

VALERY ALEFF

THAT'S LIFE

This moment is of no importance and that is why you pay no attention to it, which does not mean your attention is fully occupied elsewhere, being engrossed in a book, sacred or otherwise. All books are sacred if they can be found in your personal library; at least they are sacred to *you* and that is what counts. You cannot take care of the entire sacredness that the world is overloaded with: our churches, mosques and so on resound with this sacred text, another sacred text. You end up listening to voices, not to the letter of the law or any other letters. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and no one forbids you to listen to them, even if you have no Hebrew. You listen to these letters and realise the Almighty uttered the same letters when speaking to Moses and other prophets. Was Moses a prophet or a guide? Both, both, and this thought has a soothing effect on your nerves and even on your genes. Now you know you will be saved; what is more, you know where to go, and it does not really matter if you do not set off on your journey at once: God can wait for you because He is subjected to neither time nor space. To what or whom is He subjected? To nothing and no one. He is not even subjected to Himself, for He is above Himself, superior to Himself; in a way, He is a supergod. And yet He neither overacts, nor overreaches Himself.

There is another moment and you take notice of it because you say to yourself, 'Too long, too long.' You must be waiting for someone or something, otherwise everything appears too short, even the universe which is infinite, according to some astronomers. But you do not listen to astronomers, your attention being wholly seized by the moment you are trying to disregard. Yes, it is too long, too long, and your waiting is growing unbearable. One cannot bear *everything*, even if one happens to be a saint. There are pains that are unbearable and toothache is only one instance of such pains; yet they punctuate our existence and we cannot get rid of them altogether. We go to a dentist and have one of our teeth pulled out; but we have got 33 of them and sooner or later such and such a tooth will spell disaster for us and our wives, our husbands. At night they wish to sleep instead of listening to our moans and groans which are likely to keep them awake and rather far from their sweet, delicious dreams.

Nights were created for sweet dreams and the deep sleep during which our souls roam somewhere, out of our reach – out of their own reach sometimes, for they often overreach themselves and overstep all sorts of bounds. They are as free as the wind that used to be a yardstick by which the freedom of our ancestors – they were poets, all of them – was often measured. 'O wind, o wind,' they used to say or sing. 'I wish I could be as free as you are.' They did not sing these songs in prisons; they were just yearning for more freedom because in

all earthly countries – with the exception of free countries – the lack of freedom makes people suffer and erect barricades. Some are on one side of the barricades, others on the other. *Others* are usually policemen or soldiers and *some* are the poor who fight a losing battle because they have only stones and mud. And both soldiers and policemen have shields and helmets which enable them to stay in the kingdom of the quick – until the next struggle for life and freedom and brotherhood.

You spend several nights on one side, on the other side, and the barricades you erected to keep your colleagues company seem to merit space in a museum of ancient monuments. Another night and yet another. Upon awakening you realise that the whole city has been converted into a museum – overnight, as they say. Over which night? There have been so many of them that, in the long run, you are likely to lose count not only of nights but also of days and your projects. You vaguely recall some of your projects, but hesitate as to their number and the ideas into which you intended to put your heart and soul. Both your heart and soul are prepared to leave your body and join your projects that promise prosperity and happiness to yourself and your children. Into what can you put them now? Nothing short of happiness will ever satisfy your heart, let alone your soul, on account of its immortality, of its time-originated infinity. All your projects, alas, have fallen through and you blame yourself and the barricades for this unforgivable failure. Do not forget that there is such a thing as a metaphysical or psychological barricade which should be taken into consideration alongside its material counterpart. On the one side of this particular barricade there are hard-pressed wishes, on the other repressed ones.

This barricade is a keyword, if not a symbol: you struggle with others and also with yourself. Of course you struggle with nature, represented by mosquitoes, bugs and other miniscule creatures that you can hardly see with the naked eye. The smaller they are, the more pernicious they turn out to be if you give them too much freedom in your house, let alone in your body. They are on the opposite side of the barricade but no barricade can prevent them from visiting your body and psyche. They often drive you mad and you are at a loss to understand what is going on both inside and outside your *substance*. (One cannot live without this word; and yet it is not a keyword.) They climb over barricades, walls and other barriers you erect in the hope of keeping them at bay. Once inside your walls, you feel protected and safe, even though you learnt at school that one cannot be on the safe side, however astutely one may behave, now and then saying to oneself, ‘Better safe than sorry.’ You may be sorry but you are certainly not safe, whatever you do or think. ‘You are both sorry and unsafe,’ as a Chinese writer put it.

So you are often driven mad by bugs and mosquitoes, especially if you are in your bed,

trying to get some sleep after sleepless nights. First you say to yourself, ‘I can hear something buzzing,’ and you know what insect you have in mind, for there are no bees, no wasps in your bedroom. You know you are talking about a mosquito that is on the point of biting your cheek and sucking your blood. You start flailing your arms around and the mosquito vanishes for a while, although it is still in your room – you are quite aware of that. At this point you start going mad: the faster you flail your arms, the nearer you get to madness and the nearest lunatic asylum. The mosquito does not need to circle above your head and around your ear; and for once it can survive without your precious blood. It has achieved its objective, for driving you mad was its only objective and ambition. Your blood is intact but you are not aware of that, for lunatics are unable to measure the quantity of their own blood – even if they slit their wrists or throats; even if their blood flows into basins and bowls.

The same goes for bugs except that you do not flail your arms around for the simple reason that you neither hear anything nor see how this insect – or whatever you may call it – penetrates your body and the rest of your numerous substances. You are a manifold creature – every human being is, being the most perfect creature made by the Almighty out of nothing. Well, only out of nothing can one create everything and everybody – that is the axiom often alluded to in the Scriptures and elsewhere. Of course not everybody reads the Scriptures every day, but you do not need to read anything to realise that the world came out of nothing, at some point. At some point, therefore, there was nothing, otherwise the world would not have had a beginning. Well, you take your time machine and go towards the past – as far as you can. Sooner or later you are bound to come across a beginning – a beginning of sorts, no doubt. Not the Big Bang, the Big Deal. A small world perhaps, for the world *is* small and its beginning might have been small, for all we know.

