inner form that a human type of the new generation involuntarily finds itself with, simply as the effect of the general objective processes of the times. On this plane one can define a realism that signifies coolness, clarity, seriousness, and purity; detachment from the world of sentimentalism, of ego problems, of melodramatic tragedy, of the whole legacy of twilight romanticism, idealism, and expressionism: a realism that entails the sense of the vanity of the I and of believing oneself important as an individual.[2] Matzke wrote: "We are objective, because for us the reality of things is great, infinite, and everything human is too small, limited, and polluted with 'soul'."[3] He spoke of the language of things and actions, to be substituted for that of feelings; of an inner form that has nothing to do with books, culture, or science, so that it can be much more precise in the "barbarian" than in the "civilized" being of the bourgeois world. Hence the term "objective asceticism" has been used of this attitude; and one may also recall the expression of Stravinsky: "to freeze things."[4]

I must emphasize that this attitude is based neither on pessimism nor on a concealed philosophy of desperation. It is not concerned with values and goals that it now recognizes as illusory, or with its impotence to control reality, or its own inadequacy. The very sense of these values and goals is nonexistent, leaving action to be free, in a pure and cool

atmosphere. Drawing an analogy from the world of the arts, Matzke refers to the criteria that Albrecht Schaeffer followed in translating Homer: he wanted to convey "the loftiness of the far-off, the different, the strange," and to highlight "not the episodic or sentimental, but a laconic monumentality, rigid rather than moving, enigmatic rather than familiar, obscure and weighty rather than smooth and polished."[5] The essential traits of the new attitude were well described as distance, otherness, loftiness, monumentality, a laconic quality, and the revulsion against all that is warm proximity, humanity, effusiveness, expressionism; the line of objectivity in figures, of coolness and grandeur in forms.

But apart from art, we are dealing with the general elements of a conduct and sentiment of existence, because the thesis that art stands among the supreme capabilities of man and reveals the essence of the universe rightly appeared to these writers as tired and anachronistic. The love of clarity is part of the style of objectivity: "Better ugly and clear, than beautiful and veiled."[6] The world must return to its stable, calm, clear, and naked state. "In the last analysis, even the life of the soul has value for us only as a thing, as a given of existence, with equal characteristics of objectivity and fatality,"[7] wrote Matzke. "Rather than looking at the world from the point of view of the soul, we look at the soul from the point of view of the world.[8] And then everything seems to us clearer, more natural, more evident, and that which is merely subjective appears to us ever more irrelevant and laughable."[9]

Between the two world wars, functional architecture received impulses from currents analogous to those of the *Neue Sachlichkeit.* The theme of a new classicism generally surfaced in them, understood precisely in the sense of a tendency toward form and simplification, toward a linear and essential "Doricism," affirmed in opposition to the arbitrariness, fantasy, and "gracefulness" of the preceding art of bourgeois individualism. One may also recall in France the so-called *esprit nouveau* that was closely related to the exponents of functional architecture. And at the time when Bontempelli launched his "novecentismo,"[10] a parallel demand, though on a merely dilettantish plane of literati and unrealized intentions, was proclaimed in Italy. Then Bontempelli opposed to "the romantic era, that lasted from Jesus Christ to the Ballets Russes" (!) the new era, which was supposed to unfold

under the sign of a magical realism and a new classicism, just as others were speaking of the new Doricism of the skyscraper era, of white metal and crystal.

Despite its limited pertinence to our concerns, this motive of a new realism contains values that are susceptible to transposition onto a higher, spiritual plane, in view of the task of turning what one experiences in the modern world into something positive. There are objective processes today that certainly involve an impoverishment compared to the preceding world of the individual and the person, and to its survival. But in him who can maintain the inner tension proper to the transcendent dimension, such an impoverishment may acquire the positive value of a simplification and essentialization of being, in a spiritual world in dissolution.

I have treated the new realism with the reservation that what is of value in it is generally out of sight. But now that this is pointed out, it is best to draw a clear demarcation between the realism that may contain this potential significance, and its subproducts of neorealism and Marxist realism that belong to the ambitus of pure nihilism, not least because there have been collusions between the different types.

Generally speaking, the second type has manifested almost exclusively in the domain of art and literary criticism, and as a function of politics. It is hardly worth dwelling on the neorealism that surfaced after World War II. It was characterized by the tendency in the artistic field to present as human reality only the most trivial and wretched sides of existence, mostly relating to the lowest and most vulnerable social strata. The whole pose exhausted itself in a single phase; it appeared wanting in any dimension of depth, even virtual depth, and served as a sophisticated formula for certain intellectuals disguised as common folk. When it was not reiterating banalities about the pathos of wretched people, it often took pleasure in ugliness and in masochism, in the complacent depiction of everything most abject, corrupt, and defeated in man. There is a whole genre of novels, unnecessary to name by title, in which this tendency appears undisguised, sometimes in combination with the most irrational and dark side of existentialism. That which in actual life is only a sector of a complex reality is here characterized as reality itself: a misrepresentation too obvious to require further comment.

More noteworthy is the tendentious use made of something that is less a realism than a narrow-ranged *verismo* on the part of the Marxist "new realism," which realistically depicts the negative aspects of existence for purposes of propaganda and sociopolitical action, starting from the well-known formula that "the damage done to humanity is the consequence of the bourgeois and capitalistic socioeconomic structure." We have already mentioned the kind of "human integrity" that is offered as an alternative: it is that of Nietzsche's "last man," a human integrity traded for that which might suit socialized cattle. The corresponding realism and anti-idealism is to be judged accordingly. Its anti-bourgeois and anti-individualist polemic takes for granted a regression of the human unit to a purely collective ("social") existence determined by material and economic values: a regression that is given out to be an "integration" and a "new proletarian humanism." (At one point Lukács lets slip its true name, when he speaks of "plebeian humanism.") Here realism seems to be synonymous with a banal primitivism, which we have mentioned as the formula for one type of existential anesthetization in the world where God is dead.

The truth, as we know, is that the realism in question draws its specific character from the theory of historical materialism and from other conceptions that, while they aspire to being objective and scientific, in fact contain just as much "mythology" and mere social ideology as is found in those great despised words, written in capital letters, of bourgeois idealism. Words of this kind are not eliminated from the underpinnings of the Marxist new realism, but replaced by others of a still lower level; they form the center of a mystic nihilism sui generis through their translation into energized ideas, made to work on the subintellectual strata of the masses. This is enough to deprive Marxist realism of any "realistic" character, and to show that it is far from having reached the zero point of values. That zero point may become the start of a clear, detached, objective vision of existence, and of a positive, existential incapacity to submit to "myths" of any kind whatsoever. This last trait belongs rather to the deepest demand of the "new realism" discussed above, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* and kindred tendencies, in which we can find something of positive value from our point of view. It is a

simplification that may well involve an impoverishment and a lack of colorfulness compared to the "values of the person," but that does not necessarily descend to a lower level, and that may give rise to a kind of conduct in the free man that fits the objective structures of the contemporary world.

18

The "Animal Ideal"

The Sentiment of Nature

The transcendent dimension may also become active in reaction to the processes responsible for a steady erosion of many ties to nature, leading to a rootless state. It is evident, for example, that the stay-at-home bourgeois lifestyle is increasingly and irreversibly affected by the progress of communication technology, opening up great expanses on land, sea, and air. Modern life takes place ever less in a protected, self-contained, qualitative, and organic environment: one is immersed in the entire world by new and rapid travel that can bring us to faraway lands and landscapes in little time. Hence, we tend toward a general cosmopolitanism as "world citizens" in a material and objective sense, not an ideological, much less a humanitarian one. At least the times of "provincialism" are over.

To see what positive effect such situations can have on the development of the differentiated and self-possessed man, it is enough to glance at the ideas of certain traditional spiritual disciplines. In them, the metaphysical idea of the transience of earthly existence and the detachment from the world have had two characteristic expressions, whether symbolic or actual: the first in hermit life, living alone in desert or forest, the second in the wandering life, going through the world without house or home. This second type has even occurred in some Western religious orders; ancient Buddhism had the characteristic concept of "departure," as the start of a nonprofane existence, and in traditional Hinduism this was the last of the four stages of life. There is a significant analogy with the idea of the medieval "knight errant," to which we might add the enigmatic and sometimes disconcerting figures

of "noble travelers" whose homeland was unknown, who did not have one, or must not be asked about it.

Although our case is different from that of ascetics who remove themselves from the world, the situation of the latest technological civilization might offer the incentive for commitments of this kind. In a large city, in mass society, among the almost unreal swarming of faceless beings, an essential sense of isolation or of detachment often occurs naturally, perhaps even more than in the solitude of moors and mountains. What I have hinted at concerning recent technology that annihilates distances and the planetary spread of today's horizons, feeds inner detachment, superiority, calm transcendence, while acting and moving in the vast world: one finds oneself everywhere, yet at home nowhere.[1] In this way, the negative can again be turned into positive. The experience increasingly offered, and often imposed on our contemporaries, of going to other cities, across frontiers, even to other continents, outside the sphere of a secure existence with its peculiarities can be banal, matter-of-fact, touristic, utilitarian, and in our day almost always is. Alternatively, it can be an integrated part of a different, liberated life, with a more profound meaning in the above-mentioned terms, but only if the proper capacity of reaction is present in oneself.

Given that the speed factor has an essential role in the modern, technical mastery of distances, a passing allusion could be made to the value of the experience of speed itself. It is well known that today it is used by many men, and even women, almost like alcohol, to obtain a physical intoxication that feeds an essentially physical I, needing distraction from unpleasant thoughts and drugging itself with strong emotions.[2]

Like the machine itself, some situations of speed in the technologized world can have a virtual, symbolic, and realizable dimension, often involving risk: the greater the speed, the more it requires a superior lucidity, bringing into play a higher type of calmness and internal immobility. In this context the intoxication of speed can even change its nature; it can pass from one plane to another and have some traits in common with the type of intoxication of which I have spoken describing the state of integrated Dionysism. If this were the proper place, I could develop this theme much further.

Returning to what was mentioned earlier, the expression "nomad

of the asphalt," although scathing, is significant of the negative and depersonalizing effect on life of the destruction of natural ties in large, modern cities. Also in this regard, I am not concerned with those forms of revolt or protest that, with the idea of defending "human values," end up going "back to nature," starting from the antitheses between city and nature, between "civilization" and nature. That theme already belonged to the nineteenth-century bourgeois repertory. But today it occurs in the context of what we might call the "physical" primitivization of existence.

Here is one effect of that regression, through which in the course of his "liberation" Western man has come to feel ever less as a privileged being of creation, and ever more as one of so many natural species—even as an animal. The defining and spread of Darwinism and evolutionism were already barometric indicators of this inner attitude. But apart from the domain of theories and science, in the field of ordinary, modern life, it has manifested in terms of behavior, giving rise to what has been called the "animal ideal," especially referring to North America, where it was first realized.

The term applies to that ideal of biological well-being, comfort, optimistic euphoria emphasizing everything that is sheer health, youth, physical vigor, security, and material success, primitive satisfaction of hunger and sexual desire, athletic life, and so forth, whose counterpart is the atrophy of every superior form of sensibility and interest. I have already treated this.[3] The kind of man who is thus elevated to the summit of "modern" civilization is evidently one who has developed only the aspects through which he belongs to an animal species. It goes without saying that this idea finds its counterpart in the nihilism that underlies many of today's predominant sociopolitical currents. Here I only want to emphasize the "back to nature" idea as an instance of the physical cult of the personality.

It is not a matter of mere forms, legitimate but banal, of organic compensation. It is no wonder that today's man feels a need for physical reintegration, relaxation of nerves, and invigoration of the body away from the environment of large, modern cities. For this reason, natural living, the culture of the body, and even certain types of individual sport may be useful. Things appear otherwise, however, when people start to

claim that some kind of spiritual factor is involved; that is, when it is thought that natural surroundings and physical strength make a man feel closer to himself than in the experiences and tensions of civilized life, and above all when it is supposed that physical sensations of well-being and comfort have any profound significance, or anything to do with human integrity considered from a higher point of view.

Apart from that position, which leads to the "animal ideal" and modern naturalism, I deplore the general confusion of a "return to origins" with a return to Mother Earth and even to Nature. Although it has often been misapplied, that theological doctrine that holds that a purely natural state for man *has never existed* is still legitimate; at the beginning he was placed in a supranatural state from which he has now fallen. In fact, for the true type of man, it can never be a question of those origins and that "mother" wherein the individual cannot differentiate himself from his fellow men, or even from the animals. Every return to nature is a regressive phenomenon, including any protest in the name of instinctual rights, the unconscious, the flesh, life uninhibited by the intellect, and so forth. The man who becomes "natural" in this way has in reality become denatured.

Here I must return to an earlier point: a consequence of rejecting this view is the overcoming of the antithesis between city and nature in the behavior that should be "natural" for the human type who concerns us. It is the attitude of him who feels in place as little in nature as in the city, for whom it is normal and honest in a higher sense to keep his distance with respect to both; he sees the *need* and *pleasure* of surrender, expatiation, and feeling in animal, physical terms as an evasion, a symptom of fatigue and internal inconsistency. The body is part of the "person" as a definite instrument of expression and action in the situation actually lived; therefore it is obvious that one must also extend to it discipline and control, in order to assure completeness of being. This, however, has nothing to do with the cult of the physical personality, much less with the mania for sports, especially for team sports, one of today's most vulgar and widespread opiates of the masses.

As for the "sentiment of nature," in general, the human type that concerns us must consider nature as part of a larger and more objective whole: nature for him includes countrysides, mountains, forests, and

seacoasts, but also dams, turbines, and foundries, the tentacular system of ladders and cranes of a great modern port or a complex of functional skyscrapers. This is the space for a higher freedom. He remains free and self-aware before both types of nature—being no less secure in the middle of a steppe or on an alpine peak than amid Western city nightlife.

The counterpart of the "animal ideal" occurs when the sentiment of nature and landscape is made banal. This was already the case with idyllic nature, which was made into a myth in the period of the *Encyclopédie* and by Rousseau. Later, along these lines, there was the nature beloved by the bourgeois: Arcadian or lyric nature characterized by beauty and grace, by the picturesque, the restful, by that which inspires "noble sentiments"; nature with its brooks and groves, the romance of sunset and the pathos of moonlight; nature to which one declaims verses, weaves idylls, and evokes the poets who speak of "beautiful souls." Though sublimated and dignified, the mood immortalized by Beethoven's *Pastorale* is no different.

In the end, the phase of nature for the plebeians arrives, with the breakout of the masses, the common people everywhere with or without their automobiles, the travel agencies, the *dopolavori*,[4] and all the rest; nothing is spared. The naturists and nudists form the extreme of this phenomenon. The beaches—teeming insect-like with thousands and thousands of male and female bodies, offering to the glance an insipid, almost complete nudity—are another symptom. Still another is the assault on the mountains by cable cars, funiculars, chair lifts, and ski lifts. All this is part of the regime of final disintegration of our epoch. There is no point in dwelling on it.

I prefer to clarify the function that authentic contact with nature can have for the active, impersonal attitude, starting with some notions along the lines of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, which can only acquire a full significance in our differentiated human type.

Matzke said of this: "Nature is the great realm of things, which demands nothing of us, which neither pursues us nor asks for sentimental reactions, which stands mutely before us as a world to itself, external and alien. This is exactly what we need . . . this reality, always grand and distant, resting in itself, beyond all the little joys and the little sorrows of man. A world of objects, enclosed in itself, in which we

ourselves feel like an object. Completely detached from everything merely subjective, from every personal vanity and nullity: this is what nature is for us."[5] It is a question of restoring to nature—to space, to things, to landscape—those characteristics of distance and foreignness to mankind that were hidden in the epoch of individualism, when man projected his feelings, his passions, his lyrical ardor, onto reality to make it closer to him. It is a question of *rediscovering the language of the inanimate* that cannot manifest until the "soul" has ceased to impose itself on things.

This is the sense in which nature can speak to us of transcendence. Our attention automatically shifts from some principal aspects of nature to others that are more propitious for opening us up to the nonhuman and the nonindividual. Nietzsche also spoke of the "superiority" of the inorganic world, calling it "spirituality without individuality." For a "supreme clarification of existence" he refers as an analogy to the "pure atmosphere of the Alps and ice fields, where there are no more clouds or veils, where the elementary qualities of things are revealed naked and uncompromising but with absolute intelligibility" and one hears "the immense, ciphered language of existence," "the doctrine of becoming made stone."[6] To return the world to a calm, stable, clear, and cool state; to restore to it its elementarity, its self-contained grandeur—this was also said to be the demand of the "new objectivity." Here prominence was justly given not to insensibility, but to a different kind of sensibility. Also for us, it is a matter of a human type whom nature no longer interests by offering him what is "artistic," rare, characteristic; he who no longer seeks in nature the "beauty" that merely feeds confused nostalgias and speaks to fantasy. For this human type, there can be no landscape more beautiful than another, but some landscapes can be more distant, boundless, calm, cool, harsh, and primordial than others. He hears the language of things of the world not among trees, brooks, beautiful gardens, before oleographic sunsets and romantic moonlight, but rather in deserts, rocks, steppes, glaciers, murky Nordic fjords, the implacable, tropical sun, great ocean currents—in fact, in everything primordial and inaccessible. It naturally follows that the man with this sentiment of nature relates to it more actively—almost

by absorbing its own pure, perceived force—than in a vague, lax, and rambling contemplation.

If for the bourgeois generation nature was a kind of idyllic Sunday interlude of small-town life, and if for the latest generation it is the stage for acting out its vacuous, invasive, and contaminating vulgarity, it is for our differentiated man a school of objectivity and distance; it is something fundamental in his sense of existence, exhibiting an absolute character. At this point one can clearly speak of a nature that in its elementarity is the great world where the stone and steel panoramas of the metropolis, the endless avenues, the functional complexes of industrial areas are on the same level, for example, as great, solitary forests as symbols of a fundamental austerity, objectivity, and impersonality.

With regard to the problems of inner orientation in our epoch, I have always valued ideas present in traditional esoteric doctrines. This also applies to what I have just said. The liberation of nature from the human, the access to it through the language of silence and the inanimate seems congenial to one who would turn the objective, destructive processes of the modern world to his own advantage. But the direction is no different from that which schools of traditional wisdom, like Zen, knew through a real cleansing and transparency of the glance or an opening of the eye, an enlightening revelation of the consciousness that has overcome the fetters of the physical I, of the person, and his values.

The result here is an experience that already belongs to a different level from that of ordinary consciousness. It does not exactly concern the matter of this book, but it is still interesting to point out its relationship with the vision of the world centered on free immanence, which was mentioned in an earlier chapter (in which a fleeting allusion to Zen itself was made) and which I now reconsider as the limit of a new realism. Ancient tradition has a saying: "The infinitely distant is the return." Among the maxims of Zen that point in the same direction is the statement that the "great revelation," acquired through a series of mental and spiritual crises, consists in the recognition that "no one and nothing 'extraordinary' exists in the beyond"; only the real exists. Reality is, however, lived in a state in which "there is no subject of the experience nor any object that is experienced," and under the sign of a

type of absolute presence, "the immanent making itself transcendent and the transcendent immanent." The teaching is that at the point at which one seeks the Way, one finds oneself further from it, the same being valid for the perfection and "realization" of the self. The cedar in the courtyard, a cloud casting its shadow on the hills, falling rain, a flower in bloom, the monotonous sound of waves: all these "natural" and banal facts can suggest absolute illumination, the *satori.* As mere facts they are without meaning, finality, or intention, but as such they have an absolute meaning. Reality appears this way, in the pure state of "things being as they are." The moral counterpart is indicated in sayings such as: "The pure and immaculate ascetic does not enter *nirvana*, and the monk who breaks the rules does not go to hell," or: "You have no liberation to seek from bonds, because you have never been bound."[7] The extent that these peaks of the inner life can be attained, in the framework already indicated, remains undetermined. I merely wish to point out a convergence of themes and a direction.

Part 5

Dissolution of Consciousness and Relativism

19

The Procedures of Modern Science

One of the principal justifications for Western civilization believing itself, since the nineteenth century, to be the civilization par excellence is natural science. Based on the myth of this science, preceding civilizations were judged to be obscurantist and infantile; prey to superstitions and to metaphysical and religious whims. Apart from a few casual discoveries, they were ignorant of the path of true knowledge, which can be reached only with the positive, mathematical-experimental methods developed in the modern era. Science and knowledge have been made synonymous with experimental "positive science," while the epithet "prescientific" has come to signify a disqualification beyond appeal of any other type of knowledge.

The apogee of the myth of physical science coincided with that of the bourgeois era, when positivist and materialist scientism was in favor. Then there was talk of a crisis of science, and an internal critique occurred, resulting in a new phase inaugurated by Einstein's theory. As an offshoot of this, the scientistic myth has revived recently with an appraisal of scientific knowledge that in certain cases has had curious developments. Among them, it is claimed that the latest science, having now passed the phase of materialism and cleared the field of old, useless speculations, has reconciled its conclusions about the nature of the universe with metaphysics, presenting themes and views that agree with the certainties of philosophy, and for some, even of religion. Besides the popularizers of *Reader's Digest*, certain scientists like Eddington, Planck, and even Einstein have made informal pronouncements of this kind. Hence there is a kind of euphoria, confirmed by the prospects of

the atomic era and the "second industrial revolution," whose very point of departure was modern physics.

All these are only developments of one of the great illusions of the modern world, one of the mirages of an epoch in which, in reality, the dissolving processes have besieged the field of knowledge itself. In order to realize this, it is enough to look beyond the façade. If it is not a matter of popularizers, but of the scientists themselves, and if it is not a case like the knowing smiles between mystifying augurs, which Cicero speaks of, it reveals a naïveté that only an unequaled limitation of horizons and intellectual interests could explain.