So a multitude of bugs wreak havoc inside your body – and also outside it, doing justice to the saying ‘What is inside, so outside’; and also to the saying ‘What is in the middle, so elsewhere’. Everything is everywhere and your mosquito buzzes here and there, in the United States and in Australia, as if not satisfied with your madness, your deadness. You are dead to some extent: all lunatics are, judging from how their colleagues and relatives look at them. They look at them and say, ‘Where are we going to bury him or her? In the family vault?’ ‘There isn’t one,’ say your neighbours, meaning you had no family and consequently no vaults. What to do? Let them find a way out of the situation because the dead are supposed to take care of the dead and you are dead already, according to your friends and relatives. All right, you bow to the inevitable; you also bow to the evitable for the simple reason that you like bowing and nothing can prevent you from doing so whenever you feel like it. You feel like it now, as if you

were on a stage. Yet you are not and you know that in spite of your madness, your *lunatism*, as you call your madness. Perhaps you just like the word '*luna*' that means 'moon' in Russian and in some other languages as well. Perhaps, perhaps. You do not speak other languages. Well, you are a moonatic – in English, in English. Aren't you, aren't you?

Where are your bugs now? 'What have you done with your youth?' as a French poet says. What have you done with your bugs? What have *they* done to you? Nothing, nothing so far. They are not used to your body yet and therefore have to make themselves at home before swinging into action, into your malediction. They will curse you some day, but not today: you are on top form after your illness, after your numerous deaths. Your resurrection is in perfect working order so that once again you believe in Jesus Christ and *his* Resurrection, *his* 'Comeback', as they say now. They update everything, for they think no one will ever understand them if they do not keep up with the times. So they keep up with the times and spaces, and everything goes smoothly as far as their objectives are concerned. Of course they are not likely to notice that their objectives are very subjective and suit only their own purposes. Never mind, never mind, as they say. We all say that; we hear that as well because we usually hear what *we* say – *ourselves*, not *others*, not the multitude. What counts is our altitude, not their multitude – that is what we say to ourselves, not to others who would not understand anything. Anyway, they do not know the world 'altitude'.

There are no bugs; at least you do not think about them. And if your thoughts are bug-free, so is your body, for your body is influenced and affected by your mental life, by your mind that lords it over your life and probably the rest – the whole world. Of course you are no dictator and only your representation may be discussed in this connection; but you are weary of your representation. You know the world is what it is and no Schopenhauer, no Berkeley, will ever modify it. Philosophy is powerless in the world where machines march up and down the streets, cleaning houses, pavements and mere stones that would not mind remaining dirty and dusty. No one asks them what their true nature is and so they undergo all sorts of treatments under the hoofs of horses, under our wheels, meals and other ills. Actually we are no better off than stones – after what has happened in our lives since our births and previous deaths. Why speak about stones?

So we speak about domes. We see a dome in the distance and start thinking about it. Our train of thought pulls out in front of us and we look at it, curious to find out what we are thinking about. We are thinking about this dome and compare it to other domes we have seen ever since the same birth that does not go from one maternity hospital to another. Sometimes we speak about our 'births' in the plural, taking into consideration the number of lives we had lived before

we were born in such and such a maternity hospital; sometimes we just think about one birth, for one birth is quite enough for one life. And we have no intention of living several lives (and only one karma): the doctrine of metempsychosis does not really suit us. It does not seem to fit our requirements and there is nothing we can do about it; and the same goes for our requirements. Yes, they cannot do anything about it either, for they are unwilling to change. They reject whatever is below their standards which are very high, needless to say; otherwise requirements would not be requirements. For instance, we have not yet been able to find a house that meets our requirements so that we live in the streets, in the open air.

This dome – the one we see in the distance – reminds us of religious ceremonies and we say to ourselves that we have not been to church for many months. We cannot say we have not been to church ever since our birthday: after all, we were baptised in one of the churches, although we do not remember if that particular church had a dome or was domeless. Suppose it was domeless. So what? Our baptism is valid in spite of this insignificant absence which has nothing to do either with faith or Jesus Christ. St Francis did not always have a dome above his head, which was no obstacle along his path to God and His stigmata (*his* stigmata): you can get them in the open air on condition that your faith is mighty and mature. So you get them as a matter of course and now you wonder what you are to do with them. Should you show them to everybody, bent on converting the entire world population to Christianity? But some people became Christians in their babyhood – at the end of their christenings. Your stigmata are not likely to change anything in *their* lives except that, upon seeing this sign of God's awesome presence, they may decide to adjust their faith to His presence and the awe they experience. So they adjust their lives to the renewal of their faith and thank you from the bottom of their hearts. That is what your stigmata are for and so you have no regrets about the way things worked out.

And what if you show your *soul* to them? They may be Christians, for all you know, but that does not mean – not *automatically* – that they believe in the existence of the soul and its immortality. So you pull your soul out of your glands and show it to them, saying, 'I'm dying. Could you please take care of my soul?' 'What should we do with it?' they ask. 'Send it to heaven.' 'To Paradise?' 'Of course.' They take your soul and you die, for no one can live without their soul; but you keep looking at them to find out what is in store for your soul. In hot weather, they sell masses of cold drinks and ice creams: people need to get cool and the only way to accomplish this feat is, for example, to drink a cold Coca Cola. No one sells Coke in this sort of desert and the woman to whom you gave your soul is sweating like a pig. So she wipes her dirty face on your clean soul and once your soul is dirty, she sends it to heaven.