None of modern science has the slightest value as knowledge; rather, it bases itself on a formal renunciation of knowledge in the true sense. The driving and organizing force behind modern science derives nothing at all from the ideal of knowledge, but exclusively from practical necessity, and, I might add, from the will to power turned on things and on nature. I do not mean its technical and industrial applications, even though the masses attribute the prestige of modern science above all to them, because there they see irrefutable proof of its validity. It is a matter of the very nature of scientific methods even before their technical applications, in the phase known as "pure research." In fact, the concept of "truth" in the traditional sense is already alien to modern science, which concerns itself solely with hypotheses and formulae that can predict with the best approximation the course of phenomena and relate them to a certain unity. And as it is not a question of "truth," but a matter less of *seeing* than of touching, the concept of certainty in modern science is reduced to the "maximum probability." That all scientific certainties have an essentially statistical character is openly recognized by every scientist, and more categorically than ever in recent subatomic physics. The system of science resembles a net that draws ever tighter around a *something* that, in itself, remains incomprehensible, with the sole intention of subduing it for practical ends.

These practical ends only secondarily concern the technical applications; they constitute the criterion in the very domain that belongs to pure knowledge, in the sense that here, too, the basic impulse is schematizing, an ordering of phenomena in a simpler and more manageable way. As was rightly noted, ever since that formula *simplex sigillum veri*

(simplicity is the seal of the true), there has appeared a method that exchanges for truth (and knowledge) that which satisfies a practical, purely human need of the intellect. In the final analysis, the impulse to know is transformed into an impulse to dominate; and we owe to a scientist, Bertrand Russell, the recognition that science, from being a means to know the world, has become a means to change the world.

I will not dwell further on these commonplace considerations. Epistemology, that is, reflection applied to the methods of scientific research, has honestly recognized all of them already, with Bergson, Leroy, Poincaré, Meyerson, Brunschvicg, and many others, to say nothing of what Nietzsche himself had seen perfectly well. They have brought to light the altogether practical and pragmatic character of scientific methods. The more "comfortable" ideas and theories become "true," in regard to the organization of the data of sensorial experience. A choice between such data is made consciously or instinctively, excluding systematically those that do not lend themselves to being controlled; thus also everything qualitative and unrepeatable that is not susceptible to being mathematized.

Scientific "objectivity" consists solely in being ready at any moment to abandon existing theories or hypotheses, as soon as the chance appears for the better control of reality. Thereupon it includes in the system of the already predictable and manageable those phenomena not yet considered, or seemingly irreducible; and that, without any principle that in itself, in its intrinsic nature, is valid once and for all. In the same way, he who can lay his hands on a modern long-range rifle is ready to give up a flintlock.

Based on the above, one can demonstrate that final form of dissolution of knowledge corresponding to Einstein's theory of relativity. Only the profane, in hearing talk of relativity, could believe that the new theory had destroyed every certainty and almost sanctioned a kind of Pirandellian "thus it is, if you think so." In fact, it is quite a different matter, in the sense that this theory has brought us even closer to absolute certainties, *but of a purely formal character.* A coherent system of physics has been constructed to keep all relativity in check, to take every change and variation into account, with the greatest independence from points of reference and from everything bound to obser-

vations, to the evidence of direct experience, and to current perceptions of space, time, and speed. This system is "absolute" through the flexibility granted to it by its exclusively mathematical and algebraic nature. Thus once the "cosmic constant" is defined (according to the speed of light), the so-called transformation equations suffice to introduce a certain number of parameters into the formulae used to account for phenomena in order to get over a certain "relativity" and to avoid any possible disproof from the facts of experience.

A simpleminded example can make this state of affairs plain. Whether Earth moves around the Sun, or the Sun around Earth, from the point of view of Einstein's "cosmic constant" is more or less the same. One is no more "true" than the other, except that the second alternative would involve the introduction of many more elements to the formulae, thus a greater complication and inconvenience in the calculations. For the person unconcerned with one system being more complicated and inconvenient than another, the choice remains free; this person could calculate the various phenomena starting either from the premise that Earth revolves around the Sun, or from the opposite premise.

This banal and elementary example clarifies the type of "certainty" and knowledge to which Einstein's theory leads. In that regard, it is important to point out that there is nothing new here, that his theory represents only the latest and most accessible manifestation of the characteristic orientation of *all* modern science. This theory, though far from common or philosophical relativism, is willing to admit the most unlikely relativities, but arms itself against them, so to speak, from the start. It intends to supply certainties that either leave out or anticipate them, and thus from the formal point of view are almost absolute. And if reality should ever revolt against them, a suitable readjustment of dimensions will restore these certainties.

It would be good to look further into the kind and presuppositions of this "knowing." The cosmic constant is a purely mathematical concept; in using it to speak of the speed of light, one no longer imagines speed, light, or propagation, one must only have in mind numbers and symbols. If someone were to ask those scientists *what is* light, without accepting an answer in mathematical symbols, they would look stupefied and not even understand the request. Everything that in recent

physics proceeds from that stronghold participates rigorously in its nature: physics is completely algebraized. With the introduction of the concept of a "multidimensional continuum" even that final sensible intuitive basis that survived in yesterday's physics in the pure, schematic, categories of geometrical space is reduced to mathematical formulae. Space and time here are one and the same; they form a "continuum," itself expressed by algebraic functions. Together with the current, intuitive notion of space and time, that of force, energy, and movement also disappears. For example, in terms of Einstein's physics the motion of a planet around the Sun only means that in the corresponding field of the space-time continuum there is a certain "curvature"—a term that, to be sure, cannot have made him imagine anything, dealing again with pure, algebraic values. The idea of a motion produced by a force is reduced to the bare bones of an abstract motion following the "shortest geodetic line," which in our universe would approximate an ellipse. As in this algebraic scheme nothing remains of the concrete idea of force, even less so can there be room for cause. The "spiritualization" alleged by the popularizers of modern physics, due to the disappearance of the idea of matter and the reduction of the concept of mass to that of energy, is an absurdity, because mass and energy are made interchangeable values by an abstract formula. The only result of all this is a practical one: the application of the formula in order to control atomic forces. Apart from that, everything is consumed by the fire of algebraic abstraction associated with a radical experimentalism, that is, with a recording of simple phenomena.

With quantum theory one has the impression of entering into a cabalistic world (in the popular meaning of the term). The paradoxical results of the Michelson-Morley experiment provided the incentive for the formulation of Einstein's theory. Another paradox is that of the discontinuity and improbability discovered by nuclear physics through the process of expressing atomic radiations in numerical quantities. (In simple terms: it deals with the evidence that these quantities do not make up a continuous series; it is as if in the series of numbers, three were not followed by four, five, etc., but skipped to a different number, without even obeying the law of probability.) This new paradox has led

to a further algebraizing of the so-called mechanics of matrices, used to explain them away, beside a new and entirely abstract formulation of fundamental laws, like the energy constant, action and reaction, and so on. Here one has not only relinquished the law of causality, replacing it by statistical averages, because it seemed to have to do with pure chance: in addition, in the latest developments of this physics one sees the paradox of having to relinquish experimental proofs because their results were found to be variable. The very doing of an experiment allows that one may have one result now and another later, because the experiment itself influences the object; it alters it due to the interdependent values of "position" and "motion," and to any description of the subatomic phenomena another, just as "true," can be opposed. It is not the experiment, whose results through this method would remain inconclusive, but rather the pure, algebraic function, the so-called wave function, that serves to provide absolute values in this domain.

According to one most recent theory, which integrates Einstein's relativity, purely mathematical entities that on the one hand magically spring forth in full irrationality, but on the other are ordered in a completely formal system of algebraic "production," exhaustively account for everything that can be positively checked and formularized regarding the ultimate basis of sensible reality. This process was the intellectual background to the atomic era's inauguration—*parallel, therefore, to the definitive liquidation of all knowledge in the proper sense.* One of the principal exponents of modern physics, Heisenberg, has explicitly admitted this in his book: it is about a formal knowledge enclosed in itself, extremely precise in its practical consequences, in which, however, one cannot speak of knowledge of the real. For modern science, he says, "the object of research is no longer the object in itself, but nature as a function of the problems that man sets himself"; the logical conclusion in such science being that "henceforth man only meets himself."

There is an aspect in which this latest natural science represents a type of inversion or counterfeit of that concept of catharsis, or purification, that in the traditional world was extended from the moral and ritual field to the intellectual; it referred to an intellectual discipline that, through overcoming the perceptions furnished by the animal senses and more or less mixed with the reactions of the I, would lead to a higher

knowledge, to true knowledge. In effect, we have something similar in modern algebraized physics. Not only has it gradually freed itself from any immediate data of sense experience and common sense, but even from all that which imagination could offer as support. The current concepts of space, time, motion, and causality fall one by one, so to speak. Everything that can be suggested by the direct and living relationship of the observer to the observed is made unreal, irrelevant, and negligible. It is then like a catharsis that consumes every residue of the sensory, not in order to lead to a higher world, the "intelligible world" or a "world of ideas," as in the ancient schools of wisdom, but rather to the realm of pure mathematical thought, of number, of undifferentiated quantity, as opposed to the realm of quality, of meaningful forms and living forces: a spectral and cabalistic world, an extreme intensification of the abstract intellect, where it is no longer a matter of things or phenomena, but almost of their shadows reduced to their common denominator, gray and indistinguishable. One may well speak of a falsification of the elevation of the mind above human sense-experience, which in the traditional world had as its effect not the destruction of the evidences of that experience, but their integration: the potentizing of the ordinary, concrete perception of natural phenomena by also experiencing their symbolic and intelligible aspects.

20
Covering up Nature
Phenomenology

This, then, is the state of affairs: Modern science has led to a prodigious increase of information about phenomena in formerly unexplored or neglected fields, but in so doing it has not brought man any closer to the depths of reality, but has rather distanced and estranged him from them; and what nature "really" is, according to science, escapes any concrete intuition. From this point of view, the latest science has no advantage over earlier, materialistic science. The atoms of yesteryear and the mechanistic conception of the universe at least allowed one to represent something, in however primitive a fashion; but the entities of the latest mathematical physics serve to represent absolutely nothing. They are simply the stitches of a net that has been fabricated and perfected not for the sake of knowing in a concrete, intuitive, and living sense—the only sense that would matter to an undegenerate humanity—but in order to gain an ever greater power, yet still an external one, over nature, whose depths remain closed to man and as mysterious as ever. Nature's mysteries have simply been covered over, and attention diverted from them by the spectacular successes of technology and industry, where one no longer tries to know the world, but to change it for the purposes of an earthbound humanity—following the program explicitly laid out by Karl Marx.

I will repeat that it is a fraud to speak of a spiritual value in today's science, just because instead of matter, it talks about energy, or because it sees mass as "coagulated radiations" or a sort of "congealed light," and because it considers spaces of more than three dimensions. None of that has any existence outside the theories of specialists in purely abstract mathematical notions. When these notions are substituted for

those of earlier physics, they still change nothing of modern man's effective experience of the world. This substitution of one hypothesis for another does not concern real existence, but only interests minds given to pointless divagations. After it has been said that energy, not matter, exists, that we live not in a Euclidean, three-dimensional space but in a curved space of four or more dimensions, and so forth, things remain as they were; my actual experience has not changed a whit, and the significance of what I see—light, the sun, fire, seas, sky, flowering plants, dying beings—the ultimate significance of every process and phenomenon is no more transparent to me. One cannot begin to speak of transcendence, of a deepened knowledge in spiritual or truly intellectual terms. One can only speak of a quantitative extension of notions about other sectors of the external world, which aside from practical utility has only curiosity value.

In every other respect, modern science has made reality more alien and inaccessible to men of today than it ever was in the era of materialism and so-called classical physics. And it is infinitely more alien and inaccessible than it was to men of other civilizations and even to primitive peoples. It is a cliché that the modern scientific vision has desacralized the world, and the world desacralized by scientific knowledge has become one of the existential elements that make up modern man, all the more so to the degree that he is "civilized." Ever since he has been subject to compulsory education, his mind has been stuffed with "positive" scientific notions; he cannot avoid seeing in a soulless light everything that surrounds him, and therefore acts destructively. What, for example, could the symbol of the sunset of a dynasty, like the Japanese, mean to him when he knows scientifically what the sun is: merely a star, at which one can even fire missiles. And what is left of Kant's pathetic appeal to "the starry sky above me," when one is educated by the latest astrophysics and its equations about the constitution of space?

The boundary that defines the range of modern science from the very start, whatever its possible developments, appears in the fact that its constant and rigid point of departure has been and is based on the dualistic and exteriorized relationship between the I and the not-I, which is proper to simple sense-knowledge. This relationship is the immutable foundation of all modern science's edifices: all its instru-

ments are just like so many extensions, improvements, and refinements of the physical senses. They are not instruments of *another* kind of knowledge, that is, of true knowledge. Thus, for example, when modern science introduces the idea of a fourth dimension, it is always as another dimension in the physical world, not as that of a perception that goes beyond physical experience.

Given this basic situation of a limitation exalted to a method, one can well understand that the consequence of all scientific and technological progress is an inner stagnation or even a return to savagery. Such progress is not accompanied by any inner progress but develops on a plane apart; it does not intersect with man's concrete, existential situation, which instead is left to itself. It is hardly worth mentioning the absurdity or the disarming naïveté of that modern social ideology that makes science a sort of substitute for religion, giving it the task of showing man the way to happiness and progress, and sending him on that way. The truth is that man has gained nothing from the progress of science and technology, neither in regard to knowledge (and I have already spoken of that), nor in regard to his own power, and still less in regard to any higher law of conduct. At best, one could make an exception for medicine, but still only on the physical level. As for power, let no one claim that the ability of the hydrogen bomb to destroy an entire metropolis, or the promise of nuclear energy that heralds the "second industrial revolution," or the games for grown-up children that are space exploration, have made a single person more potent and superior in himself, in his concrete being. These forms of a mechanical, external, and extrinsic power leave the real human being untouched; he is no more powerful or superior using space missiles than he ever was when using a club, except in its material effects; apart from those he remains as he was, with his passions, his instincts, and his inadequacies.

As for the third point, the laws of action, obviously science has put at man's disposal a prodigious system of means, while leaving the problem of ends altogether indeterminate. The image of the modern world's situation mentioned above is again appropriate: "A petrified forest, having chaos at its center." Some have tried to argue a finalistic view of the unprecedented accumulation of energy in the atomic era. Theodor Litt, for example, has suggested that man might realize his own nature

in the face of a crisis situation by using his free will, deciding in full responsibility, taking the risk, in one direction or the other. Currently the decision is over the destructive and military use of atomic energy, or its "constructive," peaceful use.

In an epoch of dissolution, such an idea seems completely abstract and fantastic, typical of intellectuals with no sense of reality. First it presupposes the existence of men who still possess an inner law and sure ideas about what course should really be followed—and this, beyond anything that relates to the purely material world. Second, it presumes that these hypothetical men are the very ones entrusted with the use of the new means of power, in one direction or the other. Both suppositions are chimerical, especially the second. Today's leaders are caught in a tangle of actions and reactions that evade any real control; they obey irrational, collective influences, and are almost always at the service of special interests, ambitions, and material and economic rivalries that leave no room for a decision based on an enlightened freedom, a decision as an "absolute person."

In fact, even the alternative suggested above, over which our contemporaries agonize so much, may present itself in terms very different from those advanced by a pacifist, progressivist, moralizing humanitarianism. I truly cannot say what the person who still has hope for man should think of the imminence of quasi-apocalyptic destruction. It would certainly force many to face the existential problem in all its nakedness, and subject them to extreme trials; but is this a worse evil than that of mankind's safe, secure, satisfied, and total consignment to the kind of happiness that befits Nietzsche's "last man": a comfortable consumer civilization of socialized human animals, aided by all the discoveries of science and industry and reproducing demographically in a squirming, catastrophic crescendo?

These are the terms in which questions about modern science and its applications must clearly appear to the differentiated human type whom we have in mind. It remains to add a few considerations on the consequences that he can draw from this field for his own conduct. I will not dwell further on the world of technology, having already spoken of how the differentiated man can let it act on him. I have mentioned the machine as symbol; and among the challenges that may

serve, in crisis situations, to activate the transcendent dimension in him, we may also include everything that, after the total wars already experienced, the atomic era may hold for us, thanks to the "miracles of science." One need only emphasize that the state of affairs is given and irreversible, to be accepted and turned to one's own advantage, as one might do, for example, when faced with a cataclysm. Apart from that, my verdict on the intrinsic value of science and technology remains valid, and what I have said on the subject should be kept in mind.

A different point of view may enter into consideration regarding the scientific method in itself. Modern science in no way reveals the essence of the world, and has nothing to do with real knowledge, but more often puts the seal on its dissolution. Still, scientific activity has an ideal of clarity, impersonality, objectivity, rigor, and the exclusion of personal sentiments, impulses, and preferences. The scientist thinks that he can exclude himself and let objects speak for themselves; he is concerned with "objective" laws that have no respect for what pleases or does not please the individual, and nothing to do with morality. Now, these are also traits of the realism that I have included among the elements valid for the integrated man. In classical antiquity, after all, mathematics was recognized as a discipline for cultivating intellectual clarity. The practical character with which I have reproached modern science does not prejudice this: I am speaking of the orientation or basic formula of every science of the modern type, and not of the direct and arbitrary interventions of individuals in the course of research that proceeds on this basis, and that will not tolerate them. Scientific activity thus reflects in its own way something of that ascesis of active objectivity mentioned earlier, having a symbolic value similar to that which the machine possesses on another plane.

Anyone endowed with real clarity of vision, however, cannot fail to see the part played by irrational elements in the scientist's makeup, quite aside from his formal research methods, especially regarding his choice of hypotheses and interpretive theories. There is a substratum of which the modern scientist is unaware: a substratum in regard to which he is passive and subject to precise influences that originate in part from the forces that have shaped a civilization at one or another point of its cycle. In our case it is the terminal and twilight phase of the Western

cycle. One gains a presentiment of how important this substratum is from the criticism of science and its "superstition of the fact" (as Guénon puts it[1]), showing that the fact means little in itself, but that the essential factor is the system into which it fits and on whose basis it is interpreted. This also indicates the limitations that prejudice the ideal of clarity and objectivity in the modern type of scientist. The secret and true history of modern science is still waiting to be written.

It may seem contradictory that in the previous chapter I approved of an attitude of distance and the detachment of the I from things, whereas now I have disapproved of the dualistic system in which the I is juxtaposed to the not-I of the external world, nature, and phenomena, which is the basic premise of all modern science and also the origin of a system where true knowledge is out of the question. This contradiction vanishes with insight into the inner formation, the attitude, and the possibilities of someone who faces things and nature after having ceased to project feelings and subjective, emotional, and imaginary contents onto them. It is because the inner being is extinct in the modern scientist, leaving him with only gross physical perceptions and an abstract, mathematical intellect, that the relationship between the I and the not-I grows rigid and soulless, so that his detachment can only act negatively. His science is only good for grasping and manipulating the world, not for understanding it or for enlarging his knowledge in a qualitative way.

As for the integrated man, his situation is quite different; the vision of naked reality imposes on him no limits of this kind. The very latest science, as in a reductio ad absurdum, has made painfully visible the characteristics belonging to all of modern science, which must therefore add up to a negative balance; but this signifies for him the end of equivocation. He will put it aside as meaningless, abstract, and purely pragmatic, devoid of any interest or any "scientific" theory of the world. He will judge it, in Othmar Spann's words, as "knowledge of that which is not worth the trouble of knowing." Having made a tabula rasa, what remains is Nature, the world in its original state. Thus he arrives at a natural relationship, just as described at the end of chapter 19. Only in the present context, to dissipate completely the apparent contradiction, it is well to introduce a further idea: that of the multidimensional nature

of experience. This multidimensionality is quite distinct from the mathematical and merely cerebral one of the latest physics. For a summary explanation I again follow the method of not referring directly (as well I might) to traditional teachings, but of examining one of the modern currents in which it is detectable as a sort of involuntary reflection. I will take for this the "phenomenological ontology" of Edmund Husserl, which has sometimes been confused with existentialism itself.

Husserl's philosophy also seeks to liberate the direct experience of reality from all the theories, problems, apparently precise concepts, and practical ends that hide it from our minds; also from any abstract idea about what might be behind it, either in philosophical terms (like "essence" or Kant's "thing in itself") or in scientific ones. From the objective viewpoint, this almost revives the Nietzschean aspiration to banish any "beyond," any "other world," while from the corresponding subjective viewpoint, it revives the ancient principle of the *epoché*, that is, the suspension of any judgment, any individual interpretation, any application of concepts and predicates to experience. In addition, one seeks to overcome all current opinion, the sense of false familiarity, false obviousness, and habit that one may have about things, in short everything that has overlaid the primordial surprise in the face of the world. That is the initial phase.

Next, one is meant to let the facts or "presences" of experience speak for themselves, in direct relation to the I. The phenomenological school uses the unfortunate term of "intentionality" for this relation, whereas it is really the opposite of any intention in the current sense. (See chapter 18, where it is explained that at this degree there cannot be any more "intentions," either in reality or in the I.)

I must explain here what the movement in question really means by the "phenomenon" from which it takes its name. It has restored the original meaning to the word, connected to a Greek verb that means to be manifested or revealed. Thus it is supposed to mean "that which is directly manifested," that which is offered directly as a content of consciousness. It is far removed from the usage of the term "phenomenon" prevalent in modern philosophy, where the phenomenon has been given an implicitly or overtly denigratory meaning, for instance, that of a "mere phenomenon" as opposed to what really is, or as hiding what

really is: on the one hand is being, on the other appearance, the "world of phenomena." This antithesis is now rejected, with the idea that being can manifest itself as it truly is, in its essence and its significance. Hence the expression "phenomenological ontology" (that is, the doctrine of being, based on the phenomenon) is not a contradiction in terms. "Beyond the phenomena as phenomenology understands them, there can be nothing else."