You know it is self-indulgent of you, but you speak about yourself all the time – even

when you speak about others, saying ‘they, them, one’ and so on. Why don’t you speak about their souls, their troubles that are far more numerous than yours? After all, you are not starving to death; nor are you going deaf or blind or mad. You are going dead – that is for sure, but this is no exception to the rule which says that Socrates is human and so he must die. Roses are not human, which does not prevent them from dying in their turn, and one wonders why you do not speak about roses and *their* fate. I am going gaga no doubt: twice a week I buy roses in the nearest supermarket and smell them upon awakening and before going to bed. Sometimes I also smell them in the afternoon, for they smell not only in the mornings and in the evenings, and one is wholly justified in enjoying their fragrance. So whenever I happen to walk past them, I bend over the vase and inhale as much air as I can; and my lungs are thankful for the fresh and fragrant air I offer them.

Well, I did speak about roses for a while; I also touched upon other people, although I am not sure they are my neighbours to whom I owe a lot of love, according to some sacred books. Everything is sacred, as pantheists and hedonists affirm when they feel like bolstering their morale or morales – it depends on how many morales they have at the moment. One had better keep a dozen morales at one’s disposal: if three of them are fairly low, the other ones can give them a helping hand. If, however, you have only one morale, you are doomed to follow in its footsteps – up and down, up and down, up and down. Now you are on top of the world; now you are at the bottom of the world, of the self-same world. You are allowed to have a multitude of morales, but there is only one world around you and you must cope with it to the best of your abilities. So you do your best to straighten your problems out; you can never be sure you do your best because you have no idea what the ‘best’ is – in your case, in other cases. Well, you are still alive and even if you stay in bed round the clock, you are happy and bless whoever shows up within your field of vision.

It is better to bless than to curse because you may be punished for your curses, whereas you are sure to be rewarded for the blessings you shower upon your fellow creatures. And even if you are not rewarded at once, you should recall Pascal’s bet as a result of which you will go to Paradise and not to its unpleasant counterparts. So you bless everybody and go to Paradise; at least no one dares to curse you and you count on this self-restraint, even though you know that people do not always return the favour and often disregard both gifts and good turns. But neither your faith in God nor your numerous blessings cost you anything so that you go on with your rituals and are often rewarded with smiles and pastries. People invite you to tea and also to dinner, whenever they think you have not skimped during your worldwide distribution of blessings. And you rely on God making an effort in the Hereafter where there are so many

furnaces and palaces, and gardens, and fires, and brimstones.

You do not always think in these terms, for life may display other components for your benefit – not only your colleagues' tea parties and their plonk. Life is beautiful and you see the proof of this axiom everywhere, not only during your visits to Niagara Falls. Its ugliness is also part of its beauty – all depends on your angle of vision and on the visions you avail yourself of in your dreams. Your sweet dreams often lavish on you what is described in the Koran and some other sacred books that you tenaciously consult to find out what awaits you beyond life and death. I, for one, do not know the Koran by heart so that I have to go downstairs and look for it in my library where I keep a lot of paradises which may come in useful if there is no real Paradise either on Earth or in the Hereafter. You just memorise one of the literary paradises and live within your memory without ever going out – not even to the nearest park where you used to walk every afternoon for the sake of your lungs, heart and body in general.

When I think about Paradise, I visualise only one garden because, in my opinion, one garden is enough, provided there are a lot of fountains and maidens in it. But in the Koran there are two gardens and twice as many maidens, I suppose; and these gardens abound in branches and fruit. Why do I never think about fruit in the course of my virtual excursions into the Garden of Eden? Because I am afraid of the forbidden fruit? But I do not think there is anything forbidden in this redecorated Garden, given that we are quite mature today, after spending so many millennia in exile on Earth. I adore exotic fruit like mangoes and papayas; I also have a weakness for apples, even for cooking apples. But there are no doctors in Paradise, are there? And if there are, why keep them away?

‘– lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral –’ Does Mahomet speak of maidens' lips? Anyway, in Hell there are neither rubies, nor coral, nor maidens, nor mature women whose bodies some individuals prefer to those of Lolitas, otherwise they would not sell porn movies dedicated to matronly persons. Why think of Hell anyway? There are other ways of spending time and even if we are determined to *waste* our time – there are individuals who are keen on wasting their time – we might eventually hit upon another idea, a more rewarding wastetime, as it were. Of course, after reading or re-reading the Koran, one may reach the conclusion that, whatever we do or undo, we waste our time and this state of affairs will remain unchanged as long as we remain on Earth instead of going under her – literary speaking. Figuratively speaking, we shall travel upward, to the spot where two gardens and a myriad of maidens await us with their fruit and excellent moods.

Everything we look upon is blessed, as a poet put it. Poets put anything, anywhere, calling it ‘poetic licence’, and nobody says anything, for we like poetic licenses and licenses in general.

Not often are we given licence to do this and that, but even if we only do *that*, being deprived of *this* – for some obscure reason – we are happy and even *that* happiness is capable of making us happy for a while. And ‘a while’ is enough sometimes: we are in excellent mood and our projects multiply and replenish the Earth. We know we need to open up overseas markets and we do open them up just as we do our best to keep active: commercially, politically and sexually. A year later we say to our competitors, ‘Our company has been successful in penetrating overseas markets this year,’ and our competitors envy us our ability to work with overseas clients. Actually our luxurious lifestyle and personal ostentation are both hated and envied. We must have been blessed either by God Himself or by some of His envoys; or just by an ordinary citizen walking on Earth and thinking in terms of earthly life.

The point is you cannot be blessed by anyone, for a blessing has nothing to do with a curse – it is just the opposite. And this time opposites are not supposed to meet, not even in the Hereafter where a kind of universal and everlasting harmony continuously reconciles religion and science and also different points of view. You can be cursed by everyone and sometimes it does happen – when your social life is at fever pitch. A lot of people surround you and every word of yours resounds everywhere; and as soon as it begins to resound it gives rise to a series of misunderstandings. You are misunderstood by everyone, not only by your relatives, neighbours and colleagues. This gigantic crowd ostracises you and once again you find yourself in front of your fireplace that is quite cold today, as you say to yourself; and you have no logs to burn in it.

Suddenly a distant memory invades your mind and also your body, considering that body and mind are never separated; and if they are, they are never too far away from each other. So they communicate and let you know what they think about your life and its discomfitures; and also the predicaments you refuse to face as you try to persuade yourself that everything is all right. But everything is *not* all right, far from it, and you begin to wonder if *anything* is all right today, tonight; if you have enough willpower to extricate yourself from the situation. Of course you have a lot of will *to* power, but willpower is not identical to either will to power or will to live. You wish to live and struggle for life, but this wish of yours – and all other wishes of yours – are not equivalent to what may be termed ‘your willpower’. And it is not enough to have such a thing at one’s disposal: one’s ability to handle it properly depends on its quantity, not only on its quality. It took a lot of willpower to stay calm, you say to yourself as you think about the prelude to the night you are spending in front of the fireplace, a place without fire, a mere grate. No fire, no fire – either inside or outside.

And what about that distant memory of yours, that mind-invader? You seem to have

forgotten it as if you had put no value on memories, the past, the heaven you saw in your childhood. And then a voice says to you, ‘When I lifted the log, there were lots of beetles skittering around under it.’ Your memory’s voice no doubt. Yes, you were thinking about the logs you did not have within your reach – except in your memory where logs and beetles went on moving to and fro. Is it a blessing, one of the blessings you thought about some time ago? Whatever it is, it does not outweigh the curse which led to your bankruptcy and other misfortunes about which you are reluctant to think in front of the fireplace – or anywhere else. But, for reasons best known to yourself, you are thinking about curses, which enables you to single out the curse you hold responsible for your innumerable failures. The point is you can be cursed by anyone and that is what makes curses so different from blessings.

If someone takes the trouble to bless you, you can ask this person to show his or her credentials, for only saints, priests and messiahs are allowed to bless human beings. Of course you would not put in prison an individual who has just said to you, ‘Bless you!’ or ‘Bless you, dear!’ Nor would you reprimand a woman who says, ‘May God bless you,’ whenever you help her with her shopping. But an efficient, *useful* blessing requires a gift and a social status bestowed only upon *exceptional* creatures and you must take notice of this fact instead of rejoicing whenever the verb ‘to bless’ reaches your ears. Actually, you ought to make sure this verb is addressed to you and not to the whole of Creation: to logs, beetles and fireplaces, among other things. And even if it does concern you *directly*, you had better not give free rein to your emotions and tears of joy. A down-and-out may bless you, if you put a few coins into his hat or whatever he uses for his business-related purposes; but this down-and-out is not entitled to bless anyone or anything unless he or she is a saint. It is true that many saints used to beg on the streets – for money and food, for coins and banknotes. It is partly on account of this pastime that they were promoted from tramps to saints: there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.

Well, it is easier to be cursed than blessed and that accounts for many failures and suicides to which human beings resort when they cannot get off the hook. There are many hooks and their number does not depend on the number of people who hang from these hooks as they wait for saviours, the Messiah or Mother Teresa. I am not sure they swing as they hang on these hooks, but they have no strength left to get *off* them and that is what counts under the circumstances. It is not the way you *hang* on your hook that counts, whatever you say; anyway, you should not confuse hooks with swings. Nor should you confuse swings with roundabouts, otherwise you will go on losing your money and health, your happiness and wellbeing. Of course you are a born loser but you may be born once again, a second time, provided your

second birth is destined to become a *spiritual* birth, not just a *physical* one. Do not forget St Augustine and many other saints who were born twice, thrice – many, many times, which accounts for their high-level, high-class, high-end, hi-fi spirituality.

So you are born a second time and this time you are a born winner, even if for the moment you do not win anything, not even a single game of ping-pong. But this does not really matter: you are not a sportsman and the Olympics do not appeal to your senses, your pride, or your feet. Do you wish to become a multimillionaire so as not to envy those who have villas and swimming pools on several continents? Perhaps. But given that your new birth is spiritual and not financial, you also aspire to *spiritual heights* which are not always situated in the areas where business comes first. So you think about your spiritual education: you can take care of it yourself, for it is your *second* birth, not the *first* one. It may even happen that your parents are no longer at your side and so cannot really help you, being ensconced in Paradise or in its suburbs. You read sacred books and realise how important it is to be a *spiritual* creature, even if spirituality is not often backed up by bank accounts and suchlike, whatever ‘suchlike’ may mean in the context. Well, it is easy to guess what it means: you do not have to read sacred books to solve this problem. All you have to do is buy one issue of *Paris Match* and look at the photographs you are sure to find in it.

You look at them and realise they are far more entertaining than the books you have been reading ever since your spiritual birth. They are far more *joyful* as well and a lot of saints used to place joyfulness among the ten major Christian virtues. And Buddhists smile for hours and hours; they even smile in their sleep, which proves that they never have to cope with nightmares. And if they do, they continue to smile because they react neither to reality nor unreality, being divorced from whatever may perturb their inner and outer peace. Even if you do not give them alms, they go on smiling, although any lack of money and food is commonly regarded as a nightmare from which one would like to awake; anyone with the exception of a Buddhist. Buddhists do not need to get rid of their nightmares because they have none. That is the best solution to any problem – its total absence which spares you the necessity of getting rid of it. As for yourself, your second birth got rid of many problems and you should not buy *Paris Match* too often so as to guard against any outbreak of inner rioting.