The next stage is to explain that, if being is not hidden but manifested in the phenomenon, such manifestation has various degrees. The lowest is the obtuse, opaque state of simple sensible presences. But a "disclosing" *(Erschliessung)* of the phenomenon is possible, which may relate in a certain way to the idea I have mentioned of the living pluridimensionality of the real. Knowing, from the point of view of phenomenology, means to proceed with this disclosure: a procedure that, however, is not logical or inductive, scientific, or philosophical. If anything, Husserl's idea of what is involved reproduces—even plagiarizes—a traditional teaching. His "reduction" (a technical term of this school) or "phenomenological destruction" with regard to the external world is, as I have said, the stripping of all the conceptual and discursive accretions that cover up the pure and direct experience. When applied to the inner world, this "reduction" or "destruction" is said to lead, as though to an altogether original element, to the perception of the pure I, or, as Husserl calls it, the "transcendent I." This would constitute that one point of certainty, that original evidence, already sought by Descartes after doubting everything else. Using our terminology, this element or residuum that is left after applying phenomenological reduction to the inner world, and that manifests nakedly, is the "being" within us, the superindividual "Self." It is a center of clear and immobile light, a pure luminous source. When its light is projected onto phenomena, it determines their disclosure, that is, it reveals in them a more profound dimension, the "living presence" that the phenomenologists also call "the immanent content of meaning" *(immanenter Sinngehalt)*. Thereupon the inner and the outer meet.

There is a further aspect of phenomenology that at least pretends to reflect a traditional view. One is supposed to overcome the antithesis or hiatus that usually exists between the data of direct experience and its

significances. The school in question seeks to distinguish itself both from the irrational and vitalistic, and from the positivistic and empirical schools. What remains in those schools, after they have made a tabula rasa after their fashion, is the simple, "positive," sensible reality (the point of departure for correspondingly "positivist" science), or the pure experience lived as something instinctive, irrational, and subintellectual. In contrast, the disclosure or animation of the phenomenon when the light of the Self, of Being, is projected onto it causes to appear in the phenomenon itself, as its ultimate essence, something one might call "intellectual" (intelligible), if intellectuality did not nowadays mean that which belongs to the rational and abstract mind. One can clarify the idea by saying that what intervenes, beyond the stage of direct experience, certainly, but disanimate and opaque, is a "*vision* of the sense of things as a *presence*." "Understanding coincides with vision, intuition (direct perception) with meaning." Whereas normally the world is given us in the form of sensible presences ("phenomena") without significance, or else as merely subjective meanings (ideas of thought) without a sensible presence (without a real intuitive basis), the two things are supposed to coincide in the "phenomenological deepening" on the plane of a higher objectivity. In this way, phenomenology does not present itself as irrationalism or positivism, but as an "eidetics": a knowledge of intellectual essences. It aims toward an "intellectual" transparency of the real, of which naturally there are very different degrees.

When medieval philosophers spoke of *intuitio intellectualis* (intellectual intuition), they were not referring to anything different. On the whole, and keeping strictly to the essential points that have been raised so far, and to the way in which I have raised them, the assumptions of phenomenology would seem to correspond to those that I have formulated. Nevertheless, such a correspondence between the phenomenologists' motives and traditional teachings is superficial and illusory, though as I have said, one sometimes wonders whether it is a case of plagiarism pure and simple. The phenomenological school of Husserl and his followers deals with simple philosophy; it is like the parody of things belonging to an absolutely different world. The whole of phenomenology, being the invention of modern thinkers and academic specialists, has as its sole basis the existential plane of modern man, for

whom the disclosure of phenomena, that is, the concrete, living pluridimensionality of the real presented in its nakedness (Nietzsche would say in its "innocence") is and must be mere fancy. Everything in this school is confined to more or less abstruse books, with the usual vain critical examinations of various systems of the history of profane philosophy, with logical analyses and the usual fetishism for "philosophy," not to mention the mixture of the valid motives that I have isolated here with many suspect ideas. Among the latter are the significance attributed to time, to history, and to becoming; the misuse of the term *Lebenswelt* (world of living) for that of pure experience; another misuse, already mentioned, of the concept of "intentionality"; the naïve and irrelevant pictures of a world of "harmony" and "rationality," and so forth. But this is not the place for a critical analysis or any further discrimination, given that phenomenology has served us no better or worse than existentialism as a simple, incidental point of reference.

I have now pointed out a direction, and the only direction possible once one has realized the great illusion and the spiritual irrelevancy of everything that passes for "knowledge" today, at the end of a cycle. I repeat: This direction was well known to the traditional world, and anyone with the chance of referring to it directly can do perfectly well without Husserl and all the rest. Thus he will avoid from the start the error of "mistaking the finger pointing to the moon for the moon itself," to use a Far Eastern expression. "Phenomenological destruction" rigorously applied cannot spare phenomenology itself; and one can say the same of this recently fashionable movement as of the others of our time: *vu*, *entendu*, *interré* (seen, heard/understood, buried). Nothing has changed: we have not arrived at any real transcendence.

In traditional teachings, the symbol of the eye in the middle of the forehead, whose glance burns up all appearances, corresponds precisely to the idea of "phenomenological destruction." Similarly, the traditional esoteric doctrine concerning the multiple states of the being has always admitted an "essence" or a "being" that is not the hypothetical counterpart, purely thought or believed in, of the phenomena, but the object of an "intellectual" experience as direct as the common sensorial type. The same doctrine also speaks, not of an "other reality" but of other experienceable dimensions of the one reality. Incidentally, the so-called

symbolic conception of the cosmos has the same significance: it is the pluridimensionality of the degrees of significance that reality may present in a differentiated experience, obviously conditioned by the nature of the experiencer (at whose limit there may be that which Husserl calls the "transcendental I"). The final dimension of the object of such an experience might correspond to the views of Zen Buddhism that I have mentioned: pure reality that acquires an absolute meaning just as it is, when it knows no goals, when no intentions are attributed to it, when it has no need of justifications or proofs, and manifests the transcendent as immanent.

I have already treated the echo of such views in Nietzsche's and Jaspers' ideas about the "language of the real." But it is as well to repeat that in speaking of these ideas in order to warn of their errors and offer alternatives, I do not mean to present any of this as an actual possibility, either for my contemporaries in general, or even for the type of man I always have in mind. One cannot ignore everything that modern progress and culture have created, and that is now an established fact in modern man's makeup, largely neutralizing the faculties necessary for an effective "opening" of the experience of things and beings—an opening that has nothing to do with the philosophical lucubrations of today's phenomenologists.

The sensation of the current dissolution of knowledge and of the character of that which now passes as knowledge may be a helpful premise; but to go any further, the essential thing is not a simple mental orientation but an inner awakening. Given that throughout this book I have chosen not to consider the differentiated type who wants to, and can, isolate himself from the modern world, but one who lives in the thick of it, it is difficult for him to get beyond a certain limit on the path of knowledge that leads through the multiple dimensions of reality. Apart from the forms of conduct and opening already mentioned in connection with the new realism (forms that remain valid and possible), perhaps only special and traumatic situations can momentarily overcome this limit. And I have already spoken of those.

Part 6

The Realm of Art

From "Physical" Music to the Drug Regime

21
The Sickness of European Culture

In my discussion of personal values and the new realism, I have mentioned the nature of culture and art in the modern world. I return to that subject but from a slightly different point of view, in order to define the potential significance of this realm for the differentiated human type.

When speaking of the relationship between recent art and culture and the entire dissolutive process, one can call upon the principal thesis expounded by Christoph Steding in *The Empire and the Sickness of European Culture*[1]—a good study of the genesis of the cultural characteristics that took form in Europe after the decline of its traditional unity. Steding emphasizes that present culture had its point of departure in the dissociation, neutralization, emancipation, and absolutization of particular realms, which therefore ceased to be more or less organic parts of a whole. He refers especially to a formative center of all existence that gave a meaning to life, a center that also guaranteed a sufficiently organic character to the culture. The positive and necessary manifestation of this center on the political level corresponded to the principle of the Empire, not only in its secular significance (that is, political in a limited sense), but spiritual as well, which it preserved in the medieval European *ecumene* and which was marked by a political theology of high Ghibellinism, as supported by Dante himself.

In Europe, this process of dissolution, which always follows the disappearance of any higher point of reference, had two connected causes. The first was a kind of paralysis of the idea of European tradition as a center of gravity—which also corresponded to an obscuration, materializing, and decline of the Empire and its authority. Then, as if by counterpoint, there ensued the second cause: the centrifugal motion of

the parts, the dissociation and autonomization of partial areas, conditioned precisely by the weakening and disappearance of the originating force of gravity. From the political point of view, there was the well-known consequence that we need not dwell on: the end of the unified whole that the preceding European world still presented politically and socially, despite a system of ample regional autonomies and multiple tensions. Steding calls this a "Swissifying" and "Dutchifying"[2] of areas previously organically included in the complex of the Empire, and the fragmentation consequent on the rise of national states. But on the intellectual level the effect was necessarily the formation of a divided, "neutral" culture, devoid of any objective character.

This is indeed the genesis and the predominant character of culture, science, and art that have come to prevail in the modern era. It is not necessary to make a detailed examination of that realm here. If I continued the discussion of modern science and its technical applications, it would be easy to highlight this process of increasing autonomy, a process neither checked nor restrained by any higher limits or guidance: hence one often has the impression that technical-scientific development takes man in hand and faces him with difficult, unexpected situations full of unknowns. I need not dwell on the specialized fragmentation, the lack of a higher and unifying principle of modern knowledge, as it is quite evident. These are the consequences of one of the dogmas of progressive thought, the unassailable "freedom of science" and of scientific research, which is a simple, euphemistic way to indicate and legitimize the development of one activity dissociated from the whole.

That "freedom" is not unlike the "freedom of culture" celebrated as a victory, with which the active processes of dissolution likewise manifest in an inorganic civilization (as opposed to what Vico recognized as proper to all the "heroic periods" of preceding civilizations). One of the most typical expressions of the "neutralization" of such a culture is the antithesis between culture and politics: pure art and pure culture are supposed to have nothing to do with politics. In the direction of literary liberalism and humanism, separation has often turned into overt opposition. There is a well-known intellectual and humanist type who fosters an almost hysterical intolerance for anything referring to the political

world—state ideals and authority, strict discipline, war, power, and domination—and denies them any spiritual or cultural value. Accordingly, there are those who have dealt with a "cultural history" carefully separated from "political history," making it a realm in itself. Naturally, the antipolitical pathos and alienation of this "neutral" art and culture have been largely justified by the degradation of the political sphere, by the low level to which political values have fallen in recent times. But it is more a case of an orientation on principle, which excludes any consideration of how anomalous this situation is: in modern culture the "neutral" character has in fact become a constituent feature.

Here, to anticipate any misunderstanding, it is prudent to emphasize that the opposite condition, the normal and creative one, is not that of a culture at the service of the state and of politics (politics in the degraded, modern sense). It is that in which a unique idea, the basic and central symbol of a given civilization, shows its strength and exerts a parallel, positive action, often invisible, both on the political plane (with all the values, not just the material ones, that should concern every true state) and on that of thought, culture, and the arts: it excludes any major schism or antagonism between the two realms, as well as any need for outside interventions. Precisely because an organic type of civilization no longer exists, precisely because the processes of dissolution have penetrated every realm of existence, all of that has ceased to exist. Today we seem fated to have the alternative, false and deleterious in itself, of either a "neutral" art and culture devoid of every higher warrant and meaning, or of an art and culture subject to pure and simple, degraded political forces, as is the case in totalitarian systems, and chiefly in those informed by the theories of "Marxist realism" and the corresponding polemic against the decadence and alienation of bourgeois art.

The separation of art and culture is a direct consequence of subjectivism, the disappearance of any objective and impersonal style, and the general lack of the dimension of depth, following what has already been stated in broad terms about the "values of the personality" and overcoming them. What remains to be added is a summary examination of the most recent forms that "neutral" art has given rise to, in order to take stock of the situation.

22
Dissolution in Modern Art

When speaking of modern art, the first thing to mention is its "intimate" quality, typical of a feminine spirituality that wants nothing to do with great historic and political forces; out of morbid sensitivity (sometimes brought about by a trauma), it retreats into the world of the artist's private subjectivity, valuing only the psychologically and aesthetically "interesting." The works of Joyce, Proust, and Gide mark the extreme of this tendency in literature.

In some cases, the trend with "pure art" as its slogan is associated with the above specifically in the sense of a pure formalism of expressive perfection; the "subject" becomes irrelevant, so that any intrusion of it is deemed a contamination. (Benedetto Croce's aesthetics, if it were not so insipid, could be cited here.) In these cases an even greater degree of dissociation is present than in the fetishism of the artist's own interiority.

There is no point in speaking of the current desire to hold on to a "traditional art." Today no one has any idea of what can rightly be called traditional in a higher sense. We find here only academicism and the withered reproduction of models, which lack—and must needs lack—any original creative force. It is a variety of the "regime of residues"; the so-called great art relegated to the past is merely the stuff of rhetoric.

In the opposite, avant-garde trend, value and meaning are reduced to those of a revolt and an illustration of the general process of dissolution. Its works are often interesting, not from an artistic point of view but rather as indices of the climate of modern life. They reflect the critical situation already alluded to in speaking of European nihilism, but give rise to nothing constructive, permanent, or durable. We should note amidst the chaos of styles the cases of rapid retreat from the most

advanced positions: almost all those avant-gardists who were most revolutionary in an existential situation that was originally authentic have accepted a new academicism, a new conventionality, and the commercialization of their work. Equally typical is the subsequent turn, on the part of some of these artists, in an abstract, formal, and neoclassical direction, which is an evasion that puts an end to the relentless tension of their former, more authentic, revolutionary phase. One could speak here of an "Apollonism," in the admittedly arbitrary sense in which Nietzsche used the term in *The Birth of Tragedy.*

Nonetheless, from the differentiated man's point of view the process of dissolution found in the most extreme art (I will address music later), with its atmosphere of anarchic or abstract freedom, may actually have a liberating value, as opposed to much of yesterday's bourgeois art. Aside from this, after the exhaustion of expressionism as a shapeless eruption of dissociated, psychic contents, and after the exhaustion of dadaism and surrealism, if their attitudes had persisted we would have witnessed the self-dissolution of modern art, which would have left an empty spiritual space. In a different epoch, it is precisely in that space that a new "objective" art might have taken shape, in that "grand style" to which Nietzsche referred: "The greatness of an artist is not measured by the beautiful sentiments that he arouses—only girls can think along these lines—but by the degree to which he approaches the grand style. This has in common with great passion the disdain of pleasure; he forgets to persuade, he *wills* . . . To make himself master of the chaos that one is, to force his own chaos to become form, mathematics, *law*—that is the grand ambition. Around such despotic men a silence is born, a fear, similar to what is felt at a great sacrilege."[1] But to think this way in the present world is absurd: our epoch lacks any center, any meaning, any objective symbol that could give soul, content, and power to this "grand style."

Similarly, in the field of fiction what is of interest today belongs to the documentary genre, which, with more or less expressive power, makes us aware of the state of contemporary existence. Only here, and in a few cases, is subjectivism overcome. But in the majority of literary works, in short stories, dramas, and novels, the regime of residues persists, with its typical forms of subjective dissociation. Their constant

background, rightly called the "fetishism of human relationships," consists of the insignificant, sentimental, sexual, or social problems of insignificant individuals, reaching the extreme of dullness and banality in a certain epidemic type of American novel.

Having mentioned "social problems," I must also squelch the claims, or more accurately, the aesthetic and artistic ambitions, of "Marxist realism." The Marxist critic condemns the "bourgeois novel" as a phenomenon of alienation, but as I have already said, the intent of giving a social content or interpretation to the narrative, specifically mirroring the dialectic evolution of classes, the impulse of the proletariat, and so on, is merely a simian parody of realism and the organic integration of a divided and neutral culture. Here one kind of dissociation is replaced by another more serious one: that of making the socioeconomic element an absolute, detached from the rest. "Social" problems are, in themselves, of as little interest and importance as those of personal relationships and fetishist sentimentalities. None of these touches the essence; they fall far short of what might be the object of fiction and of a high art in an organic civilization. The few fictional writings brought to a difficult and artificial birth under the sign of "Marxist realism" speak for themselves; they are coarse material forced into a straitjacket by the demands of pure propaganda and "communist edification." One cannot speak here either of aesthetic criticism or of art, but rather of political agitation in the lowest meaning of the term. However, the present world is such that even where there was a demand for "functional art," for a "consumer art" (Gropius's expression) that was not "alienated," it was obliged more or less to end at the same level. The only sector that was preserved was perhaps architecture, because its functionalism does not require reference to any higher meanings, which are nonexistent today. When a Marxist critic like Lukács writes: "In recent times art has become a luxury item for idle parasites; artistic activity, in its turn, has become a separate profession with the task of satisfying those luxury needs,"[2] he sums up what art is practically reduced to in our day.

This reductio ad absurdum of an activity sundered from every organic and necessary context parallels the other forms of internal dissolution that are present today, and as such facilitates the radical revision that the differentiated human type is forced to make concerning

the importance of art in the earlier period. I have already mentioned how, in the climate of the present civilization and its objective, elementary, even barbaric tendencies, many people have discarded the notion of the period of bourgeois romanticism that art is one of the "supreme activities of the spirit," revealing the meaning of the world and of life. The man whom we have in mind can of course agree with this devaluation of art today. The fetishizing of art in the bourgeois period, connected with the cult of the "creative personality," the "genius," is alien to him. Even when it comes to some of the so-called great art of yesterday, he may feel no less distant than certain men of action today, who pay no attention to appearances, not even for "recreation," but are interested in other things. We may well share and approve this attitude—based, however, on the higher realism of which I have spoken, and on the sentiment of the "merely human" that is the constant basis of that art, in all its pathos and tragedy. It may even be that a differentiated man finds himself more comfortable with certain very modern art, because in itself it represents art's self-dissolution.

Incidentally, this devaluation of art, justified by the latest consequences of its "neutralization" and the new, active realism, had some general precedents in the traditional world. Art in a traditional and organic civilization never occupied the central spiritual position that the period of humanist and bourgeois culture accorded to it. Before the modern era, when art had a true, higher meaning, this was thanks to its preexisting contents, superior and prior to it, neither revealed nor "created" by it as art. These contents gave meaning to life and could exist, manifest, and act even in the virtual absence of what is called art, in works that sometimes might seem "barbaric" to the aesthete and the humanist who have no sense of the elementary and primordial.

We can draw an analogy with the attitude toward art in general that the differentiated man, looking to a new freedom, can assume in this period of dissolution. He is very little interested in, or preoccupied with, the current "crisis of art." Just as he sees no valid, authentic knowledge in modern science, similarly he recognizes no spiritual value in the art that has taken shape in the modern era through the processes mentioned at the beginning of this chapter; he sees no substitute for the meanings that can be kindled by direct contact with reality in a cool, clear, and essential

climate. Upon objective consideration of the processes at work, one has the distinct feeling that art no longer has a future: that it is relegated to an ever more marginal position with respect to existence, its value being reduced to a luxury, in accord with Lukács's criticism quoted above.

It is helpful to return for a moment to the particular realm of modern fiction, where one deals with works that are corrosive and defeatist, so as to anticipate the same possibility of misunderstanding as in the case of neorealism. Clearly, my position has nothing in common with judgments based on bourgeois points of view; thus the accusation of the *divided and neutral character of art must not be confused with moral*izing, or with the censuring of art on the part of current petty morality. In the artistic works in question, it is not a matter of those "existential testimonies" pure and simple, to which one can apply this saying about Schoenberg: "All his happiness lay in recognizing unhappiness; all his beauty in forbidding himself the appearance of beauty."[3] It concerns a particular art that directly or indirectly works to undermine any idealism, to deride any principles, to attack institutions, to reduce to mere words ethical values, the just, the noble, and the dignified—and all this without even obeying an explicit agenda (hence its difference from a corresponding literature of the Left, or the use and political exploitation of that literature on the part of the Left).

We know which groups raise an indignant protest against a similar, popular type of art. This is not the correct reaction, in my view, because it disregards its potential significance as a touchstone, especially for the differentiated man. Without anticipating coming chapters, I shall just say here that the difference between depraved and mutilated realism, and positive realism, lies in the latter's affirmation that there are values that, for a given human type, are not mere fictions or fantasies, but realities—absolute realities. Among these are spiritual courage, honor (not in the sexual sense), straightforwardness, truth, and fidelity. An existence that ignores these is by no means "realistic," but sub-real. For the man who concerns us, dissolution cannot touch these values, except in extreme cases of an absolute "rupture of levels." One must nevertheless distinguish between the substance and certain expressions of it, and also recognize that, on account of the general transformations of mentality and environment that have already happened or are in process,

these expressions have already been prejudiced by the conformism, the rhetoric, the idealistic pathos, and the social mythology of the bourgeois period; thus their foundations are already undermined. Whatever is worth saving in the field of conduct needs to be liberated in an interior and simplified form, needing no consensus, and sound enough not to lean on any of the institutions or value systems of yesterday's world. As for the rest, it may as well collapse.

Once this point is settled (and it was already explained in the introduction), one can recognize that the corrosive action exercised by contemporary literature rarely touches on anything essential, and that many of its targets are not worth defending, cherishing, or regretting. Those scandalized, alarmist, and moralizing reactions stem from an undue confusion of the essential and the contingent, from the incapacity to conceive of any substantial values beyond limited forms of expression that have become alien and ineffective. The differentiated man is not scandalized, but adopts a calm attitude of understatement; he can go even further in overthrowing the idols, but then he asks: "And now what?" At most, he will trace an existential line of demarcation, in the direction that I have repeatedly indicated. It does not matter that this corrosive and "immoral" literature does not obey any higher goals (though it likes to pretend that it does), and is only of value as evidence of the somber, tainted, and often filthy horizons of its authors. The evidence remains valid: it defines a certain distance. Times like these justify the saying that it is good to give the final push to that which deserves to fall.