Of course you would give anything to be able to smile forever, notwithstanding Ebola and other diseases that pursue their goals and do their best to annihilate both life and Earth. They do not think in terms of spirituality: it is our *physical* life they endeavour to annihilate. Well, as long as we are spiritual and keep our faith intact, we shall prevail, survive and preserve our immortality against all odds. It is true that, in this struggle for immortality, the odds are

stacked against our victory; but we have our own truth and our *personal* truth is often at odds with the *Absolute* Truth. And no amount of capital letters will ever shake our confidence in our triumph over time and its stooges. Over space, among other stooges and things.

A man boards a plane in Australia and lands in Europe where he is welcomed by his friends, relatives, colleagues and admirers. No one is aware of the fact that a number of microscopic strands of a virus travel with him, being stowaways inside his body. No one tests him for contamination; he transmits the virus to the crowd of admirers and also to his relatives and colleagues. We should triumph over space by arresting this man in Australia to prevent him from landing in Europe or anywhere else. We shall allow him to land up in a local prison, though.

So we can triumph over space by isolating it from whatever belongs to us: time, health, happiness, women, men, gardens and fruit. But our gurus obstinately repeat that we should not think about the fruit of our labours because only our labours – or paths, or ways – really count. Others say the opposite and these opposites do not meet either so that we are lost somewhere in the middle of opposites and labours about which both superman and Hercules know nothing at all. Why should we get involved with superfluous things that can neither bring us to the end of the road nor even put us on the right track? All tracks look alike and all we can do is reject passions and emotions, leaving only virtue, peace and quiet, and a modicum of love, otherwise no Christian will ever liken us to saints. And our parents have worked hard to inculcate what they call a ‘team spirit’ into our brains. And this team spirit is in no way different from the atmosphere one finds in a church where there are a lot of saints, a lot of sanctity as such.

As a child I thought it was easy to become a saint because so many people had already joined this sacred team. Besides, one had nothing else to do in life: becoming a saint was a full-time job, according to my parents. You had to be virtuous and generous, offering your clothes to lepers, whenever you came across them in the streets. ‘And if there are no lepers in the streets?’ I asked my mother. ‘Then give your clothes to cancer patients. Anyway, finding the sick is the easiest thing in the world.’ That is why I thought it was easy to become a saint. Now I know you have to become either Mother Teresa or a Pope. And that is easier said than done. Sometimes it is even hard to *say* that: your tongue does not turn, as the Russians put it.

In the meantime, you continue to read sacred books that talk to you about right and wrong, about virtue and your own status. You should not do what others do because you are supposed to quit everything you stand for: your family, business, the world itself and many other selves, its, his and hers. You must do it for the sake of your own self which cannot shine unless you abandon almost everything, almost, almost; at the end of this road you begin to wonder what

else you can abandon, reject and so on. You strip yourself of your clothes and give them to the poor, even if you end up naked as a result of this ritual practised by saints and other benefactors of humanity. And if you have some money – coins, banknotes, credit cards – you put all this on a pile of dog muck because that is what your credit cards deserve, according to St Augustine.

Today your guru assures you that nothing will happen either to your body or to your mind if you perform a few rituals *inside* your brain and not outside it. You are so used to the outside world you cannot imagine how it feels to be blind and deaf and deprived of your senses. But you can become mindful only if you withdraw into yourself to the point of forgetting others' charms, sex appeal, villas, golf courses and swimming pools. You should swim inside yourself; you should sink to the bottom of the ocean and it is pointless to ask what kind of ocean is alluded to because this ocean is your consciousness and unconscious. And then you are enjoined to obliterate them and when you manage to follow your guru's advice or order to the letter, you realise you are lying naked at the bottom of something. It is neither the swimming pool nor your consciousness: they are both abolished once and for all. You are just conscious of your misery and of a particle of nirvana that seems to wait for you round the corner. You abolish this part of your consciousness, whereupon this particle vanishes. You are really naked now – as naked as the naked eye that cannot see anything.

Back home you try to remember what your guru said this afternoon and realise you cannot remember anything, for your consciousness has been abolished and your memory is situated in both your consciousness and unconscious, not in this artificial oblivion of yours. Luckily for you, you have got a huge library on which you may rely whenever deprived of your memory by gurus and attacks of amnesia. What you do know tonight is limited to your house and furniture; at least you are able to find your whereabouts without losing your way in a stream of consciousness where one comes across odds and ends, gods and bends. So you say to yourself, 'I'm at home, I'm at home. There's a huge library in the adjacent room. I have to go there because I haven't forgotten yet how a mammal walks and runs.' So you walk over to your library and find a few books which may and must shed light on your recent experience and lost memory. You are no longer conscious of your former consciousness and limit your requirements to your recent experience, to your guru's commands and bans. And once again you realise you have come up against a brick wall and this wall is surrounded by other brick walls; and it is pointless to remove bricks from these walls because – as you know from bitter experience – the more you remove the more you find, be it bricks or sticks or ticks.

Obviously your furniture does not want you to pick up an axe and hack away at armchairs, cupboards, ironing boards and so on; in other words, your furniture does not want you to hack

it to death. Even furniture perseveres in its own being, but you are bent on attaining nirvana and so have no wish to persevere, to last, to come back for another life, another set of depravations and horrors, another sect.

Well, it does not really matter how long you have been looking at this shelf where there are books you need very badly, otherwise you would not have set off on this journey from the living room to the library, hacking your way through the jungle of objects and wayward thoughts. And these books talk to you about your duties which come down to overcoming bondage, and you go on reading them because, as usually happens, you do not really know what they are talking about. Whatever you read presents you with a problem that would be difficult to solve unless you are prepared to read such and such a book from beginning to end, notwithstanding your busy schedule and love for your children. They do not care for Buddhism and its bondages that you do your best to overcome as you leaf through the book you are holding in the hope of finding what you are supposed to overcome. Anyway, you are now on an island upon which your book enlarges for a while. 'Make thyself an island!' it says. What kind of island? A desert island? An inhabited island? If it is a desert island, you will not be able to go shopping; and you are no Robinson Crusoe, whatever your book might say on the subject.