From our point of view, a reactionary "re-moralizing" of literature appears inauspicious, even if it were possible, in the sense of a return to the style of Manzoni, and in general of the nineteenth-century specialists in the theatrical presentation of concepts of honor, family, homeland, heroism, sin, and so on. One has to go beyond both positions: that of the moralizers, and that of the proponents of this corrosive art whose transitional and primitive forms are destined to exhaust themselves, leaving for some a void, and for others, the free space for a higher realism. And these considerations should make it plain that my former accusations of divided and indifferent art are not to be interpreted as the desire to give art a moralizing, edifying, or didactic content.

23
Modern Music and Jazz

There is another particular area worth paying attention to, because it reflects some typical processes of the epoch, and examining it will lead us on to some general phenomena of contemporary life. I am speaking of music.

It is obvious that, unlike what is proper to a "civilization of being," the music of a "civilization of becoming," which is unquestionably the modern one, must have developed in a peculiar way to enable us to speak of it as a Western demon of music. The processes of dissociation behind all modern art naturally play a part here, so that in the latest phases of music we find self-dissolving situations just like the general ones spoken of above.

It is no oversimplification to say that the most modern Western music has been characterized by an ever more distinct separation from its origin, whether in melodramatic, melodious, pretentious, heroic romanticism (most recently in the line represented by Wagnerism), or in tragic pathos (we need only refer to Beethoven's usual ideas). This separation has been realized through two developments, only apparently opposed.

The first is *intellectualization*, in which the cerebral element prevails, with an interest focused on harmony, often leading to a technical radicalism to the detriment of immediacy and sentiment ("human contents"), resulting in abstract rhythmic-harmonic constructs that often seem to be ends in themselves. The extreme case of this is recent twelve-tone music and strict serialism.

The second is the *physical* character found in the most recent music. This term has already been used for a music, mostly symphonic and

descriptive, that returns in a certain sense to nature, removing itself from the subjective world of pathos, and is inclined to draw its principal inspiration from the world of things, actions, and elementary impulses. Here the process is similar to the intolerance for intimist, academic studio painting during the rise of early impressionism and plein air painting. This second musical tendency had already begun with the Russian school and the French impressionists, having as its limit compositions such as Honegger's *Pacific 231* and Mossolov's *The Iron Foundry.* When the second, physical current met with the first, superintellectualized one, this meeting came to define a most interesting situation in recent music. One need only think of early Stravinsky, where an intellectualism of pure, overelaborated rhythmic constructions blossomed into the evocation of something pertaining less to psychology, or to the passionate, romantic, and expressionistic world, than to the substratum of natural forces. One can see *The Rite of Spring* as the conclusion of this stage. It represents the almost complete triumph over nineteenth-century bourgeois music; music becomes pure rhythm, an intensity of a sonorous and tonal dynamism in action. It is "pure music," but with an additional Dionysian element, hence the particular reference to dance. The predominance of dance music over vocal and emotional music has also characterized this current.

Up to this point, such a process of liberating dissolution in the realm of music might have a positive aspect from our point of view. One could well approve of a revolution that has caused Italian operatic music of the early nineteenth century, and German as well, to appear out of phase, heavy, and false, and likewise even symphonic music with high "humanist" pretensions. The fact is, however, that, at least in the field of "serious" concert music, the next phase after the revolutionary stage mentioned above consisted of abstract forms dominated by technical virtuosity: forms whose inner meaning recalls what I have interpreted as an existential refusal or diversion, taking it beyond the plane of dangerous intensity.

Here one can refer to Stravinsky's second period, where dance music gave way to a formal music that was sometimes parodistic, sometimes neoclassically inspired, or else characterized by a pure, dissociated sonorous arithmetic that had begun to appear in the preceding period,

producing a timeless spatialization of sounds. One also thinks of Schoenberg, considering his development from free atonal music, often in the service of an exasperated, existential expressionism (the existential revolt being expressed here as the atonal revolt against the "common chord," a symbol of bourgeois idealism), to a phase of dodecaphony (twelve-tone system). This development in itself is very significant for the terminal crisis of modern music. After the chromatic limit had been reached, from a technical point of view, step-by-step from post-Wagnerian music to that of Richard Strauss and Alexander Scriabin, atonal music abandoned the traditional tonal system, the basis of all preceding music, transporting, so to speak, the sound to a pure and free state, almost as if it were an active musical nihilism. After that, with all twelve tones of the chromatic scale taken without hierarchical distinction and in all their unlimited possibilities of direct combination, the twelve-tone system sought to impose a new abstract law, beyond the formulae of common-practice harmony. Recently, music has experimented with sounds created by electronic technology, which transcend traditional orchestral means of production. This new territory also incurs the problem of finding an abstract law to apply to electronic music.

One can see in the extremes of dodecaphony reached in Anton von Webern's compositions that the trend can go no further. While Adorno could state in his *Philosophy of Modern Music*: "The twelve-tone technique is our destiny,"[1] others have justly spoken of a musical "ice age." We have arrived at compositions whose extreme rarefaction and formal abstraction depict worlds similar to that of modern physics with its pure algebraic entities or, on the other hand, that of some surrealists. The very sounds are freed from traditional structures and propelled into a convoluted system where the complete dissolution into the formless, with skeletal and atomically dissociated timbres, is contained only by the pure algebra of the composition. As in the world created by machine technology, the technical perfection and force of these new musical resources is accompanied by the same emptiness, soullessness, spectrality, or chaos. It is inconceivable that the new twelve-tone and post-serial language, with its foundation of inner devastation, could express contents similar to those of earlier music. At most, this language can be conducive to exasperated, existential expressionistic contents

such as surface in Alban Berg's works. The limit is crossed by the so-called *musique concrète* of Pierre Schaeffer, with its "organization of noises" and "montage" of environmental and orchestral sounds. A typical case is that of John Cage, a musician who declares explicitly that his compositions are no longer music. Going beyond the disintegrations of traditional structures through serial music and leaving behind Webern and his school, Cage mixes music with pure noise, electronic sound effects, long pauses, random insertions, even spoken ones such as radio transmissions. The goal is to produce disorientation in the listener in the same way as dadaism, so that one is hurled toward unexpected horizons, beyond the realm of music, and even of art in general.

If we look instead for the continuing role of dance music, we shall not find it in the "classical" symphonic genre but in modern dance music, specifically in jazz. It is with good reason that the present epoch, besides being called the "age of the emergence of the masses," the "age of the economy," and "the age of omnipotent technology," has been called the "Jazz Age." This shows that the extension of the trend in question now goes beyond esoteric musical circles and saturates our contemporaries' general manner of listening. Jazz reflects the same tendency as early Stravinsky, in terms of the pure rhythmic or syncopated element; apart from its elements of song, it is a "physical" music that does not stop at the soul, but directly arouses and stirs the body. This is quite different from the earlier European dance music; in fact the very gracefulness, impetus, movement, and sensuality permeating those dances—for example, the Viennese or English waltz, and even the tango—are substituted in jazz by something mechanical, disjointed, altogether primitively ecstatic, and even paroxysmal through the use of constant repetition. This elemental content cannot be lost on anyone who finds himself in great European and American metropolitan dance halls, amidst the atmosphere of hundreds of couples shaking themselves to the syncopation and driving energy of this music.

The enormous and spontaneous spread of jazz in the modern world shows that meanings no different from those of the physico-cerebral "classical" music, which superseded nineteenth-century bourgeois melodrama and pathos, have in fact thoroughly penetrated the younger generation. But there are two sides to this phenomenon. Those who

once went crazy for the waltz or delighted in the treacherous and conventional pathos of melodrama, now find themselves at ease surrounded by the convulsive-mechanical or abstract rhythms of recent jazz, both "hot" and "cool," which we must consider as more than a deviant, superficial vogue. We are facing a rapid and central transformation of the manner of listening, which is an integral part of that complex that defines the nature of the present. Jazz is undeniably an aspect of the resurfacing of the elemental in the modern world, bringing the bourgeois epoch to its dissolution. Naturally, the young men and women who like to dance to jazz today do so simply "for fun" and are not concerned with this; yet the change exists, its reality unprejudiced by its lack of recognition, since its true meaning and possibilities could only be noted from the particular point of view employed by us in all of our analyses.

Some have included jazz among the forms of compensation that today's man resorts to when faced with his practical, arid, and mechanical existence; jazz is supposed to provide him with raw contents of rhythm and elemental vitality. If there is any truth in this idea, we must consider the fact that to arrive at this, Western man did not create original forms, nor utilize elements of European folk music, which, for example in the rhythms of southeastern Europe (Romanian or Hungarian), has a fascination and an intensity comprising not only rhythm but also authentic *dynamics*. He instead looked for inspiration in the patrimony of the lower and more exotic races, the Negroes and mulattoes of the tropical and subtropical zones.

According to one of the scholars of Afro-Cuban music, Fernando Ortiz, all the primary elements of modern dance actually have these origins, including those whose origins are obscured by the fact that they have come through Latin America. One can deduce that modern man, especially North American man, has regressed to primitivism in choosing, assimilating, and developing a music of such primitive qualities as Negro music, which was even originally associated with dark forms of ecstasy.

In fact, it is known that African music, the origin of the principal rhythms of modern dances, has been one of the major techniques used to open people up to ecstasy and possession. Both Alfons Dauer and

Ortiz have rightly seen the characteristic of this music as its polyrhythmic structure, developed in such a way that the static [on-beat] accents that mark the rhythm constantly act as ecstatic [off-beat] accents; hence the special rhythmic figures that generate a tension intended to "feed an uninterrupted ecstasy."[2] The same structure has been preserved in all so-called syncopated jazz. These syncopations are like delays that tend to liberate energy or generate an impulse: a technique used in African rites to induce possession of the dancers by certain entities, the Orisha of the Yoruba or the Loa of the Voodoo of Haiti, who took over their personalities and "rode" them. This ecstatic potential still exists in jazz. But even here there is a process of dissociation, of abstract development of rhythmic forms separated from the whole to which they originally belonged. Thus, given the desacralization of the environment and the nonexistence of any institutional framework or corresponding ritual tradition, any suitable atmosphere or appropriate attitude, one cannot expect the specific effects of authentic African music with its evocative function; the effect always remains a diffuse and formless possession, primitive and collective in character.

This is very apparent in the latest forms, such as the music of the so-called beat groups. Here the obsessive reiteration of a rhythm prevails (similar to the use of the African tom-tom), causing paroxysmal contortions of the body and inarticulate screams in the performers, while the mass of the listeners joins in, hysterically shrieking and throwing themselves around, creating a collective climate similar to that of the possessions of savage ritual and certain Dervish sects, or the Macumba and the Negro religious revivals.

The frequent use of drugs both by performers of this music and by the enraptured young people is also significant, causing a true, frenetic "crowd mentality," as in beat or hippie sessions in California involving tens of thousands of both sexes.

Here we are no longer concerned with the specific compensation that one can find in syncopated dance music as the popular counterpart and extension of the extremes reached, but not maintained, by modern symphonic music; we are concerned with the semi-ecstatic and hysterical beginnings of a formless, convoluted escapism, empty of content, a beginning and end in itself. Hence, it is completely inappropriate when

some compare it to certain frenetic, collective, ancient rites, because the latter always had a sacred background.

Quite apart from similar extreme and aberrant forms, one can still consider the general problem of all these methods that provide elemental, ecstatic possibilities, which the differentiated man, not the masses, can use in order to feed that particular intoxication described earlier, which is the only nourishment he can existentially draw from an epoch of dissolution. The processes of recent times tend precisely toward these extremes; and whereas some of the present youth merely seek to dull their senses and to use certain experiences merely for extreme sensations, others can use such situations as a challenge that demands the right response: a reaction that arises from "being."

24
Excursus on Drugs

Going beyond music and dance, we are led to an even larger and more problematic realm, which embraces many other methods being increasingly used by the younger generation. The North American Beat Generation, in putting together alcohol, the sexual orgasm, and drugs as essential ingredients to give them a sense of life, radically associated techniques that in reality have a common background that I have alluded to earlier.

I need not dwell much on this realm. Apart from what will be said of sex in another chapter, I shall address here only a few considerations on drugs, which are the means that, among all those used in certain sectors of the contemporary world, most visibly have the goal of an ecstatic escape.

The increasing spread of drugs among today's youth is a very significant phenomenon. A specialist, Dr. Laennec, writes: "In our lands, the most widespread category of drug addicts is represented by the neurotics and psychopaths for whom the drug is not a luxury but an essential food, the response to anguish. . . . Toxicomania now appears as an additional symptom of the patient's neurotic syndrome, one symptom among others, a last defense, soon becoming the one and only defense."[1] These considerations can be generalized, or rather extended, to an even larger circle of people who are not clinically neurotic: I am speaking above all about young people who have more or less distinctly perceived the emptiness and boredom of modern existence, and are seeking an escape from it. The impulse can be contagious: drug use extends to individuals who did not have this original impetus as a point of departure, and in such people it can only be regarded as an avoidable bad habit. Once starting on drugs to fit in or be in vogue, they succumb

to the seduction of the states caused by the drug, which often wrecks their already weak personality.

With drugs we have a situation similar to that of syncopated music. Both were often transpositions onto the profane and "physical" plane of means that were originally used to open one up to the suprasensible in initiation rites or similar experiences. Just as dances to modern syncopated music derive from ecstatic Negro dance, the various drugs used today and created in laboratories correspond to drugs that were often used for "sacred" ends in primitive populations, according to ancient traditions. This is even true for tobacco; strong extracts of tobacco were used to prepare young Native Americans in their withdrawal from profane life to obtain "signs" and visions. A similar claim can be made for alcohol, within certain limits; we are aware of the tradition centered on "sacred beverages," as in the use of alcohol in Dionysian and similar rituals. For example, alcoholic beverages were not prohibited in ancient Taoism: on the contrary, they were considered "life essences" inducing an intoxication that, like dance, could lead to a "magical state of grace," sought by the so-called real men. In addition, the extracts of coca, mescal, peyote, and other narcotics have been, and often still are, used in the rituals of secret societies of Central and South America.

No one has a clear or adequate idea about all this anymore, because there is not enough emphasis today on the fact that the effects of these substances are quite different according to the constitution, the specific capacity for reaction, and—in these cases of nonprofane use—the spiritual preparation and intent of the user. Lewin has even spoken of a "toxic equation" that is different in every individual, but this concept has not been given the necessary emphasis, nor has the available field of observations been broad enough, given that the blocked existential situation of the great majority of our contemporaries considerably restricts the possible range of reaction to drugs.

However, the "personal equation" and the specific zone on which drugs, here including alcohol, act, lead the individual toward alienation and a passive opening to states that give him the illusion of a higher freedom, an intoxication and an unfamiliar intensity of sensation, but that in reality have a character of dissolution that by no means "takes him beyond." In order to expect a different result from these experiences, he

would have to have at his command an exceptional degree of spiritual activity, and his attitude would be the opposite of those who seek and need drugs to escape from tensions, traumatic events, neuroses, and feelings of emptiness and absurdity.

I have already pointed out the African polyrhythmic technique: one energy is locked into continuous stasis in order to unleash an energy of a different order. In the inferior ecstaticism of primitive peoples this opens the way for possession by dark powers. I have said that in our case, this different energy should be produced by the response of the "being" (the Self) to the stimulus. The situation created by the reaction to drugs and even alcohol is no different. But this kind of reaction almost never occurs; the reaction to the substance is too strong, rapid, unexpected, and external to be simply experienced, and thus the process cannot involve the "being." It is as if a powerful current penetrated the consciousness without requiring assent, leaving the person to merely notice the change of state: he is submerged in this new state, and "acted on" by it. Thus the true effect, even if not noticed, is a collapse, a lesion of the Self, for all his sense of an exalted life or of a transcendent beatitude or sensuality.

For the process to proceed differently, it would go schematically as follows: at the point in which the drug frees energy x in an exterior way, an act of the Self, of "being," brings its own double energy, $x + x$, into the current and maintains it up to the end. Similarly, a wave, even if unexpected, serves a skilled swimmer with whom it collides by propelling him beyond it. Thus, there would be no collapse, the negative would be transformed into positive, no condition of passivity would be formed with respect to the drug, the experience in a certain way would be deconditioned, and, as a result, one would not undergo an ecstatic dissolution, devoid of any true opening beyond the individual and only substantiated by sensations. Instead, in certain cases there would be the possibility of coming into contact with a superior dimension of reality, which was the intention of ancient, nonprofane drug use. To a certain degree, the harmful effect of drugs would be eliminated.

At this point it will be helpful to add some details. In general, drugs can be divided into four categories: stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, and narcotics. The first two categories do not concern us; for

example, the use of tobacco and alcohol is irrelevant unless it becomes a vice, that is, if it leads to addiction.

The third category includes drugs that bring on states in which one experiences various visions and seemingly other worlds of the senses and spirit. On account of these effects, they have also been called "psychedelics," under the assumption that the visions project and reveal the hidden contents of the depths of one's own psyche, but are not recognized as such. As a result, physicians have even tried to use drugs like mescaline for a psychic exploration analogous to psychoanalysis. However, when all is reduced to the projection of a psychic substratum, not even experiences of this kind can interest the differentiated man. Leaving aside the perilous contents of the sensations and their artificial paradise, these illusory phantasmagoria do not take one beyond, even if one cannot exclude the possibility that what is acting may not be merely the contents of one's own subconscious, but dark influences that, finding the door open, manifest themselves in these visions. We might even say that those influences, and not the simple substratum repressed by the individual psyche, are responsible for certain impulses that can burst out in these states, even driving some compulsively to commit criminal acts.

An effective use of these drugs would presuppose a preliminary "catharsis," that is, the proper neutralization of the individual unconscious substratum that is activated; then the images and senses could refer to a spiritual reality of a higher order, rather than being reduced to a subjective, visionary orgy. One should emphasize that the instances of this higher use of drugs were preceded not only by periods of preparation and purification of the subject, but also that the process was properly guided through the contemplation of certain symbols. Sometimes "consecrations" were also prescribed for protective purposes. There are accounts of certain indigenous communities in Central and South America whose members, only while under the influence of peyote, hear the sculpted figures on ancient temple ruins "speak," revealing their meaning in terms of spiritual enlightenment. The importance of the individual's attitude clearly appears from the completely different effects of mescaline on two contemporary writers who have experimented with drugs, Aldous Huxley and R. H. Zaehner. And it is

a fact that in the case of hallucinogens like opium and, in part, hashish, this active assumption of the experience that is essential from our point of view is generally excluded.

There remains the category of narcotics and of substances that are also used for total anesthesia, whose normal effect is the complete suspension of consciousness. This corresponds to a detachment that would exclude all intermediate "psychedelic" forms and the insidious, ecstatic, and sensual contents, leaving a void. However, if consciousness were maintained, with the pure I at the center, it could facilitate the opening to a higher reality. But the advantages would be outweighed by the extreme difficulty of any training capable of maintaining detached consciousness.

In general, one must keep in mind that drug use even for a spiritual end, that is, to catch glimpses of transcendence, has its price. *How* drugs produce certain psychic effects has not yet been determined by modern science. It is said that some, like LSD, destroy certain brain cells. One point is certain: Habitual use of drugs brings a certain psychic disorganization; one should substitute for them the power of attaining analogous states through one's own means. Therefore, when one has chosen a path based on the maximum unification of all one's psychic faculties, these drawbacks must be kept firmly in mind.

The common reader probably finds these ideas tedious, and lacking in personal points of reference to give him bearings. But, again, it is the development of our argument that has required even this brief excursus. In fact, only by dwelling on these possibilities, as unusual as they are, can one adequately identify the necessary antitheses. This shows us the blockage that prevents any positive value in the evocation of the elemental in today's world, leaving only those purely dissolutive and regressive processes that prevail increasingly in the younger generations.

Part 7

Dissolution in the Social Realm

25
States and Parties

Apoliteia

As a result of today's general processes of dissolution, the sociopolitical is the realm that most displays the lack of any truly legitimate structure possessing a link to higher meanings. Given this state of affairs, we must frankly recognize that the human type who concerns us must govern his own behavior by entirely different principles from those which, in social life, would be proper to him under other circumstances.

In the present epoch, no nation-states exist that, by their nature, can claim any principle of true, inalienable authority. Furthermore, one cannot even speak of states today in the proper traditional sense. Only "representative" and administrative systems exist, in which the primary element is no longer the state, understood as an entity in itself and an incarnation of a higher idea and power, but "society," conceived in terms of "democracy." This background even persists in totalitarian communist regimes, which so insist on the quality of "popular democracies." For a long time there have been no true sovereigns, monarchs by divine right capable of wielding sword and scepter, and symbols of a higher human ideal. More than a century ago, Juan Donoso Cortés stated that no kings existed capable of proclaiming themselves as such except "by the will of the nation," adding that, even if any had existed, they would not have been recognized. The few monarchies still surviving are notoriously impotent and empty, while the traditional nobility has lost its essential character as a political class and any existential prestige and rank along with it. Its current representatives may still interest our contemporaries when put on the same plane as film actors and actresses, sport heroes and opera stars, and when through some private, sentimental, or scandalous chance, they serve as fodder for magazine articles.

Even outside traditional frameworks, true leaders do not exist today. "I turned my back on the rulers when I saw what they called ruling: bartering and haggling with the rabble. . . . Among all the hypocrisies, this seems to me the worst: that even those who commanded feigned the virtues of the serfs"[1]—Nietzsche's words are without exception still true of the so-called ruling class of our times.

Like the true state, the hierarchical, organic state has ceased to exist. No comparable party or movement exists, offering itself as a defender of higher ideas, to which one can unconditionally adhere and support with absolute fidelity. The present world of party politics consists only of the regime of petty politicians, who, whatever their party affiliations, are often figureheads at the service of financial, industrial, or corporate interests. The situation has gone so far that even if parties or movements of a different type existed, they would have almost no following among the rootless masses who respond only to those who promise material advantages and "social conquests." When striking these chords does not suffice, the only influence over the masses today—and now even more than ever—is on the plane of impassioned and subintellectual forces, which by their very nature lack any stability. These are the forces that demagogues, popular leaders, manipulators of myths, and fabricators of "public opinion" count on. In this regard we can learn from yesterday's regimes in Germany and Italy that positioned themselves against democracy and Marxism: that potential enthusiasm and faith that animated masses of people, even to the point of fanaticism, has completely vanished in the face of crisis, or else been transferred to new, opposing myths, replacing the preceding ones by the sole force of circumstances. One must expect this from every collective current that lacks a dimension of depth, inasmuch as it depends on the forces I have mentioned, corresponding to the pure *demos* and its sovereignty—which is as much as to say, literally, "democracy."

The only realms left for any efficacious political action after the end of the old regimes are this irrational and subintellectual plane, or the other one, determined by pure material and "social" utility. As a result, even if leaders worthy of the name were to appear today—men who appealed to forces and interests of a different type, who did not promise material advantages, who demanded and imposed a severe discipline on

everyone, and who did not prostitute and degrade themselves just to ensure a personal, ephemeral, revocable, and formless power—they would have almost no hold on present society. The "immortal principles" of 1789 and the rights of equality granted by absolute democracy to the atomized individual regardless of qualification or rank, and the irruption of the masses into the political structure, have effectively brought about what Walther Rathenau calls a "vertical invasion by barbarians from below."[2] Consequently, the following observation of essayist Ortega y Gasset remains true: "The characteristic fact of the moment is that the mediocre soul, recognizing itself as mediocre, has the audacity to assert the right of mediocrity and impose it everywhere."[3]

In the introduction I mentioned the few who by temperament and vocation still think today, in spite of everything, about the possibility of a rectifying, political action. *Men among the Ruins* was written with their ideological orientation in mind. But on the basis of experience we must admit the lack of the necessary premises to reach any concrete, appreciable results in a struggle of this kind. On the other hand, I have specified within these pages a human type of a different orientation, although spiritually related to those others who will fight on even in hopeless positions. After taking stock of the situation, this type can only feel disinterested and detached from everything that is "politics" today. His principle will become *apoliteia*, as it was called in ancient times.

It is important to emphasize that this principle refers essentially to the inner attitude. In the present political situation, in a climate of democracy and "socialism," the rules of the game are such that the man in question absolutely cannot take part in it. He recognizes, as I have said before, that ideas, motives, and goals worthy of the pledge of one's own true being do not exist today; there are no demands of which he can recognize any moral right and foundation outside that which they derive as mere facts on the empirical and profane plane. However, *apoliteia*, detachment, does not necessarily involve specific consequences in the field of pure and simple activity. I have already discussed the capacity to apply oneself to a given task for love of action in itself and in terms of an impersonal perfection. So, in principle, there is no reason to exclude the political realm itself as a particular case among others, since participating in it on these terms requires neither any objective

value of a higher order, nor impulses that come from emotional and irrational layers of one's own being. But if this is how one dedicates oneself to political activity, clearly all that matters is the action and the impersonal perfection in acting for its own sake. Such political activity, for one who desires it, cannot present a higher value and dignity than dedicating oneself, in the same spirit, to quite different activities: absurd colonization projects, speculations on the stock market, science, and even—to give a drastic example—arms traffic or white slavery.

As conceived here, *apoliteia* creates no special presuppositions in the exterior field, not necessarily having a corollary in practical abstention. The truly detached man is not a professional and polemic outsider, nor conscientious objector, nor anarchist. Once it is established that life with its interactions does not constrain his being, he could even show the qualities of a soldier who, in order to act and accomplish a task, does not request in advance a transcendent justification and a quasi-theological assurance of the goodness of the cause. We can speak, in these cases, of a voluntary obligation that concerns the "persona," not the being, by which—even while one is involved—one remains isolated.

I have already said that the positive overcoming of nihilism lies precisely in the fact that lack of meaning does not paralyze the action of the "persona." In existential terms, the only exception would be the possibility of action being manipulated by some current political or social myth that regarded today's political life as serious, significant, and important. *Apoliteia* is the inner distance unassailable by this society and its "values"; it does not accept being bound by anything spiritual or moral. Once this is firm, the activities that in others would presuppose such bonds can be exercised in a different spirit. Moreover, there remains the sphere of activities that can be made to serve a higher-ordained and invisible end, as when I mentioned the two aspects of impersonality and what is to be gained from some forms of modern existence.

Turning to a particular point, one can only maintain an attitude of detachment when facing the confrontation of the two factions contending for world domination today: the democratic, capitalist West and the communist East. In fact, this struggle is devoid of any meaning from a spiritual point of view. The "West" is not an exponent of any

higher ideal. Its very civilization, based on an essential negation of traditional values, presents the same destructions and nihilistic background that is evident in the Marxist and communist sphere, however different in form and degree. I will not dwell on this, given that I have outlined a total conception of the course of history, and dismissed any illusion about the final result of that struggle for world control, in *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Since the problem of values does not come into question, at most it presents a practical problem to the differentiated man. That certain margin of material freedom that the world of democracy still leaves for external activity to one who will not let himself be conditioned inwardly, would certainly be abolished in a communist regime. Simply in view of that, one may take a position against the soviet-communist system: not because one believes in some higher ideal that the rival system possesses, but for motives one might almost call basely physical.

On the other hand, one can keep in mind that for the differentiated man, having no interest in affirming and exposing himself in external life today, and his deeper life remaining invisible and out of reach, a communist system would not have the same fatal significance as for others; also an "underground front" could very well exist there. Taking sides in the present struggle for world hegemony is not a spiritual problem, but a banal, practical choice.

In any case, the general situation characterized by Nietzsche remains: "The struggle for supremacy amidst conditions that are worth nothing: this civilization of great cities, newspapers, fever, uselessness."[4] Such is the framework that justifies the inner imperative of *apoliteia*: to defend the world of being and dignity of him who feels himself belonging to a different humanity and recognizes the desert around himself.

26
Society

The Crisis of Patriotic Feeling

We now come to the social realm in the proper sense. Here we can only conclude that every organic unity has been dissolved or is dissolving: caste, stock, nation, homeland, and even the family. Even when all these have not completely disappeared, their social foundation is not a living force full of significance, but the mere force of inertia. We have already seen this when speaking of the person: what exists today is essentially the shifting mass of "individuals," devoid of organic connections, a mass contained by external structures or moved by collective, formless, and unstable currents. The differences between them, as they exist today, are no longer true differences. The classes are only fluid, economic classes. Again, the words of Zarathustra are timely: "Rabble above, rabble below! What do 'poor' or 'rich' mean today? I have forgotten how to tell the difference."[1] The only real hierarchies are those technical ones of the specialists who serve material utility, the needs (largely unnatural), and the distractions of the human animal: hierarchies in which rank and spiritual superiority no longer have any meaning or place.

Instead of the traditional unification through particular bodies, orders, functional castes or classes, guilds—frameworks to which the individual felt an attachment, based on a supra-individual principle that informed his entire life, giving it a specific meaning and orientation—today's associations are determined only by the material interests of individuals, united only on this basis, such as trade unions, professional organizations, parties. The formless state of the people, turned into mere

higher ideal. Its very civilization, based on an essential negation of traditional values, presents the same destructions and nihilistic background that is evident in the Marxist and communist sphere, however different in form and degree. I will not dwell on this, given that I have outlined a total conception of the course of history, and dismissed any illusion about the final result of that struggle for world control, in *Revolt Against the Modern World*. Since the problem of values does not come into question, at most it presents a practical problem to the differentiated man. That certain margin of material freedom that the world of democracy still leaves for external activity to one who will not let himself be conditioned inwardly, would certainly be abolished in a communist regime. Simply in view of that, one may take a position against the soviet-communist system: not because one believes in some higher ideal that the rival system possesses, but for motives one might almost call basely physical.

On the other hand, one can keep in mind that for the differentiated man, having no interest in affirming and exposing himself in external life today, and his deeper life remaining invisible and out of reach, a communist system would not have the same fatal significance as for others; also an "underground front" could very well exist there. Taking sides in the present struggle for world hegemony is not a spiritual problem, but a banal, practical choice.

In any case, the general situation characterized by Nietzsche remains: "The struggle for supremacy amidst conditions that are worth nothing: this civilization of great cities, newspapers, fever, uselessness."[4] Such is the framework that justifies the inner imperative of *apoliteia*: to defend the world of being and dignity of him who feels himself belonging to a different humanity and recognizes the desert around himself.

masses, ensures that any possible order will necessarily have a centralistic and coercive character. The inevitable, centralizing, overgrown structures of modern states, which increase their interventions and restrictions even when "democratic freedoms" are proclaimed, if on the one hand they hold off complete disorder, on the other they destroy whatever might still remain of organic bonds and unity. And this social standardization reaches its limit when openly totalitarian forms take over.

Furthermore, the absurdity of modern life is blatantly revealed by those economic aspects that essentially, and regressively, determine it. On the one hand, an economy of necessities has decidedly become an economy of excess, one of whose causes is the overproduction and progress of industrial technology. On the other hand, overproduction requires, for the sake of the market, that a maximum volume of needs be fed and maintained among the masses: needs that, on the brink of becoming customary and "normal," entail a corresponding, growing conditioning of the individual. The first factor here is the very nature of the dissociated productive process that has, as it were, taken modern man by the hand, like an unleashed giant incapable of restraint, thus confirming the saying: *Fiat productio, pereat homo!* (Let there be production! Let man perish! —Werner Sombart). While in a capitalist regime not only greed for profits and dividends has a part in this senseless increase in production, but also the objective necessity for capital reinvestment in order to prevent a blockage paralyzing the entire system, another more general cause of the senseless increase of production along the lines of an excessive consumer economy is the necessity to employ labor to combat unemployment. As a result, in many states the principle of overproduction and overindustrialization, exacerbated by the demands of private capitalism, has become the very dictator of sociopolitical planning. So a vicious circle forms, the opposite of a system in equilibrium, of processes well contained within sensible boundaries.

This naturally brings us to an even more prominent aspect of the absurdity of modern existence: the unrestrained increase and growth of the population, occurring along with the regime of the masses, fostered by democracy, the "conquests of science," and the unselective welfare system. The procreative pandemic or demon is effectively the principal

force that incessantly feeds and sustains the entire system of the modern economy, with its mechanism ever more conditioning the individual. Proof positive of the derisory character of the craze for power nurtured by today's man is the fact that this creator of machines, this dominator of nature, this inaugurator of the atomic era, is not far above an animal or a savage when it comes to sex. He is incapable of controlling the most primitive forms of the sexual impulse and everything connected with it. So, as though obeying a blind destiny, he ceaselessly, irresponsibly, increases the formless human mass and supplies the chief driving force to the entire system of the paroxysmal, unnatural, and ever more conditioned economic life of modern society, creating at the same time innumerable hotbeds of social and international instabilities and tensions. The vicious circle then becomes that of the mass, which, with the excess potential of a workforce, feeds overproduction, which in its turn seeks ever-larger markets and masses to absorb the products. Nor can we ignore the fact that demographic growth has an index inversely proportional to the social scale, thus adding a further factor to the general regressive process.

Evidence of this is absurdly obvious, and could easily be developed and supported by specific analyses. But this summary of the essential points is enough to validate the principle of inner detachment not only toward the present political world but also, more generally, the social world. The differentiated man cannot feel part of a "society" like the present one, which is formless and has sunk to the level of purely material, economic, "physical" values, and moreover lives at this level and follows its insane course under the sign of the absurd. Therefore, *apoliteia* requires the most decided resistance to any social myth. Here it is not just a matter of its extreme, openly collectivist forms, in which the person is not recognized as significant except as a fragment of a class or party or, as in the Marxist-Soviet area, is denied any existence of his own outside the society, so that personal destiny and happiness distinct from those of the collective do not even exist. We must equally reject the more general and bland ideal of "sociability" that today often functions as a slogan even in the so-called free world, after the decline of the ideal of the true state. The differentiated man feels absolutely *outside* of society, he recognizes no moral claim that requires his inclusion in an

absurd system; he can understand not only those who are *outside*, but even those who are *against* "society"—meaning against this society. Putting aside everything that does not directly concern him (because his way does not match that of his contemporaries), he would be the last to endorse efforts to normalize and rehabilitate within "society" those who have had enough of the game and are stigmatized as "unsuitable" and "asocial"—the anathema of democratic societies. The ultimate intention of such efforts is to narcotize those who can see through the absurd and nihilistic character of today's collective life, behind all the "social" masks and the corresponding lay mythology, as I have already said.

Based on these general considerations, we can now examine the crisis that some particular ideals and institutions of the previous period are undergoing, in order to clarify the position to be taken in that regard.

We turn first to the ideas of *homeland* and *nation*. The crisis that such ideas are suffering is evident, especially after World War II. On the one hand, it is a consequence of objective processes: the great economic and political forces in motion are such as to increasingly relativize the frontiers and to reduce the principle of national sovereignty. One tends to think in terms of large spaces and blocs or supranational systems, and given the growing uniformity of mores and ways of life, given the transformation of the population into masses, and given the development and ease of communications, everything that has a solely national reference is assuming the quasi-provincial character of a local curiosity.

On the other hand, the crisis regards the way of feeling itself; it is connected to the decline of yesterday's myths and ideals, to which men respond less and less after the upheavals and downfalls of recent times, and which are ever less capable of awakening the old enthusiasm in the collectivity.

As in so many previous occasions, it is also necessary here to see clearly what exactly is suffering the crisis, and to define its value. Again, it is not about the reality of the traditional world, but of conceptions essentially born and introduced with its destruction, and above all with the revolution of the Third Estate. The words "homeland" and "nation," in the modern sense of political myths and collective ideals,

were virtually unknown in the traditional world. The traditional world knew "nationalities," ethnicities, and races only as natural facts, devoid of that specific political value that they would receive in modern nationalism. They represented a primary material differentiated by hierarchies and subject to a superior principle of political sovereignty. In many cases, this elevated principle represented the primary element, the nation the secondary and derived element, since at the beginning there was no unity of language, territory, "natural borders," or relative ethnic homogeneity beyond the encounter and miscegenation of different bloods; these were often only the effect of a long formative process determined over centuries by a political center and its loyalist and feudal bonds.

In addition, it is well known that in the West, political nations and nation-states emerged from the decline of the medieval ecumenical unity, due to a process of dissociation, a freeing of particular units from a whole (as indicated in chapter 25). The process replicates on the international and continental plane the same features as would give rise within every state to the freeing of individuals, to social atomism and the dissolution of the organic concept of the state.

To an extent, the formation of nations has run parallel with the revolutionary idea. Already in the oldest historical example, that of the France of Philip the Fair, one can see how the move toward a national state went hand in hand with a process of anti-aristocratic leveling, an incipient destruction of the articulations of an organic society due to absolutism, and the constitution of those centralized "public powers" that would become ever more prominent in modern states. We are well aware of the close relationship between the dissolution corresponding to the declaration of the "rights of man and the citizen" of 1789 and the patriotic, nationalistic, and revolutionary idea. The very word "patriot" was unknown before the French Revolution; it first appeared between 1789 and 1793 to indicate one who supported the revolution against the monarchies and aristocracies. Similarly, in the European revolutionary movements of 1848 and 1849, "people," "national idea," and "patriotism" on the one hand, and revolution, liberalism, constitutionalism, republican and antimonarchical tendencies on the other, were concordant and often inseparable elements.

It was in this climate, on the eve of the bourgeois or Third Estate revolution, that "homeland" and "nation" took on a primarily political meaning and that mythical value that would become ever more evident in the openly nationalistic ideologies that followed. Thus "patriotic" and "national sentiments" are tied to the mythology of the bourgeois era, and it was only then, during the relatively brief period from the French Revolution to the First or perhaps the Second World War, that the idea of nation actually played a determining role in European history, in close connection with the democratic ideologies. The same idea is now playing the same role for the non-European peoples as they become emancipated, following the same presuppositions, or rather following the internal antitraditional and modernizing dissolutions.

When bland patriotism turned into radical nationalistic forms, the regressive character of such tendencies and the contribution from the emergence of the mass-man in the modern world became clearly evident. For the essence of nationalistic ideology is to hold homeland and nation as supreme values, conceiving them as mystical entities almost with a life of their own and having an absolute claim on the individual; whereas, in reality, they are only dissociated and formless realities, by way of their negation of any true hierarchical principle, and of any symbol or warrant of a transcendent authority. In general, the foundation of political unities that have taken form in this direction is antithetical to the traditional state. In fact, as I have said, the cement of the latter was a loyalty and fidelity that could dispense with the naturalistic fact of nationality; it was a principle of order and sovereignty that, by not being based on this fact, could even be valid in areas including more than one nationality. It was the dignities, particular rights, and castes that united or divided individuals "vertically," beyond the "horizontal" common denominator of "nation" and "homeland." In a word, it was unification from above, not from below.

Once all this is recognized, we can see in a different light the present crisis, both objective and ideal, of the concepts and sentiments of homeland and nation. Again, one might speak of destructions that attack something already having a negative and regressive character, so that they could even signify a potential liberation, if the direction of the

whole process were not toward something still more problematic. Therefore, even if only a void remained, it would be no reason for the differentiated man to deplore that crisis and concern himself with the reactions in the "realm of residues." The void could be filled, the negative could give rise to the positive, only if the ancient principles returned to replace the dissolving naturalistic unities with those of a different type; if it were no longer homelands and nations that united or divided, but rather ideas; if the decisive thing were not sentimental and irrational adhesion to a collectivizing myth, but a system of loyal, free, and strongly personalized connections—something that would naturally require as a fundamental point of reference leaders invested with a supreme and intangible authority. Along this line they could even be formed by transnational groupings such as were known in various imperial epochs and, partially, in the Holy Alliance. Today, the degraded counterfeit of all that is taking form alongside the crisis of national sovereignties: power blocs determined solely by factors that are material, economic, and "political" in the worst sense, devoid of every ideal. Hence the insignificance of the antithesis between the two principal blocs of this type existing today, between the democratic West and the communist and Marxist East. For lack of a third force of a different character, and a true ideal to unite and divide beyond homelands, nations, and anti-nations, the only prospect is that of an invisible unity, in a world without frontiers, of those few individuals who are associated by their very nature, which is different from that of the man of today, and by the same inner law—in short, almost in the same terms as Plato used, speaking of the true state, which idea was then taken up by the Stoics. A similar, dematerialized type of unity and state was at the basis of the Orders, and its last reflection, deformed to the point of being unrecognizable, can be seen in secret societies like Freemasonry. If new processes are to develop when the present cycle exhausts itself, perhaps they could have their point of departure in this very kind of unity. Then we could see in action the positive side of overcoming the idea of homeland, whether as myth of the romantic bourgeois period or as a naturalistic fact almost irrelevant to a unity of a different type. Being from the same country or homeland would be replaced by being, or not being, for the same cause. *Apoliteia*, the detachment of today,

contains this eventual possibility for tomorrow. In this case too it is necessary to see the distance existing between the attitude indicated here and certain recent products of modern political erosion: a formless and humanitarian cosmopolitanism, a paranoid pacifism, and the whims of those who want to feel themselves only as "citizens of the world," eventually becoming the "conscientious objectors."

27

Marriage and the Family

Social factors present a closer connection with those of private life and mores, when one considers the problem of relations between the sexes, marriage, and the family as they are today.

In our time, the crisis of the family as an institution is no less salient than that of the nineteenth-century romantic idea of homeland, and is largely an effect of processes that are irreversible, being tied to all the factors that characterize existence in recent times. Naturally, today's crisis of the family also arouses preoccupations and moral reactions, with more or less hopeless attempts at restoration that can offer nothing but conformism and an empty and false traditionalism.

Here, too, I see things in a different way and, as in the case of the other phenomena already considered, must coldly recognize the reality of the situation. We have to face the consequences of the fact that the family has long since ceased to have any higher meaning, or been cemented by living factors that go beyond the merely individual. The organic and, to a certain degree, "heroic" character that its unity presented in the past has been lost in the modern world, just as the institution's residual veneer of "sacrality" bestowed by religious marriage has disappeared, or nearly so. In reality, in the great majority of cases the modern family is presented as a petit bourgeois institution determined almost exclusively by conformist, utilitarian, primitive, or at best sentimental factors. Above all, its essential fulcrum has disappeared, which was constituted by the primarily spiritual authority of its head, the father: that is shown by the etymological meaning of the word *pater* as "lord," or "sovereign." At this rate one of the principal goals of the family, procreation, is reduced to the mere mindless propagation of

one's bloodline: propagation, moreover, that is promiscuous, given that with modern individualism any limitation of conjugal unions by stock, caste, and race has collapsed, and given that, in any case, it no longer has as counterpart the most essential continuity, that is, the transmission of a spiritual influence, a tradition, and an ideal heritage from generation to generation. Yet how could it be otherwise? How could the family continue to have a firm, binding center, if its natural head, the father, is so often estranged from it today—even physically, when the practical mechanism of material life takes him away from it, in a society that is intrinsically absurd? What authority can the father have, especially in the so-called upper classes, if he is reduced to a money-making machine, a busy professional, and the like? Moreover, this often holds for both parents, owing to the emancipation of the woman and her entrance into the world of the professions and work. Even less conducive to the climate within the family or to a positive influence on the children is the alternative, the "lady" who devotes herself to a frivolous and *mondaine* existence. In such a situation, how can the erosive and disintegrating processes not work against the unity of the modern family, and how can the claim of a "sacred character" of the institution not be counted among the mendacious hypocrisies of our society?