Well, your impurities have not been blown away, not yet; not all of them. Some of your impurities float through the air – like rain clouds, like a cloud passing over the sun and the moon. You look at your impurities and are tempted to compare them to smoke, to a murky yellow smog or smoke hovering over the city. Yes, your impurities usually hover over the city and every time you see them you wonder how you could divert them from their trajectory: after all, they might contaminate the inhabitants of your native city and they can do it all the more easily since these inhabitants have already been contaminated and poisoned by their own impurities and by those of their friends and relatives. But your impurities have always hovered over the city you like so much. You know you are unable to divert them to another city, to a foreign country about which you do not care. Luckily for you and others, the recent pattern of weather deviates from the norm for this time of year: you may count on winds and storms, their driving forces and energies. 'Avast ye!' you shout. That is all you can do for the moment.

And what about your defilements? Are they in any way comparable to your impurities and infirmities? You do suffer from a long list of infirmities and they cannot help affecting your mood, decisions and the overall pattern of your behaviour. Small children often behave aggressively and you follow the same pattern of behaviour as if you were a small child – in spite of your infirmities that cannot be associated with the lithe, athletic body of a ballet dancer. By no stretch of the imagination can you be seriously described as a handsome young man

whose performances at the Bolshoi Theatre invariably draw a crowd. So you do not behave like a handsome young man who usually dances with sleeping beauties and wide-awake ones – at the Bolshoi Theatre, of all places. You are just an impure middle-aged man whose defilements annoy not only your gurus but also yourself; yet you are seldom annoyed nowadays, on account of your overall or partial indifference.

Sometimes you do not give a damn, sometimes you do – it depends on whether your life is at stake or not. As a *budding* Buddhist – budding, not even buddhing – you still care a little about life and are even ready to be reborn and assume a lot of responsibilities connected with another karma, another set of duties. If you are duty bound, you are bound – you are no Prometheus, though – and you should disconnect yourself from any bondage. In a way, you are already disconnected from it; at least you are on the way to being disconnected from it altogether. To some extent you are already a broken human or a broken machine, for humans are machines as some philosopher put it. Never try to mend a broken machine without disconnecting it from the electricity supply. Well, you are not eager to mend yourself and if you change your mind, you have nothing to worry about: you have already been disconnected from the electricity or Schopenhauer's will. Call it what you will, you are disconnected, dissociated, disabled and disavowed – by yourself, if not by others. You are dis, dis, dis, dis; and this reminds you of the Dies Iraes you heard in Mozart's and Verdi's requiems. You have not yet forgotten the wrath of God; nor has His wrath forgotten you. That is what they call 'reciprocity'.

In some books you are encouraged to be mindful; in others they speak of your watchfulness and you realise with horror that your life depends on a translation. You do not mind the mind and its fullness, but you feel no affection for the world 'watch' that reminds you of time, even though its present meaning is not situated in the domain of time and the instruments used for its measurement. It has even more in common with what they call 'neighbourhood watch' and suddenly you remember that the inhabitants of your area watch each other's property. So you are permanently watched, for your property is part of your life and so are you, however strongly you may wish to estrange yourself from both your life and possessions. (Your guru's prescription for success and bliss.) As you distance yourself from your desires and golf courses, you get closer and closer to nirvana. But others interfere by calling the police and talking about the stranger they see in front of your house. A few police officers intrude upon your privacy and you have to start from scratch, fighting your desires and passions, nipping them in the bud, stepping in the mud.

Watchful, mindful, beware, beware. Beware of the anger of the mind; as if one could control one's mind located somewhere in the head, in the brain, in the consciousness and

probably amidst the objects you are looking at. A flash of anger suddenly comes to the fore and annihilate here a city, there a country, according to films and books that continue to talk about Hitler and his stooges. Beware, beware. You are reminded of Macbeth to whom his witches – and our witches and switches – talked like that, determined to set a trap and yet another trap. And he walked straight into it, them, into his enemies' camps where they played with blades and trees, walking to and fro.

Do not fall into the trap of thinking you can learn a foreign language without doing any work. That is what your teachers, gurus and relatives say to you and you realise you will never learn any language, not even your own. And life is a foreign language – everyone knows that and some people keep learning it as if hoping to live forever. And if you do not, it is not worth your while learning anything, given that anyway you will walk into this trap, or that trap. And you will never learn anything about these traps except that there are traps and you are walking right into them, even if demarcations between regions are shown with dotted lines on the map you have on your wall. But what kind of region are you walking around? To answer this question, you need a map of the world or at least a map of Paris, of Brussels, of Berlin – not an ordinary road map adorned with dotted lines.

So you stop walking for a while as you say to yourself that you should beware of traps and witches who say from time to time, 'Walk, walk, walk. You'd better walk a bit quicker – it's going to take forever if you go at this pace.' And what if it does? What if it does take forever? Is this the panacea you have been looking for so obstinately, with such persistence and insistence? You just walk very slowly and live forever. No more traps, no more trees that are likely to march towards you, hiding soldiers, Kalashnikovs and myriads of bullets. No more trees, no more tramps and robbers asking for money or life and murdering you even if you give them your purse. Beware, beware. You look for traps and cannot find any because traps are usually hidden, otherwise no one would ever walk right into them. If you see a trap you stop in your tracks and do not walk any further unless your foot has already got caught in a trap, in a grave. That is what they mean when they say, 'He's got two feet and two arms in the grave.' They might say 'one foot and one arm in the grave' but they have no time for stages and consequently do not tell their tales in stages, going straight to the point. Time is money and they would lose a lot of money if they lived their lives in stages. Life is money, stages are money and the rest of whatever there is is also money and business. Monkey business.