The interrelation between the disappearance of the preexisting principle of authority and the unleashing of individualism, already revealed in the political realm, is also manifested in the realm of the family. The decline of any prestige of the father has resulted in the estrangement of the children, the ever more clear and severe gap between new and old generations. The dissolution of the organic links in space (castes, bodies, and so on) corresponds to a dissolution in time, in the breaking of the spiritual continuity between the generations, between fathers and sons. The detachment and estrangement in both cases is undeniable and ever increasing, being exacerbated by the ever more rapid and confused rhythm of existence in today's world. Thus it is significant that such phenomena are particularly severe in the upper classes and the remains of the ancient nobility, where one would have expected the bonds of blood and tradition to persist. It is more than a humorous remark that parents are "an unavoidable evil" for "modern" children. The new generation wants its parents "to mind their own business" and not to med-

dle in the lives of their children, since they "don't understand" (even when there is absolutely nothing to understand); and it is no longer just the boys who make such a claim: the girls too have filed a similar protest. Naturally, all this intensifies the general rootless condition. Therefore, the privation of any higher meaning of the family in a materialistic and dispirited civilization is also one of the causes of the extremism of the "burnt-out generation," and of the growing criminal activity and corruption among the youth.

Given this state of affairs, whatever its principal cause—whether this cause lies in the children or the parents—procreation itself assumes an absurd character and cannot maintain its validity as one of the principal reasons of being for the family. Thus, as I have said, in innumerable cases today's family owes its existence merely to a force of inertia, conventions, practical convenience, and weakness of character in a regime of mediocrity and compromises. Nor can one expect external measures to bring about a change. I must repeat that familial unity could only remain firm when determined by a suprapersonal way of thinking, so as to leave mere individual matters on a secondary level. Then the marriage could even lack "happiness," the "needs of the soul" could be unsatisfied, and yet the unity would persist. In the individualistic climate of present society no higher reason demands that familial unity should persist even when the man or the woman "does not agree," and sentiment or sex leads them to new choices. Therefore, the increase of so-called failed marriages and related divorces and separations is natural in contemporary society. It is also absurd to think of any efficacy in restraining measures, since the basis of the whole is by now a change of an existential order.

After this evaluation, it would almost be superfluous to specify what can be the behavior of the differentiated man today. In principle, he cannot value marriage, family, or procreation as I have just described them. All that can only be alien to him; he can recognize nothing significant to merit his attention. (Later I will return to the problem of the sexes in itself, not from the social perspective.)

The contaminations in marriage between sacred and profane and its bourgeois conformism are evident to him, even in the case of religious, indissoluble, Catholic marriage. This indissolubility that is supposed

to safeguard the family in the Catholic area is by now little more than a façade. In fact, the indissoluble unions are often profoundly corrupted and loosened, and in that area petty morality is not concerned in the least that the marriage is actually indissoluble; it is important only to act as if it were such. That men and women, once duly married, do more or less whatever they want, that they feign, betray, or simply put up with each other, that they remain together for simple convenience, reducing the family to what I have already described, is of little importance there. Morality is saved: One can believe that the family remains the fundamental unit of society so long as one condemns divorce and accepts that social sanction or authorization—as if it had any right—for any sexually based cohabitation that corresponds to marriage. What is more, even if we are not speaking of the "indissoluble" Catholic rite of marriage, but of a society that permits divorce, the hypocrisy persists: one worships at the altar of social conformism even when men and women separate and remarry repeatedly for the most frivolous and ridiculous motives, as typically happens in the United States, so that marriage ends up being little more than a puritanical veneer for a regime of high prostitution or legalized free love.

Nevertheless, the issue of Catholic marriage deserves some additional theoretical and historical consideration to prevent ambiguity. Naturally in our case it is not the arguments of "free thinkers" that turn us against this kind of marriage.

Earlier I mentioned the contamination between the sacred and the profane. It is worth recalling that marriage as a rite and sacrament involving indissolubility took shape late in the history of the Church, and not before the twelfth century. The obligatory nature of the religious rite for every union that wished to be considered more than mere concubinage was later still, declared at the Council of Trent (1563). For our purposes, this does not affect the concept of indissoluble marriage in itself, but its place, significance, and conditions have to be clarified. The consequence here, as in other cases regarding the sacraments, is that the Catholic Church finds itself facing a singular paradox: proposals intending to make the profane sacred have practically ended up making the sacred profane.

The true, traditional significance of the marriage rite is outlined by Saint Paul, when he uses not the term "sacrament" but rather "mystery" to indicate it ("it is a great mystery," taken verbatim—Ephesians 5:31–32). One can indeed allow a higher idea of marriage as a sacred and indissoluble union not in words, but in fact. A union of this type, however, is conceivable only in exceptional cases in which that absolute, almost heroic dedication of two people in life and beyond life is present in principle. This was known in more than one traditional civilization, with examples of wives who even found it natural not to outlive the death of their husbands.

In speaking of making the sacred profane, I alluded to the fact that the concept of an indissoluble sacramental union, "written in the heavens" (as opposed to one on the naturalistic plane that is generically sentimental, and even at base merely social), has been applied to, or rather imposed on, every couple who must join themselves in church rather than in civil marriage, only to conform to their social environment. It is pretended that on this exterior and prosaic plane, on this plane of the Nietzschean "human, all too human," the attributes of truly sacred marriage, of marriage as a "mystery," can and must be valid. When divorce is not permitted in a society like the present, one can expect this hypocritical regime and the rise of grave personal and social problems.

On the other hand, it should be noted that in Catholicism itself the theoretical absoluteness of the marriage rite bears a significant limitation. It is enough to remember that if the Church insists on the indissolubility of the marriage bond in space, denying divorce, it has ceased to observe it in time. The Church that does not allow one to divorce and remarry does permit widows and widowers to remarry, which amounts to a breach of faithfulness, and is at best conceivable within an openly materialistic premise; in other words, only if it is thought that when one who was indissolubly united by the supernatural power of the rite has died, he or she has ceased to exist. This inconsistency shows that Catholic religious law, far from truly having transcendent spiritual values in view, has made the sacrament into a simple, social convenience, an ingredient of the profane life, reducing it to a mere formality, or rather degrading it.

This is not all. Together with the absurdity proper to democratizing

the marriage rite and imposing it on all, there is an inconsistency in Catholic doctrine when it claims that the rite, as well as being indissoluble, renders natural unions "sacred"—which represents one incongruence associating with another. Through precise, dogmatic premises, the "sacred" is here reduced to a mere manner of speech. It is well known that Christian and Catholic attitudes are characterized by the antithesis between "flesh" and spirit, by a theological hatred for sex, due to the illegitimate extension to ordinary life of a principle valid at best for a certain type of ascetic life. With sex being presented as something sinful, marriage has been conceived as a lesser evil, a concession to human weakness for those who cannot choose chastity as a way of life, and renounce sex. Not being able to ban sexuality altogether, Catholicism has tried to reduce it to a mere biological fact, allowing its use in marriage only for procreation. Unlike certain ancient traditions, Catholicism has recognized no higher value, not even a potential one, in the sexual experience taken in itself. There is lacking any basis for its transformation in the interests of a more intense life, to integrate and elevate the inner tension of two beings of different sexes, whereas it is in exactly these terms that one should conceive of a concrete "sacralization" of the union and the effect of a higher influence involved in the rite.

On the other hand, since the marriage rite has been democratized, the situation could not be otherwise even if the premises were different; otherwise, it would be necessary to suppose an almost magical power in the rite to automatically elevate the sexual experiences of any couple to the level of a higher tension, of a transforming intoxication that alone could lift it beyond the "natural" plane. The sexual act would constitute the primary element, whereas procreation would appear absolutely secondary and belonging to the naturalistic plane. As a whole, whether through its conception of sexuality, or through its profanation of the marriage rite as something put in everyone's reach and even rendered obligatory for any Catholic couple, religious marriage itself is reduced to the mere religious sanction of a profane, unbreakable contract. Thus the Catholic precepts about the relations between the sexes reduce everything to the plane of a restrained, bourgeois mediocrity: tamed, procreative animality within conformist limits that have not been fundamentally changed by certain hesitant,

fringe concessions made for the sake of "updating" at the Second Vatican Council.

So much for clarifying the principles of the matter. In such a materialized and desecrated civilization and society as the present ones, it is then natural that the very barriers against dissolution that the Christian conception of marriage and family provided—however problematic it might have been—have become less and less, and that as things now stand, there is no longer anything worth being sincerely defended and preserved. None of the consequences of the crisis as seen in this realm, including all today's problems surrounding divorce, free love, and the rest, can be of much interest to the differentiated man. Upon final analysis, he cannot consider the overt individualistic disintegration of marriage as a worse evil than the line followed by the communist world, which, having liquidated the fads of free unions cultivated by early revolutionary, antibourgeois socialism, tended ever more to substitute the state or some collective for the family, while vindicating the "dignity" of the woman only as worker side by side with the man, and in terms of a mere reproductive mammal. In fact, in present-day Russia decorations as lofty as "Heroine of the Soviet Union" are being contemplated for fruitful women—even unmarried comrades—who have given at least ten babies to the world, which, if they desire, they can even rid themselves of by handing them over to the state, which supposes it can educate them more directly and rationally to make them into "Soviet men." It is known that a comment in Article 12 of the Soviet constitution has essentially inspired such a view of the female sex: "Work, in other times considered as a useless or dishonorable labor, becomes a question of dignity, glory, a question of valor, heroism." The title of "Hero of Socialist Labor," equaled by the "Hero of the Soviet Union," is the counterpart of the title just indicated bestowed upon the reproductive woman. These are the happy horizons offered as the alternative to the "decadence" and "corruption" of bourgeois capitalist society, where the family is dissolving amid anarchy, indifference, and the so-called sexual revolution of the younger generation, along with the disappearance of any organic link or principle of authority.

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In any case, these alternatives also lack any significance. In this epoch of dissolution it is hard for the differentiated man to become

involved in marriage and family in any way. It is not a matter of ostentatious anticonformism, but a conclusion drawn from a vision consistent with reality, in which the imperative of an inner freedom remains. In a world like the present, the differentiated man must be able to have the self at his disposal, all his life long. It is not for him to form any ties in this realm, any more than ascetics or mercenaries in another epoch would have done. It is not that he is unwilling to assume even graver burdens: the problem refers instead to that which, in itself, is devoid of any meaning.

This saying of Nietzsche is well known: "*Nicht fort sollst du dich pflanzen, sondern hinauf. Dazu helfe dir der Garten der Ehe*" (Do not plant for the future but for the heights. May the garden of marriage help you in that). It refers to the idea that today's man is a mere form of transition whose only purpose is to prepare the birth of the "superman," being ready to sacrifice himself for him, and to withdraw at his arising. We have already done justice to the craze of the superman and this finalism that postpones the possession of an absolute meaning of existence to a hypothetical future humanity. But from the wordplay of Nietzsche's saying, one can deduce the endorsement of a concept that marriage should serve to reproduce not "horizontally" (such is the meaning of *fortpflanzen*), simply breeding, but rather "vertically," toward the summit *(hinaufpflanzen),* elevating one's own line. In fact, this would be the only higher justification of marriage and family. Today it is nonexistent, because of the objective existential situation of which we have spoken, and because of the processes of dissolution that have severed the profound ties that can spiritually unite the generations. Even a Catholic, Charles Péguy, had spoken of being a father as the "great adventure of modern man," given the utter uncertainty of what his own offspring may be, given the improbability that in our day the child might receive anything more than mere "life" from the father. I have already emphasized that it is not about having or not having that paternal quality, not only physical, that existed in the ancient family and that grounded his authority. Even if this quality were still present—and, in principle, one should assume that it could still be present in the differentiated man—it would be paralyzed by the presence of a refractory and dissociated material in the younger generation. As we have

said, the state of the modern masses is by now such that, even if figures having the stature of true leaders were to appear, they would be the last to be followed. Thus one should not deceive oneself about the formation and education still possible for an offspring born in an environment like that of present society, even if the father were such in a more than legal sense.

The objection that such a position could provoke is certainly not that it involves the danger of a depopulation of the earth, because there is more than a sufficient pandemic and catastrophic reproduction of common humanity, but that thus the differentiated men would renounce the assurance of a lineage that would carry on the heritage of their ideas and way of being, leaving the masses and the most insignificant classes to breed their ever more numerous progeny.

One can overcome this objection by dissociating the physical generation from the spiritual one. In a regime of dissolution, in a world where neither castes, traditions, nor races exist in the proper sense, the two types of generation have ceased to be parallel, and the hereditary continuity of blood no longer represents a favorable condition for a spiritual continuity. We might refer here to that spiritual paternity to which the traditional world accorded priority over solely biological paternity, as when speaking of the relationship between teacher and student, initiator and initiate. This extended to the idea of a rebirth or second birth as a fact independent of any physical paternity, and which created in the person concerned a more intimate and essential tie than any of those that could unite him to the physical father, the family, or any naturalistic community and unity.

This, then, is the special possibility that can be considered as a substitute: it goes back to an order of ideas analogous to the principle of the nation, when we said that a naturalistic unity entering crisis could only be replaced by a unity determined by an idea. To the "adventure" of physically procreating beings who may become isolated, "modern" individuals good only for increasing the senseless world of quantity, one can then oppose the action of awakening, which those who do not spiritually belong to the present world may exert on suitably qualified people, so that the physical disappearance of the former does not leave an unfilled void. Besides, the few differentiated men existing today rarely

find themselves sharing their inner form and orientation on account of sharing the same blood or stock, through heredity. So there is no reason to suppose that things should go otherwise for the next generation. However important the task of assuring oneself a spiritual succession is, its practicability depends on circumstances. It will be realized if and where it can be, without one having to search frantically and, least of all, resort to any kind of proselytism. Above all in this realm, that which is authentic and valid is accomplished under the guidance of a higher, inscrutable wisdom, with the external appearance of casuality, rather than through a direct initiative "willed" by any individual.

28
Relations between the Sexes

I have taken care to distinguish the social problem of the family and marriage from the personal problem of sex. Once again, it is a matter of a separation that, neither normal nor legitimate in a normal world, except in special cases, imposes itself when the world is dissolving. So we come to consider the relationship between man and woman in itself.

Here too, I will first consider the positive aspects that, at least potentially, are offered by certain processes of dissolution, to the extent that what is dissolved belongs to the bourgeois world and, moreover, suffers from distortions and obscurities in sexual matters, due to the predominant religion of the West.

I turn first to that characteristic complex caused by the interference between morality and sexuality, as well as that between spirituality and sexuality. The importance that has been attributed to sexual matters in the field of ethical and spiritual values, often to the point of making them the sole criterion, is nothing less than aberrant.

Vilfredo Pareto[1] spoke of a "sexual religion" that in the nineteenth century, with its taboos, dogmas, and intolerance, accompanied religion as usually understood. It was particularly virulent in Anglo-Saxon countries, where it had, and in part still has as its worthy companions, two other brand-new, dogmatic, secular religions: humanitarian progressivism and the religion of democracy. But, apart from this, there are distortions concerning a much wider field. For example, one of them concerns the very meaning of the term "virtue."[2] It is known that *virtus* in antiquity and even during the Renaissance had the meaning of a force of the soul, of virile quality, of power, while later its prevalent meaning became sexual, so much that Pareto could coin the term

"virtuism" itself to characterize the said puritanical religion. Another typical case of the interference between sexuality and ethics and of the distortion of them is the notion of honor. It is true that this primarily concerned the female sex, but the matter was no less significant for that. For a long time it was held, and still is in certain social strata and regions, that a girl loses her "honor" not only when she has free sexual experiences outside of marriage, but even when she is a victim of rape. A similar absurdity even inspired the theme of some "great art," the grotesque extreme of this perhaps being reached by Lope de Vega's drama *The Best Judge Is the King*, in which a girl, having been kidnapped and violated by a feudal lord, loses her "honor"; but she quickly regains it when the king has the rapist executed and has the girl marry her fiancé. A parallel absurdity is the idea that a man loses his own "honor" if his wife betrays him, whereas, if anything, the opposite would be true; in adultery, it is the woman, and not the man who loses "honor": not by the sexual fact itself, but from a superior point of view, because where marriage is something serious and profound, the woman in marrying freely binds herself to a man, and through her adultery she, first disgracing herself, breaks this ethical tie. So, incidentally, one can see how foolish it was of the bourgeois world to let the blow land on the betrayed husband. It would be equivalent to ridiculing one who suddenly discovers a thief, or a leader when one of his followers breaks his oath of fidelity and betrays him—unless one wants the defense of "honor" to engender in the husband the quality of a jailer or a despot, which is certainly not compatible with a higher ideal of virile dignity.

Even from such banal examples we can clearly see the contamination suffered by ethical values through sexual prejudices. I have already indicated the principles of a "greater morality" that, being dependent on a kind of interior race, cannot be damaged by nihilistic dissolutions: these include truth, justice, loyalty, inner courage, the authentic, socially unconditioned sentiment of honor and shame, control over oneself. These are what are meant by "virtue"; sexual acts have no part in it except indirectly, and only when they lead to a behavior that deviates from these values.

The value that was attributed to virginity by Western religion, even

on a theological plane, relates to the complex mentioned earlier. It is already evident on this plane through the importance and the emphasis on the virginity of Mary, the "Mother of God," which is altogether incomprehensible except on the purely symbolic level. But it was also attested on the moral and normative plane by many opinions recognized as "probable" by Catholic moral theology (that is, recommended because prevalent and defended by thinkers of a particular doctrine, although not unequivocally binding). For example, it would be preferable for a girl to kill herself rather than allow herself to be violated (an idea that even led to the recent "sanctification" of a certain Maria Goretti), or that it would be permissible for her to kill the assailant, if she could save her own anatomical integrity thereby. A similar sentiment is defended in the same terms by the casuistry of moral theology that, when for the salvation of a city the enemy had required the sacrifice of an innocent, she could be sacrificed and the city could consent to surrender her—not, however, if a girl were demanded in order to be raped. So we can see that the sexual taboo was given a greater emphasis than life itself, and many more examples of this could easily be provided. But when, with a regime of interdictions and anathemas, one is so preoccupied with sexual matters, it is evident that one depends on them, no less than if one made a crude exhibition of them. On the whole, this is the case in Christianized Europe—and all the more so since positive religion lacks both the contemplative potential and the orientation toward transcendence, high asceticism, and true sacrality. The realm of morality has become contaminated by the idea of sex, to the extent of the complexes mentioned earlier.

Although all this abnormal order of things is not of recent date, the characteristic fact of the bourgeois period is that it assumed the principal, dissociated, and autonomous characteristics of a "social morality"—precisely with the "virtuism" of which Pareto accuses it, which to a certain extent was no longer subject to religious morality. Now, it is exactly this morality with a sexual basis that is the principal object of the processes of dissolution in recent times. We hear of a "sexual revolution" supposed to remove both inner inhibitions and repressive social taboos. In fact, in today's world "sexual freedom" is being affirmed ever more, as a current practice. But we have to consider this in more detail.

I must emphasize above all that the direction of the processes at work is toward a freeing *of* sex, but in no way a freeing *from* sex.[3] Sex and women are instead becoming dominant forces in present society, an evident fact that is also part of the general phenomenology of every terminal phase of a civilization's cycle. One might speak of a chronic sexual intoxication that is profusely manifested in public life, conduct, and art. Its counterpart is a gynocratic tendency, a sexually oriented preeminence of the woman that relates to the materialistic and practical involvement of the masculine sex: a phenomenon that is clearest in those countries, like the United States, where that involvement is more excessive.

Since I have dealt with it on other occasions,[4] I shall not dwell on this subject here, limiting myself to the collective and, in a certain way, abstract character of eroticism and the fascination centered on the latest female idols, in an atmosphere fed by countless means: cinema, magazines, television, musicals, beauty contests, and so on. Here the real persona of the woman is often a quasi-soulless prop, center of crystallization of that atmosphere of diffuse and chronic sexuality, so that the majority of "stars" with their fascinating features have as persons quite poor sexual qualities, their existential basis being close to that of common, misguided, and rather neurotic girls. To describe them someone has aptly used the image of jellyfish with magnificent iridescent colors that are reduced to a gelatinous mass and evaporate if brought out of the water into sunlight—the water corresponding to the atmosphere of diffuse and collective sexuality.[5]

As for our concerns, my principle is not simply to deplore the fact that all the mores of the past based on sexual prejudices are ever more losing their force; and it should not surprise us that what seemed corruption yesterday is now becoming normal in much of contemporary society. The important thing would be to take advantage of the changed situation in order to affirm a healthier conception of life than that of bourgeois morality, by freeing ethical values from their sexual connections. What was said of the contamination suffered by that morality's interference with the concepts of virtue, honor, and fidelity, can already indicate the right direction. We must recognize that continence and chastity have their proper place only in the framework of a certain type of ascesis and in the

uncommon vocations corresponding to it, as was always thought in the traditional world. Contrary to puritanical opinion, a free sexual life in the case of persons of a certain stature can tell us nothing about their intrinsic value—history is rich in examples of that. What they allow themselves should be measured solely by what they *are*, by the power that they have over themselves.

Relationships between men and women, with regard to living together, should be clearer, more important, and interesting than those defined by bourgeois mores and sexual exclusivism, which understands the significance of female integrity in mere anatomical terms. In principle, the processes of dissolution at work could favor many similar rectifications, if one has a particular human type in sight. However, if one refers to the majority, those possibilities remain entirely hypothetical, because here too, the necessary existential premises are lacking. Today's situation is such that increased freedom in the realm of sex is not connected to a conscious reacquisition of values that accord little importance to "important" sexual matters and oppose the "fetishization" of intersexual human relations, but is caused by the general weakening of any value, of any restraint. The positive advantages that might be drawn from the processes at work are then only virtual, and should not delude us about the actual—and future—tendencies of modern life. Aside from the atmosphere of a diffuse, pandemic, erotic intoxication, "sexual freedom" can lead to banal relationships between men and women, to a materialism, a petty immoralism, and an insipid promiscuity where the most elementary conditions for sexual experiences of any interest or intensity do not exist. It is easy to see that this is the effective outcome of the proclaimed "sexual revolution": sex "free of complexes" that becomes a general current of mass consumption.

The aspects of the crisis of female modesty are another part of this.[6] Beside the cases in which almost full female nudity feeds the atmosphere of abstract, collective sexuality, we should consider those cases in which nudity has lost every serious "functional" character—cases which by their habitual, public character almost engender an involuntarily chaste glance that is capable of considering a fully undressed girl with the same aesthetic disinterest as observing a fish or a cat. Furthermore, by adding the products of commercialized mass

pornography, the polarity between the sexes is diluted, as seen in the conduct of "modern" life where the youth of both sexes are everywhere intermingled, promiscuously and "unaffectedly," with almost no tension, as if they were turnips and cabbages in a vegetable garden. We can see how this particular result of the processes of dissolution relates to what I have said of the "animal ideal," as well as the correspondence between the East and the West. The primitive, erotic life so typical among American youth is not at all far from the promiscuity of male and female "comrades" in the communist realm, free from the "individualistic accidents of bourgeois decadence," who in the end reflect little on sexual matters, their prevalent interests being channeled elsewhere into collective life and class.[7]

We can consider separately the cases in which the climate of diffuse and constant eroticism leads one to seek in pure sexuality, more or less along the same lines as drugs, frantic sensations that mask the emptiness of modern existence. The testimonies of certain beatniks and similar groups reveal that their pursuit of the sexual orgasm causes an anguish aroused by the idea that they and their partner might not reach it, even to the point of exhaustion.

This use of sex deals with negative forms and quasi-caricatures that may, however, refer to something more serious, because the pure sexual experience also has its metaphysical value, the intensity of intercourse being able to produce an existential rupture of planes and an opening beyond ordinary consciousness. Along with the sacralization of sex, these possibilities were recognized in the traditional world. Having dealt with this in *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, I shall only include here a brief reference as it concerns the differentiated man.

As I have said, the present situation excludes the possibility of integrating sex in a life full of meaning within institutional frameworks. So we can only think of certain cases in which, despite everything, favorable conditions exceptionally and sporadically converge. Certainly, the romantic bourgeois idea of love as a union of "souls" can no longer have any place for the man in question. The significance of human relationships can only be relative to him, and he can no more seek the meaning of existence in a woman than in family and children. In particular, he must put aside the idea, or ambition, of human possession,

of completely "having" the other being as a person. Here too, a sense of distance would be natural, and could indicate a mutual respect. The positive use of the greater freedom of modern conduct and of the modern transformation of the woman can be seen in relationships that, without being superficial or "naturalistic," have an evident character, grounded on the social and ethical side in loyalty, camaraderie, independence, and courage. The man and woman always remain conscious as two beings with distinct paths, who, in the world in dissolution, can overcome their fundamental, existential isolation only through the effect of pure sexual polarity. If there is no need to "possess" another human being, the woman will not be a mere object of "pleasure," a source of sensations that are sought as means to assert oneself. The integrated being has no need of such assurances; at most he requires "nourishment." That which can be gained from the polarity just mentioned, if adequately used, can provide one of the principal materials to feed that special active and living intoxication of which I have repeatedly spoken, above all when discussing the Dionysian experience.

This brings us to the other possibility, that offered by the regime of sexuality that renders it in a certain way autonomous, and detached. As we have seen, the first possibility is "naturalistic" degeneracy. This contrasts with the second possibility, which is that of the "elementary": the assumption of the sexual experience in its elementarity. One of the themes of *Eros and the Mysteries of Love* was shown in the words: "Since psychoanalysis has emphasized the subpersonal primordialism of sex by applying a degrading inversion, it is necessary to oppose it with a metaphysical perspective."[8] On the one hand, I have examined to this end certain dimensions of transcendence that exist in latent or hidden forms in profane love itself, while on the other hand I have gathered from the world of Tradition many testimonies about the use of sex in the sense indicated, when I spoke of how higher influences could transform the general rule of union between men and women. If, however, we do not want to deal with mere concepts, but with their practical application, today I can only refer to sporadic, unusual experiences open only to the differentiated human type, because they presuppose a special interior constitution that survives in him alone.

Another presupposition regards the woman: it is that the erotic,

fascinating quality widespread in today's environment is concentrated and almost "precipitated" (in a chemical sense) in certain female types precisely in terms of an "elementary" quality. Therefore, in a sexual relationship with a woman, the situation I have often considered would reappear—that is, a dangerous situation that requires a self-mastery, the surpassing of an inner limit by anyone who intends actively to attempt it. Despite a certain exasperation or crudeness due to the different environment, the meanings originally connected to the polarity of the sexes could reappear in this context, if not yet suffocated by the puritan religion of the "spirit," and if they were not enfeebled, sentimentalized, and made bourgeois, but also not primitivized or simply corrupted. These significances are found in many legends, myths, and sagas of very different traditions. In the true, typical, absolute woman, they recognized a spiritually dangerous presence, a fascinating and even dissolutive force; this explains the attitude and the precepts of that particular line of ascesis averse to sex and woman, as if to cut off their danger. The man who has not chosen either to renounce the world or to be impassively detached from it can face the danger and even derive nourishment from the poison, if he uses sex without becoming a slave to it, and if he is able to evoke the profound, elemental dimensions in a certain transbiological sense.

As I have said, in the present world these possibilities are the exception and can only offer themselves by happy chance, given their presuppositions, and also under the unfavorable circumstances of the dullness often presented by the woman as current civilization has made her. An "absolute woman" cannot in fact easily imagine herself in the guise of an "up-to-date" and "modern" girl. More generally, she cannot easily imagine the necessary feminine qualities mentioned earlier as compatible with those required for relationships that, as we have said, should also have a character of freedom, clarity, and independence. As a result, an entirely unique form of woman would be necessary, a seemingly paradoxical form, because in a certain sense she should reproduce that "duality" (inner duality) of the differentiated male type; which, despite certain appearances, is far from the typical orientation of modern woman's life.

In reality, the entrance of the woman with equal rights into practi-

cal modern life, her new freedom, her finding herself side by side with men in the streets, offices, professions, factories, sports, and now even in political and military life, is one of those dissolutive phenomena in which, in most cases, it is difficult to perceive anything positive. In essence, all this is simply the renunciation of the woman's right to be a woman. The promiscuity of the sexes in modern existence can only "relieve" the woman to a greater or lesser degree of the energy with which she is endowed; she enters freer relationships only by regressing, because they are primitivized, prejudiced by all the factors and the practical, predominating interests of modern life. So the processes at work in present society, with woman's new status, can satisfy only one of the two requirements, that of clearer, freer, and more essential relationships, beyond both moralism and the erosive quality of bourgeois sentimentalism and "idealism," but certainly cannot satisfy the second—the activation of the most profound forces that define the absolute woman.

It lies outside of the scope of this book to consider the meaning of existence not only from the man's point of view, but also from the woman's. It is certain that in an epoch of dissolution the solution for the woman is more difficult than that for the man. One should bear in mind the already irreversible consequences of the error through which the woman believed herself to win a "personality" of her own using the man as a model: the "man," in a manner of speaking, because today's typical forms of activity are almost all anodyne, they engage "neuter" faculties of a predominantly intellectual and practical order that have no specific relation to either sex, or even to any particular race or nationality, and are exercised under the sign of the absurdity that characterizes all the systems of contemporary society. It is a world of existence without quality and of mere masks, in which the modern woman in most cases simply takes care of the cosmetic aspect, being so inwardly diminished and displaced, and lacking any basis for that active and essentializing depersonalization of which I have spoken, regarding the relations between person and mask.

In an inauthentic existence, the regime of diversions, surrogates, and tranquilizers that pass for today's "distractions" and "amusements" does not yet allow the modern woman to foresee the crisis that awaits her when she recognizes how meaningless are those male occupations

for which she has fought, when the illusions and the euphoria of her conquests vanish, and when she realizes that, given the climate of dissolution, family and children can no longer give her a sense of satisfaction in life. Meanwhile, as a result of diminished tension even man and sex can no longer mean a great deal to her; they cannot be her natural center of existence as they were for the traditional absolute woman, but can only be of value as one ingredient of a diffused and externalized existence, no more important than fashion, sport, a narcissistic cult of the body, practical interests, and so on. The destructive effects so often produced in modern women by a mistaken vocation or warped ambitions, and also the force of circumstances, enter into the equation. Thus, when the race of true men is also nearly extinct, and modern man has little left of virility in a higher sense, there is little point in the saying about the true man's capacity to "redeem," to "save the woman within woman." There is more of a danger that a true man today, in many cases, might find appropriate another maxim, that spoken by the old woman to Zarathustra: "Are you going to women? Don't forget your whip!"[9] —if it could be applied with impunity and fruitfully in these progressive times. The possibility of restoring to sex, even sporadically, its elementarity, its transcendence, and perhaps even its danger in the context mentioned, appears very much prejudiced by all these factors.

In summary, the general picture that today's society presents in the field of sex reflects in a particular way the negative aspects of a period of transition. The regime of residues, influenced in Latin countries by Catholic and bourgeois conformism, and by Puritanism in Protestant countries, still possesses a certain force. Where only the outer inhibitions have been removed, sexual life frequently assumes neurotic forms. In the opposite case of the younger generation's completely emancipated behavior, without complexes, the tendency is toward an insipid naturalism and primitivism in sexual relations. At the same time the general climate prevails of a fascination with sex and the predominance of woman as its object, without any effective differentiation, often to the point of regression, of the absolute types of femininity and virility. In particular, the emancipated feminine element becomes dimmed when involved in the social mechanism. Finally, there are the marginal cases of an exasperated use of sex, often associated with drugs, by a youth

that is existentially traumatized and at risk, in the context of a chaotic search for surrogates for a firm sense of existence.

Thus in the current situation, for the type that concerns us, the prospect of the use of more profound sexual possibilities in freer and clearer relationships between men and women can only occur in rare, unexpected cases. Apart from this, considering the current processes and their effects, the only ones of value to him are those disintegrating ones that may help to separate the realms, and which articulate the principles belonging to a higher law of life than the preceding sexual morality. Lacking anything better, he takes stock of the free space that is opened when important sexual and erotic matters are rendered less important, though not discounting what they can offer on their own level.

Part 8

The Spiritual Problem

29

The "Second Religiosity"

In chapter 19 I showed how utterly baseless is the idea of certain popularizers of the latest physics, who claim that it has graduated beyond its previous materialism and is leading toward a new, spiritual vision of reality. Now a similar deception lies at the basis of the pretences of what we might call "neospiritualism."[1] In some circles the same conclusion is drawn, namely that we are returning to spirituality, because of the proliferating tendencies toward the supernatural and the supersensible on the part of movements, cults, sects, lodges, and conventicles of every description. They have in common the ambition to supply Western man with something more than the forms of positive and dogmatic religion, reckoned inadequate, empty, and inefficient, and to lead him beyond materialism.

This too is an illusion, caused by the lack of principles so typical of our contemporaries. The truth is that here too, we are facing phenomena that in most cases are part and parcel of the dissolving processes of the age, and that despite all appearances have an existentially negative character, representing a kind of counterpart in alliance with Western materialism.

To understand the true place and significance of this new spiritualism, one can refer to what Spengler wrote about the "second religiosity." In his principal work, *The Decline of the West*, this author expounded ideas that, for all their grave confusions and personal digressions of every kind, partly reproduce the traditional conception of history. He speaks there of a process in the various cycles of civilization that leads from the organic forms of life at their origin, in which quality, spirituality, living tradition, and race prevail, to late and soulless urban forms in which the abstract intellect, economy and finance, pragmatism, and the world of the masses predominate, resting

on a grandeur that is purely material. When such forms appear, a civilization is heading for its end. The terminal state has been characterized more forcibly by Guénon,[2] who, using an image drawn from the decomposition of organisms, mentions two phases: first that of rigor mortis (corresponding in civilization to the period of materialism), and following that the ultimate phase in which the corpse disintegrates.

According to Spengler, one of the phenomena that consistently accompanies the terminal phase of a civilization is the "second religiosity." On the fringes of structures of barbaric grandeur—rationalism, practical atheism, and materialism—there spring up sporadic forms of spirituality and mysticism, even irruptions from the supersensible, which do not indicate a re-ascent but are symptoms of decay. Their expressions no longer take their stamp from the religion of the origins, from the severe forms inherited from the dominating elites who stood at the center of an organic and qualitative civilization (this being exactly what I call the world of Tradition). In the phase in question, even the positive religions lose any higher dimension; they become secularized, one-dimensional, and cease to exercise their original functions. The "second religiosity" develops outside them—often even in opposition to them—but also outside the principal and predominant currents of existence, and signifies, in general, a phenomenon of escapism, alienation, and confused compensation that in no way impinges seriously on the reality of a soulless, mechanistic, and purely earthly civilization. This then is the place and the sense of the "second religiosity." The picture can be completed by referring to Guénon, an author of far deeper doctrine than Spengler. He has stated that after nineteenth-century materialism and positivism had closed man off to what was effectively above him—the truly supernatural, the transcendent—the many twentieth-century currents appearing under the guise of "spirituality" or "new psychology" tended to open him up to that which was beneath him—beneath the existential level that generally corresponds to the complete human being. One might also use an expression of Aldous Huxley, who speaks of a "self-transcendence downwards" as opposed to a "self-transcendence upwards."

Since the West truly finds itself today in the soulless, collectivistic, and materialistic phase corresponding to the closing of a cycle of civilization,

there can be no doubt that the great majority of facts interpreted as the prelude to a new spirituality simply belong to this "second religiosity." They represent something promiscuous, fragmented, and subintellectual; they resemble the fluorescence that appears when corpses decompose. Thus the currents in question should not be seen as counteracting our present twilight civilization, but as its counterpart, and if they take hold, they might even be the prelude to a more acute phase of regression and dissolution. This is so particularly when it is not merely a matter of states of mind and theories, but when a morbid interest in the sensational and the occult is accompanied by practicing evocations and opening up the underground strata of the human psyche—as happens not infrequently in spiritualism and even in psychoanalysis. Here one may well speak, with Guénon, of "fissures in the Great Wall,"[3] dangerous faults in that protecting barrier that, despite everything, protects every normal and sound-minded person in ordinary life from the action of genuine dark forces that are hidden behind the façade of the sense-world and beneath the threshold of sound and conscious human thoughts. From this point of view, neospiritualism appears even more dangerous than materialism or positivism, whose primitivity and intellectual myopia at least serve to reinforce that "wall" which, while limiting, also protects.

In another respect, nothing is more indicative of the level of this neospiritualism than the human material of the majority of those who cultivate it. While the ancient sciences had the prerogative of a superior humanity drawn from the royal and priestly castes, today's new anti-materialist gospel is bandied about by mediums, popular "maguses," dowsers, spiritists, Anthroposophists, newspaper astrologers and seers, Theosophists, "healers," popularizers of an Americanized yoga, and so forth, accompanied by a few exalted mystics and extemporizing prophets. Mystification and superstition are constantly mingled in neospiritualism, another of whose typical traits, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, is the high percentage of women (women who are failures, dropouts, or "past it"). In fact, its general orientation may well be described as a "feminine" spirituality.

This is a topic I have already addressed and explained on many occasions. For the order of ideas that concerns us here, all that matters is to lay bare the appalling confusion that can arise from the frequent

references in neospiritualism stemming from Anglo-Indian Theosophy, to certain doctrines related to what I call the world of Tradition, particularly in its Eastern varieties.

Now a clear distinction is necessary. Whatever of Tradition is to be found in the currents in question is nearly always reduced to counterfeits of those doctrines, to residues or fragments of them mixed in with the worst of Western prejudices and with purely personal divagations. Neospiritualism in general has not the slightest notion of the plane to which the ideas it borrows truly belong, any more than of what its followers are really seeking. Such ideas usually end up as mere surrogates for the same needs as propel others toward faith and simple religion—a serious error, because the ideas really concern metaphysics, and, quite often, those teachings that even in the traditional world belonged exclusively to the esoteric doctrines that were not divulged. Besides, while it is said that the reason the neospiritualists are interested in promulgating them and even taking them into the marketplace is to be found in the decadence and aridity of Western religion, another reason is that many of them believe that these teachings are more "open" and consoling, and that they exempt one from the duties and bonds belonging to the positive faiths; whereas the opposite is the case, even if it is a matter of very different bonds. A typical example is the kind of moralizing, humanitarian, and pacifist values recently attached to the Buddhist doctrine (according to Nehru, Buddhism is "the only alternative to the H-bomb"). On a different level, we see someone like Jung "valuing" in psychoanalytic terms every type of mystery teaching and symbol, adapting them for the treatment of neurotic and schizoid individuals.

After all this, one has to wonder about how far the practical effect of neospiritualism is negative in another direction: that of throwing discredit on the teachings concerned, which are traceable to the esoteric doctrines of the world of Tradition, because of the distorted and spurious way in which they have been publicized and propagandized by the currents in question. One must in fact have a very precise inner orientation, and no less precise an instinct, to be capable of separating the positive from the negative, and of gaining from these currents an incentive toward a true reconnection with the origins and the rediscovery of a lost knowledge. And should this occur, and one enter the right path,

one should not hesitate to abandon everything to do with that casual point of departure, that is, the spiritualism of today and especially the spiritual level corresponding to it: a level that is completely alien to the grandeur, the power, the severe and sovereign character proper to that which is situated, in effect, beyond the human, and which alone can open a way beyond the world that is still living out the "death of God."

This will suffice regarding the doctrinal plane; and the differentiated man with whom we are concerned, if his attention is drawn to that domain, should be quite clear about the distinction made here. Should he lack more direct and authentic sources of information, beyond the by-products and the ambiguous glamour of the "second religiosity," he will need to undertake a task of discrimination and integration. This task is at least made easier by the fact that the modern science of religions and kindred disciplines have published the fundamental texts of various great traditions, in versions that may show their academic and specialist limitations (philology, orientalism, and so on), but that are free from the distortions, the irrelevancies, and the adulterations of neospiritualism. Thus one has the basis, the "*materia prima*," for going further after the initial and occasional impulse.[4]

There is also the practical problem to be considered. Neospiritualism often looks to practice and inner experience, borrowing from the different worlds of antiquity or the East not only ideas of the supersensible, but also paths and disciplines for removing the limits of ordinary human consciousness. Here is the same dubious situation as was mentioned in the context of Catholic rites that have ended up profaned and deprived of any effective "operative" significance, through being applied to the masses without considering the conditions required for their efficacy. In the present case the situation is even more dubious, because the goal is more ambitious.

We can set aside the most spurious, "occultist" varieties of neospiritualism, dominated by the interest in "clairvoyance," in this or that supposed "power," and any kind of contact with the invisible. The differentiated man can only be indifferent to all of that; the problem of the meaning of existence is not going to be resolved in that way, because there one is still always within the realm of phenomena. Instead of a profound existential change, it may even cause an evasion and a greater dis-

persion, like that caused on another plane by the stupefying proliferation of scientific knowledge and technology. However, neospiritualism does occasionally envisage something more and different, even if confusedly, when it refers to "initiation" and when this is postulated as the goal of various practices, "exercises," rites, yogic techniques, and so on.

I cannot simply condemn this out of hand, but it is necessary to dispel some illusions. Initiation, taken in its strict and legitimate sense, means a real ontological and existential change of man's state, an opening to the fact of the transcendent dimension. It would be the undeniable realization, the integral and deconditioning appropriation, of the quality that I have considered as the basis of the human type who concerns us, the man still spiritually rooted in the world of Tradition. Thus the problem arises of what one should think when some neospiritualist current exhumes and presents "initiatic" paths and methods.

This problem has to be circumscribed by the limits of this book, which is not concerned with those who leave their environment and concentrate all their energies on transcendence, as the ascetic or the saint can do in the religious realm. I am concerned rather with the human type who accepts living in the world and the age, despite having a different inner form from that of his contemporaries. This man knows that it is impossible, in a civilization like the present one, to revive the structures that in the world of Tradition gave a meaning to the whole of existence. But in that same world of Tradition, what might correspond to the idea of initiation belonged to the summit, to a separate domain with precise limits, to a path having an exceptional and exclusive character. It was not a question of the realm in which the general law, handed down from the heights of Tradition, shaped common existence within a given civilization, but of a higher plane, virtually released from that very law by the fact of being at its origin. I cannot go here into the distinctions to be made within the domain of initiation itself; we must just keep firmly in mind the higher and more essential significance that initiation has when one is placed on the metaphysical plane: a significance already mentioned as consisting of the spiritual deconditioning of the being. Those lesser forms that correspond to caste and tribal initiations, and also to the minor initiations linked to one or another cosmic power, as in certain cults of antiquity—

forms quite different, therefore, from the "great liberation"—must be left aside here, not least because no basis for them exists any longer in the modern world.

Well then, if initiation is taken in its highest, metaphysical sense, one must assume a priori that it is not even a hypothetical possibility in an epoch like the present, in an environment like the one we live in, and also given the general inner formation of individuals (now feeling the fatal effect of a collective ancestry that for centuries has been absolutely unfavorable). Anyone who sees things differently either does not understand the matter, or else is deceiving himself and others.[5] What has to be negated most decisively is the transposition to this field of the individualistic and democratic view of the "self-made man," that is, the idea that anyone who wants can become an "initiate," and that he can also become one on his own, through his own strength alone, by resorting to various kinds of "exercises" and practices. This is an illusion, the truth being that through his own strength alone, the human individual cannot go beyond human individuality, and that any positive result in this field is conditioned by the presence and action of a genuine power of a different, nonindividual order. And I can say categorically that in this respect, the possible cases are reduced to only three.

The first case is where one already naturally possesses this other power. This is the exceptional case of what was called "natural dignity," not derived from simple human birth; it is comparable to what in the religious domain is called election. The differentiated man posited here does possess a structure akin to the type to whom this first possibility refers. But for "natural dignity" in this specific, technical sense to be validated in him, a host of problems arise that can only be overcome if the trial of the self, spoken of in chapter 1, happens to be oriented in this direction.