Once again you turn to children because their mouths, their eyes, their hands and the rest of their bodies always tell the truths. A child is drawing something on a sheet of paper and you automatically think it is the truth you will see if you take the trouble to have a look at the child's

drawing. You take this trouble and look at it for a while and it suddenly dawns on you that Absolute Truth is the child's work of art. What you are holding has nothing to do with art, with artificial and divine inspirations and what they call '*métier*' in French and sometimes in English. It is a spontaneous revelation or eruption of Absolute Truth that cannot be otherwise: there is only one truth – and one God – and the child's drawing is the most perfect expression of it, whatever some art critics might say on the subject.

And then you look at the child and ask him what he is looking at. 'A crow,' he says. You look left, right, up and see no crows, for all your visual and mindful efforts. You are both watchful and mindful but you see neither crows nor any other birds as if they had already flown south at the approach of winter. But it is a midsummer night or a midsummer day, and you are surprised at finding no wild birds either in the sky or on park benches: you are in Hyde Park or Gorky Park; or Dostoevsky Park. You are in Hitchcock Park and you are really surprised at finding no birds in it: no birds, no ropes. There is only one stranger in these parts and the stranger has drawn his truth that coincides with Absolute Truth, Absolute Health, Absolute Time, Absolute Immortality.

The child goes on talking, 'Crow, sparrow, bench, a stranger on the bench, clouds, mouse, cat, three blind cats.' And suddenly you feel a flash of disappointment. 'Three blind cats' instead of 'three blind mice'. Is that what psychoanalysts call 'word association'? You say 'cat' and a child says 'mice'. You say 'three' and the child says, 'three mice'. You say, 'three mice' and the child say, 'three cats'. You say 'cat' and the child says 'mousetrap'. You say 'mousetrap' and a bookish chap says, '*Hamlet*'.

What you should aim at is called 'simplicity' and so everything should be simple, otherwise no one will ever understand you, your meanings, your life and aims. They say that the advantage of the plan is its simplicity; and yet they are not children. They do not say, 'Plan, advantage, bench, sparrow, arrow.' They say that all the ideas down to Platonic ideas have a stunning simplicity that can be likened to a stun gun. In a way they produce a small electric shock and stop you from moving temporarily – without harming you permanently. Of course the truth – even the one that is not really absolute – can harm you if you take an overdose of it; at least Nietzsche thought so. (For once I know which philosopher I am talking about.) Even partial truth can kill you if you do not watch out, if you do not watch your step, so to speak, for every truth, however infinitesimal, is a step towards Absolute Truth or nirvana – take your pick. And if you take an overdose of it or stay only one step ahead of what you are allowed to know – just another version of the Tree of Knowledge – you may step into your grave, bypassing the mud and the pile of dog muck.

Whatever the state your memory is in, you should never forget William Ockham and his razor. ‘Entities are not to be multiplied without necessity.’ So you should not look for the superfluous and stick to what you have, to a few simple things such as crow, bench, children, mothers, milk, birth, death, so, on. If you say ‘so on’, you make things harder for everybody, for by saying this and other things of the same nature, you multiply whatever you have already said and done. On the other hand, if you say ‘so’, you do not multiply anything and no one will append a catalogue of things in themselves to your remark. Ockham’s razor is simplicity incarnate, but it may lead to a contradiction in terms, for when you utter the word ‘razor’, you think about what use you can make of it. For instance, you may be asked, ‘Do you use an electric razor or the kind that you have to put a razor blade in?’ And you may answer, ‘My hairdresser always shaves my fringe with a razor to give a soft effect.’ But this answer begs the question of how he does it; and even your hairdresser’s whereabouts and identity are likely to be touched upon – much to your annoyance.

So you fall back upon simplicity as such and touch upon neither razors nor Ockham and his successors. Of course no one prevents you from cutting this and that from the world you are looking at as you try to unravel its mysteries and find your path in a maze which must amaze every believer in God. ‘How marvellous!’ he or she exclaims. ‘Only God was in a position to create so many marvels. Not Dante, not Darwin. Only God, only God.’ All right, but there are too many entities in this world, too many marvels some of which bar your path so you cannot get any closer either to Absolute Truth or nirvana. You see a few walls around you and you are tempted to raze them, using Ockham’s razor or just a miniature bomb. You achieve your objective or rather your *subjective*: the owner of the flat wishes to keep it intact, for he has no other flat to live in, enjoying his ownership and his friends’ company. You catch another glimpse of nirvana but neither this glimpse nor nirvana – *your* brand of nirvana – last forever. There are no more walls around you but there are other obstacles and screens beyond which truths have been hidden; and in their midst you are sure to come across Absolute Truth, provided you manage to rise up and go to what W. B. Yeats calls Chemisree or something along these lines.

You look around and realise there are too many skyscrapers in the city where you hope to stumble upon nirvana, bliss and the Miss World contest that might help you find both. So once again you pick up Ockham’s razor and set about cutting off the superfluous and the ambiguous. It is utter simplicity you have in mind and your mind directs the ritual, leaving nothing to the imagination, so to speak. You know that your imagination and its figments habitually distract you while you are working, and this time your work is blessed by gurus and

suchlike. You are working on nirvana and even those who have only a vague notion of what it is – void, cloud, nothingness, paradise – respect your determination and perseverance. Sure enough, you are determined to make a success of this enterprise and find out the truth of the universe and its suburbs. And if you happen to talk to people who do not have the foggiest idea of what nirvana offers and propounds, you just say to them, ‘My latest enterprise is to climb Mount Everest.’ After hearing you out, these people nod and applaud. What else do you need?