The other cases concern an "acquired dignity." The second case is the possibility of the power in question appearing in cases of profound crises, spiritual traumas, or desperate actions, with the consequence of a violent breakthrough of the existential and ontological plane. Here it is possible that if the person is not wrecked, he may be led to participate in that force, even without his having held it consciously as a goal. I should clarify the situation by adding that in such cases a quantity of

energy must already have been accumulated, which the circumstances cause to suddenly appear, with a consequent change of state. Therefore the circumstances appear as an occasional cause but not a determining cause, being necessary but not sufficient. It is like the last drop of water that makes the vase overflow, but only when it is already full, or the breaking of a dike that does not cause an inundation unless the water is already pressing on it.

The third and last case concerns the grafting of the power in question onto the individual by virtue of the action of a representative of a preexistent initiatic organization who is duly qualified to do so. It is the equivalent of priestly ordination in the religious field, which in theory imprints on the person an "indelible character," qualifying him for the efficacious performance of the rites. The author already cited here, René Guénon—who in modern times has been almost alone in treating such arguments with authority and seriousness, not without denouncing, too, the deviations, errors, and mystifications of neospiritualism—considers this third case almost to the exclusion of the others. For my part, I think that in our time this case is virtually excluded in practical terms, because of the almost complete nonexistence of the organizations in question. If organizations of the kind have always had a more or less underground character in the West, because of the nature of the religion that has come to predominate there, with its repressions and persecutions, in recent times they have virtually disappeared. As for other areas, especially the East, such organizations have become ever more rare and inaccessible, even when the forces that they control have not been withdrawn, in parallel with the general process of degeneration and modernization that has now invaded those areas, too. Most of all, today the East itself is no longer in a position to furnish most people with anything but by-products, in a "regime of residues." That much is obvious if one examines the spiritual stature of those from the East who have set to exporting and publicizing "Eastern wisdom" among us.[6]

Guénon did not see the situation in such pessimistic terms because of two misunderstandings. The first derived from his not only considering initiation in the integral and actual sense, as described here, but introducing the concept of a "virtual initiation" that can take place

without any effect being perceptible by the consciousness; thus it remains as inoperative in concrete terms as—to take another parallel from the Catholic religion—the supernatural quality of being a "son of God" is in the vast majority of cases, though this is dispensed at baptism, even to retarded infants. Guénon's second misunderstanding comes from supposing that the transmission of such a force is real even in the case of organizations that once had an initiatic character, but which time has brought to a state of extreme degenerescence. There is good reason to suppose that the spiritual power that originally constituted their center has withdrawn, leaving nothing behind the façade but a sort of psychic cadaver.[7] In neither point can I agree with Guénon, and so I think that today the third case is even more improbable than the other two.

Referring now to the man who concerns us, if the idea of an "initiation" is to figure on his mental horizon, he should clearly recognize the distance between that and the climate of neospiritualism, nor should he have any illusions about it. The most he can conceive of as a practical possibility is a basic orientation in terms of preparation, for which he will find a natural predisposition in himself. But realization has to be left undetermined, and it is well for him to recall the postnihilistic vision of life, described above, which excludes any reference point that might cause a deviation or decentering—even if the diversion, as in this case, were linked to the impatient awaiting of the moment in which he would finally achieve an opening. The Zen saying is again valid in this context: "He who seeks the Way, leaves the Way."

A realistic view of the situation and an honest self-evaluation indicate that the only serious and essential task today is to give ever more emphasis to the dimension of transcendence in oneself, more or less concealed as it may be. Study of traditional wisdom and knowledge of its doctrines may assist, but they will not be effective without a progressive change affecting the existential plane, and more particularly, the basic life force of oneself as a person: that force that for most people is bound to the world and is simply the will to live. One can compare this effect to the induction of magnetism into a piece of iron—an induction that also imprints on it a direction. Afterwards one can suspend the iron and move it about as one wishes, but after oscillating for

a certain time and amplitude, it will always return to point toward the pole. When the orientation toward the transcendent no longer has a merely mental or emotional character, but has come to penetrate a person's being, the most essential work is done, the seed has penetrated the earth, and the rest is, in a way, secondary and consequential. All the experiences and actions that, when one lives in the world, especially in an epoch like ours, may have the character of a diversion and be tied to various contingencies, will then have the same irrelevant effect as the displacing of the magnetized needle, after which it resumes its direction. Anything more that may eventually be realized, as I have said, is left to circumstance and to an invisible wisdom. And here the horizons should not be restricted to those of the individual, finite existence that the differentiated man finds himself living here and now.

Thus, setting aside the far-off and overly pretentious goals of an absolute and actual initiation understood in metaphysical terms, even the differentiated man should think himself fortunate if he can actually succeed in producing this modification, which integrates quite naturally the partial effects of the attitudes defined for him, in many different domains, in the preceding pages.

30
Death
The Right Over Life

In our examination of existentialism, we encountered Heidegger's conception of existence as "living for death." He makes death a sort of center of gravity, because it is there that the realization of the absolute and final sense of existence, of "Dasein," has been displaced: something that even recalls the religious conception of life as preparation for death. We have seen that all the premises of Heidegger's philosophy certainly make this outcome of existence ending in death appear negative—almost ecstatically negative.

This does not prevent the idea of death from having a particular meaning for the differentiated man; on the contrary, in a certain way it can be his touchstone. Here too, it is a matter of seeing how far he has been invaded, even beneath the threshold of his ordinary consciousness, by the way of feeling that has come to be existentially determined in Western man in general, whether through complex processes of involution, or through the conceptions of the dominant, theistic religion.

Facing the idea of death, the end of the "person," his first test naturally refers to establishing in the self the incapacity for that anguish that, according to Heidegger, one should "have the courage to feel," while also discounting all those prospects of the beyond and those otherworldly judgments that popular forms of religion have used to control the individual by working on the subintellectual part of his soul.

Here too, we can see that some processes of dissolution in the modern world are virtually ambivalent. Not only have atheism and materialism contributed to banishing the terrors of the soul facing death, but the tragedy of death itself has often been trivialized by the collective catastrophic events of recent times. Today death occurs more simply and easily than in earlier times, and in turn diminishes the importance

of human life, parallel to the growing insignificance and irrelevance that have marked the individual in the modern mechanized world of the masses. In addition, during the indiscriminate carpet bombings of the recent war, many could arrive at an attitude in which the death of any person, even a relative, became a natural and habitual event, having no more impact than the destruction of something merely material and external. Meanwhile, the idea of the uncertainty of life also enters into the order of habitual events, along with the prospect that tomorrow one could cease to exist.

In most cases the result of all this is a numbing, which alone can perhaps explain the strange Heideggerian reaction of approving anguish in the face of death. But a contrary, positive result should not be excluded when similar experiences favor an inner calm, under the sign of that which remains beyond the individual and the bond of the physical I. In antiquity, Lucretius made a functional, pragmatic use of something like modern atheistic science: in order to banish the fears of the beyond, he maintained the Olympic idea of the divine, but recognized the gods as distant essences that do not intervene in the world, and should be valued by the wise only as ideals of ontological perfection.

These aspects could provide a positive climate in the modern world for the differentiated man, because that which has been affected only concerns a vision of humanized life devoid of the sense of great distances. He can then consider a particular "contemplation of death" as a positive factor, as a challenge, and as a measure of his inner strength. He can also follow the well-known ancient maxim of considering every day as the last of his individual existence: at the prospect, not only should he maintain his calm, but he should not even change anything in his thinking or acting. Here an example could be the kamikaze suicide pilots who had vowed to die; the prospect of being called at any moment to execute a mission with no return did not exclude them from ordinary occupations, training, and recreation, and was not at all weighed down by a dismal sense of tragedy, even when lasting for months. More generally, the idea of death is a matter of surpassing an inner limit, of breaking a bond. To a certain extent, it brings us back to what was said in the first chapter. The positive *contemplatio mortis*, to which I referred, no longer gives importance to staying alive or not, and

leaves death behind one, so to speak, without being paralyzed by it. On the contrary: from this point one should enter into a higher, exalted, free form of living, carried by a sort of magical, lucid intoxication.

There is one factor that positively undramatizes the idea of death: it is that mentioned when speaking of the traditional doctrine of pre-existence. The differentiated man cannot think that his being begins with his physical, corporeal birth, and ends with his death. However, he can neither make the beyond the center of gravity of his life, as in the religious theory of salvation, nor can he regard terrestrial existence as the mere ascetic preparation for death. We have seen that he solves the problem of the meaning of life in the epoch of nihilism by displacing the I toward the dimension of "being." In the preceding paragraph I spoke of the attitude consistent with this displacement, which should existentially pervade the person, just as magnetism permeates a metal. Even if in many cases the force produced from this attitude can only act sensibly beyond this existence, it should still be able to assure a calm and secure life. An Eastern saying puts it as follows: "Life on earth is a journey in the night hours." One can explain its positive content by referring to the sensation of a "before" (with respect to human existence) and "after" (with respect to the same). In metaphysical terms, birth is a change of state and so is death; the human condition of earthly existence is only a restricted section in a continuum, in a current that traverses many other states.

In general, but particularly in a chaotic epoch in dissolution like the present one, it can be difficult to grasp the sense of this apparition of the being that one is, in the guise of a certain person, who lives in a given time and in a given place, who goes through these experiences, of whom this will be the end: it is like the confused sensation of a region traversed in a night journey where only a few scattered lights reveal some glimpses of the landscape. Nevertheless, one should maintain the sentiment, or presentiment, of one who when getting on a train knows he will get off it, and that when he gets off he will also see the entire course traveled, and will go further. This sentiment favors an immanent firmness and security, distinctly different from the state that arises in the soul facing death within the framework of a creationist theistic religion, in which whatever part of the being is superior and anterior to life, thus

also metaphysically surviving the death that ends it, remains effectively hidden.

However, any change of state involves a crisis; only the traditional view mentioned earlier can completely eliminate the problematic nature of the beyond and the event of death itself. Here, again, we would have to examine teachings that fall outside the scope of this book. I will limit myself to showing that the valid attitude toward the beyond is the same attitude that I proposed for life in general: that of a transcendental confidence, joined on one side by the "heroic" and "sacrificial" disposition (readiness to actively take oneself beyond oneself), on the other by one's capacity to dominate his soul, impulses, and imagination: just as one who, in a difficult and risky situation does not lose control of himself, doing lucidly and without hesitation all that can be done. Through this, one should benefit from all the recommendations in the preceding pages, recommendations that can then be as valid beyond life as they are for life in the current epoch. Last but not least, they include the disposition of being ready "to bear lethal blows on one's own being without being destroyed."

At this point, we shall briefly turn our attention to a particular problem, the right over one's own life, understood as the freedom to accept it or to put an end to it voluntarily. The examination of this issue will also allow a further clarification of some points considered earlier.

Suicide, condemned by most moralities with social and religious foundations, has in fact been permitted by two doctrines whose norms of life are not far from those indicated for the differentiated man in the present epoch: Stoicism and Buddhism. One can refer to the ideas of Seneca regarding Stoicism, recalling above all the general background of its vision of life. I have already said that for Seneca the true man would be above the gods themselves because they, by their very nature, do not know adversity and misfortune, whereas he is exposed to them, but has the power to triumph over them. Moreover, Seneca sees the beings that are most harshly tested as the worthiest, recalling this analogy: in war it is the most capable, sure, and qualified persons that leaders entrust with the most exposed positions and the hardest tasks. Usually it is this virile and agonistic conception that applies when suicide is condemned and stigmatized as cowardice and desertion. (There

is a saying attributed by Cicero to the Pythagoreans: "To leave the place that one is assigned in life is not permitted without an order from the leader, who is God.") Instead Seneca reached the opposite conclusion, and put the justification of suicide directly into the mouth of divinity (*De Providentia*, 6.7–9). He makes the divinity say that he has given the superior man, the sage, not only a force stronger than any contingency, and something more than being exempt from evils, namely the power to triumph over them interiorly, but has also ensured that no one can hold him back against his will: the path to "exit" is open to him—*patet exitus*. "Wherever you do not want to fight, it is always possible to retreat. You have been given nothing easier than death."

Given the presuppositions mentioned earlier with regard to the general vision of life, there is no doubt that Seneca did not intend this decision to refer to cases in which death is sought because a given situation appears unbearable: especially then, one could *not* permit oneself the act. Here too it is unnecessary to add what is equally valid for all those who are driven to cut their life short due to emotional and impassioned motives, because this would be equivalent to recognizing one's own passivity and impotence toward the irrational part of one's soul. The same is even true for cases in which social motives intervene. Both the ideal Stoic type and the differentiated man do not permit these motives to intimately touch them, as if their dignity were injured by what binds them to social life. They would never be driven to put an end to their own existence for these motives, which are included by the Stoics in the category of "that which does not depend on me." The only exception we can consider is the case of a disgrace not before others whose judgment and contempt one cannot bear, but before oneself, because of one's own downfall. Considering all this, Seneca's maxim can only have the meaning of an enhancement of the inner freedom of a superior being. It is not a matter of retreating because one does not feel strong enough before such ordeals and circumstances; rather, it is a matter of the sovereign right—that one always keeps in reserve—to either accept these ordeals or not, and even to draw the line when one no longer sees a meaning in them, and after having sufficiently demonstrated to oneself the capacity to face them. Impassibility is taken for granted, and the right to "exit" is justifiable as one of the possibilities to be considered,

in principle, only for the sake of decreeing that our circumstances have our assent, that we are really active in them, and that we are not just making a virtue of necessity. This Stoic point of view is intelligible and, what is more, unassailable.

We turn now to Buddhism, whose orientation is more or less the same. Also there the most frequent kind of suicide is forbidden: whenever one is driven to renounce life in the name of life itself, that is, because some form of a will to live, enjoy, and be worthwhile has been hindered or thwarted, killing oneself is censured. In fact, in these cases the act is not judged as a freeing of oneself but, on the contrary, as the extreme, even negative, form of attachment to life, of dependence on life. No transfiguring beyond can be expected by one who uses such violence on himself; in other states of being, the law of an existence devoid of peace, stability, and light is once again asserted over him. Buddhism even goes as far as condemning as a deviation the impulse toward extinction, *nirvana*, if one discovers that it is connected to any desire, any "thirst." At the same time, like Stoicism, it permits suicide with a similar restriction: it does not apply to the commonality, but to a superior and ascetic type in whom are found, intensified, many traits of the Stoic sage; those who in a certain way have realized a separation of the Self, to the extent of being virtually beyond both living and nonliving.

Though obviously this prospect can also be included in the horizon of the differentiated man, it leaves the path open for some difficulties. First of all, if he has reached the spiritual level just indicated, what could ever make him initiate a voluntary death? Judging from certain concrete cases alleged by Buddhist texts, some of the cases mentioned earlier would seem to be in question: in some circumstances there is no reason to feel committed beyond a certain limit. One can then "exit," almost as when one has had enough of a game, or as when one shoos a fly away after having let it settle for a time on one's face. It remains to be seen how far one can be truly sure of oneself, and sincere with oneself, in cases of this kind.

Up to this point, it is the "person" that we have essentially considered. The issue becomes more complex when going beyond the level of the person and referring to the traditional doctrine in which the being

does not begin with earthly existence. Then a higher concept of responsibility, and also of risk, shows itself. It is not the responsibility called upon in the framework of a theistic and creationist religion, which condemns suicide by appealing to a kind of military loyalty as in Cicero's terms: one should not abandon his post. Such an idea appears absurd when the preexistence of the soul is denied (as that religion denies it) before its union with the body in the human condition. In this "creationist" hypothesis one cannot sensibly speak of responsibility, because before being in the assigned "post" one did not exist at all, and because one suddenly finds oneself in it without having wanted or accepted it. Nor can one speak of a "military obligation" toward a life received, but not requested. I have already examined the dead end to which such a conception, connected to the theistic creationist point of view, leads when it is assailed by nihilism. The extreme here is in Dostoyevsky, with Kirilov's existential revolt and "metaphysical suicide" in which he takes his own life only to prove to himself that he is stronger than fear, his sovereignty, and an absolute freedom that makes him God. This position is absurd because here, no less than in theism, the only point of reference always appears to be the person; it is from the person that the initiative arises, it is the person that wants to make itself absolute. For a similar case, Augustine's words could even be valid: "Slave, you wanted to simulate a mutilated freedom by doing the illicit with impunity, in a blind imitation of omnipotence."[1] As we have seen, this is also the reason why Raskolnikov and Stavrogin fell, the latter's suicide corresponding to that type that is imposed by one's own failure—though, from an entirely different standpoint, it could be justified in a given human type under special circumstances, as touched on earlier.

But the problem of responsibility is seen under a different light when one refers to the traditional doctrine that we saw to have been more or less confusedly shadowed by existentialism itself: if one holds on to the idea that whatever one is as a person in the human condition proceeds from an original, prenatal, and pretemporal choice, wherein one willed, in terms of an "original project" (as Sartre calls it), everything that would define the contents of one's existence. In this case, it is no longer a matter of answering to a Creator, but to something referring to the very dimension of being or transcendence in oneself. The

course of existence, though not attributable to the more exterior and already human will of the individual (the person), follows, in principle, a line that has significance for the I, even though still latent or concealed: as an entirety of experiences important not in themselves but for the reactions that they provoke in us, reactions through which that being that one wished to be can be realized. In that case, life in this world cannot be considered as something that one can arbitrarily throw away, nor can it be considered simply as a bad situation in which the only choice is faith or fatalistic resignation (we have seen that, at best, the horizons of modern existentialism end there), or else being locked into a continuous trial of resistance (as happens along the lines of a dark Stoicism, devoid of the background of transcendence). As in an adventure, a mission, a trial, an election, or an experiment, earthly life appears to be something to which one committed oneself before finding oneself in the human condition, accepting in anticipation whatever difficult, miserable, or dramatic aspects it might bring, aspects that are especially likely in an epoch like the present. In these terms we can define and accept a principle of responsibility and "loyalty," without external, "heteronomous" references.

I have already spoken of the only presuppositions that, according to Stoicism and Buddhism, would permit the act of suicide: a superiority, a detachment from life. It is, however, difficult to realize them without meanwhile achieving, in some way, a suprapersonal meaning of existence on earth in the terms just mentioned: there being added the sensation that the whole of this existence is only an episode, a passage, as in the image of the voyage at night. Then would not feeling in oneself any impatience, any intolerance, or even any tediousness testify to the presence of a too human residue, of something not yet resolved by the sense of eternity or, at least, by great unearthly and nontemporal distances? And if it were so, would one not be obliged, facing oneself, *not* to act?

An Islamic saying, appropriate for a rigorous doctrine of predestination, is true: "No one can die unless by the will of Allah and at the moment fixed by Him." Similarly, if one assumes the predetermination of the essential course of individual existence, even suicide could be thought of as one of the particular acts already contemplated, so that it

only appears to be an arbitrary initiative of the person. However, this is an extreme assumption, and in reality the decision could only be illuminated by the degree of effective integration that has been attained, in terms already mentioned, as the welding of the person with Being. It is certain that in an integration of this kind, even if incomplete, suicide could have the meaning of an extreme gesture that seals one's sovereignty, in terms quite different from those of Kirilov: the sovereignty would not be *of* the person, but *over* the person. All that would remain would be the responsibility inherent in affirming that what acts is precisely the principle that *is* not the person, but *possesses* the person. However, recourse to this action can rarely present a positive and intelligible character for the differentiated man. Everyone knows that sooner or later the end will come, so that when facing every contingency it is more valuable to try to decipher the hidden meaning, the part that it has in a context that, according to the view mentioned earlier, is not alien to us, but proceeds from our transcendental will.

Matters are obviously different when one does not directly seek death but includes it, so to speak, in life, considering situations in which death coincides with obtaining the utmost meaning from life in the human condition. Here, unlike what Heidegger described, it is not a matter of a presumed gravitation of the "Dasein" of any finite existence—having its own principle outside itself—toward death and as if from one's dependence on it. The presupposition is instead a special and uncommon orientation that can be given to one's own life. In place of violent and direct action over one's life, one can "interrogate" it through forms of intense and risky existence. There are ways to put an ever more peremptory and insistent question to "destiny" (we intend this term as when speaking of *amor fati* and the special confidence in always following one's own way, in any event or contingency) in order to obtain the response as to how far there is still a profound, impersonal reason for existing in the human condition. And if this questioning leads to situations in which the borderline between life and death also represents the extreme limit of the sense and fullness of a life—differently from what would come from exaltation, simple intoxication, or a confused, ecstatic effort—then one would certainly reach the most satisfying condition for existentially overcoming the problem faced by

us. The formula referred to in context of a change of polarity of living, of particular intensities of living as a means toward a more-than-living, evidently finds its supreme application on this path. In particular, here one can see a connection with the special orientations considered in this chapter: measuring oneself in a contemplation of death, living every day in the present as if it were the last, and the quasi-magnetic orientation to be induced in one's own being, which may not manifest in this existence with the complete rupture of the ontological level proper to "initiation," but will not fail to emerge at the right moment, in order to carry one beyond.

One will see, therefore, that dwelling on this problem of death and the right over life, as the last problem of all we have examined, is of the greatest advantage regarding the attitude and behavior of the differentiated and unbroken man in an epoch of dissolution.

Elevating oneself above that which can be understood in the light of human reason alone; reaching a high interior level and an invulnerability otherwise hard to attain: these are perhaps among the possibilities that, through adequate reactions, are offered in the cases in which the night journey allows almost nothing to be perceived of the landscape that one traverses, and in which the theory of *Geworfenheit*, of being absurdly "flung" into the world and time, seems to be true, especially in a climate in which physical existence itself must present a growing insecurity. If one can allow one's mind to dwell on a bold hypothesis—which could also be an act of faith in a higher sense—once the idea of *Geworfenheit* is rejected, once it is conceived that living here and now in this world has a sense, because it is always the effect of a choice and a will, one might even believe that one's own realization of the possibilities I have indicated—far more concealed and less imaginable in other situations that might be more desirable from the merely human point of view, from the point of view of the "person"—is the ultimate rationale and significance of a choice made by a "being" that wanted to measure itself against a difficult challenge: that of living in a world contrary to that consistent with its nature, that is, contrary to the world of Tradition.