But actually this is the wrong path altogether, given that you do not have to care about fame and renown which are used to dragging you into arguments and discussions. And these discussions are centred upon the merits and demerits of those who compete for a prize or a huge amount of money and a few TV shows. Winners become famous but as they enjoy the fruit of their phony perseverance they get further and further from nirvana that brings you peace and quiet; and eternal death devoid of any rebirth, however short and insignificant. Macbeth, Macbeth, beware of rebirth! No, that is not what the witches told him in their cave or cavern where only witches and Platonists sojourn, tackling eternal problems. Sir John, Sir John. But this is from another opera, as the Russians say all the time.

Ockham’s razor is still in your hand and you know you should put it to good use, otherwise you were born for nothing. It is such a drag having to shave every day, but if you do observe this ritual, it will be a victory for common sense. And as long as you remain in a non-nirvana existence, you had better stick to the rules which ensure your safety in the world where you risk being destroyed round the clock. So you shave and then set about shaving the world which is too dishevelled and cannot welcome any bliss, however fragile and ludicrous. You do not need all these skyscrapers and if you do not need them, no one does because at this moment you represent the whole world. Your representation limits its scope to your mind and this mind of yours eliminates whatever stands in the way of nirvana which, according to specialists, is the only solution to world-wide problems. So you raze the skyscrapers and look at the new cityscape that seems to prophesy a happy future unless you are mistaken. But you do not wish to be mistaken and your wishes count in the world you created on the spur of the moment – on a whim, if you wish. Why is this future happy? Because there is nothing superfluous in it – no anti-Ockham, as some theologian put it; or anti-razor, come to think of it.

You look down from your balcony and see a lot of people whose number grows as you continue to get rid of skyscrapers and other superfluous buildings. They do not know where to live and you know they have never known *how* to live; and that is why the world is what it is – a dumping ground for toxic waste. You have already gained enough momentum to seal these people’s fate and you say, as you continue to look at them from your nirvana-bound balcony,

‘From the moment you stepped into the streets your fate was sealed.’ And you destroy them almost mechanically, which can be done without atom bombs, without any particular effort on your part. If you are close enough to nirvana, you just think about what should be done, and that is done in the twinkling of an eye; it is done quickly, in other words. So these people no longer interfere with your plans, with the purity of your vision abundantly influenced by Ockham and his immortal razor. The world is now clean-shaven, but you continue to shave it because there are still some hairs left on whatever surface you fasten your mind. Yul Brynner is the model you have chosen and, according to your calculations and ideas, the world should look like this star’s head. Anyway, the world should look like a star – a real star, a movie star: it does not really matter what star you choose as your model. What counts is the *elevation* of the Earth which is too low, too dusty: there are too many ashes on it and under it. We should elevate the Earth to the presidency which is usually associated with the centre of this or that – with the centre of the universe, in the present case. We have Copernicus to thank for this problem: but for his so-called theory, the Earth would have remained at the centre of the universe. Where is it now? Everybody knows where it is because its location has been discussed by astronomers ever since Copernicus’ discovery. There are maps where the Earth is shown in the company of other stars or whatever they are, for stars are somehow different from mere planets. Never mind, never mind. Today, we know where the Earth is and we compare it to a dumping ground, a rubbish bin, a pile of dog muck.

Should we eliminate dogs? If there are no more dogs on our planet, there will be no muck, no piles, no miles. We have razed skyscrapers and other huge buildings; nowadays there are no cities to speak of, no cities at all. We live miles from anywhere, in the middle of the countryside that we worship for its fresh air and the songs of nightingales. But the number of these miles can be reduced to another number, provided we continue to use our razor, our Ockham, our messiah and guru. What do we really need? Air miles, sea miles? The world is our oyster and we are happy in this new world of ours because it has at last deserved the name of ‘small world’. You often talk for the sake of talking and so say to a friend you meet in Australia, ‘It’s a small world.’ But up to now the world has not been small: you met your friend ten years ago and you did not go to Australia on foot, if you remember rightly. You took a plane and used your air miles, flying to Australia for nothing. You flew to this continent and it took you many hours to reach it; you cannot say the world was really small in those days, in those times. Now it is small and you can go to Australia on foot or just step down from your balcony, saying to yourself you will be in Australia in no time at all.

The world is our oyster and this oyster is a kind of nirvana we have been dreaming about

for centuries: this dream of ours dates back to the Buddha's sermons. He said we should not speak untruth and take what is not given to us, which means we are not supposed to take *anything*, for *nothing* is really given to us either by our neighbours or by fate. That is why we had better become go-getters, otherwise we shall only survive for a few hours or minutes because, in a manner of speaking, we are babies and will die at once if deprived of our mother's milk. So we have to find a mother – and not any mother, any woman, however beautiful and dignified she may look at her age. Yes, it is her age that counts: an old woman no longer has any milk in her body unless she drinks a lot of milk at breakfast, at lunch and before going to bed. But what counts is not the quantity of milk she may keep for a while inside her body, and every baby knows that. So our baby looks for a *suitable* woman with lots of *internal* milk and maternal instincts. As soon as it finds this ideal woman, ideal mother, he or she may feel on the safe side, for there is a lot of milk on this side, a lot of nutritional value.

But the Buddha warns us against the search for milk, and he also says we should not go to another man's wife. And what if this wife has a lot of inner, personal milk in her body and even in her brain? She has no children of her own and therefore dreams about her neighbours' child who may offer her an opportunity to turn her milk to good account. So on the other side of the wall there is a woman whose emotions are centred upon a boy or a girl living beyond the wall – a few yards away, to be precise. The world is very small indeed and so she walks towards this child, removing her blouse and exposing one of her breasts and herself, to some extent. Actually both the woman and the child need only one breast, one rivulet of milk, and the woman says to us, 'Take what I'm giving you.'

The whole thing seems to correspond to the Buddha's precept except that we have screamed a lot to make this woman realise we are badly in need of her milk. Well, whatever we do, we dig up our own root, according to Buddhist scriptures, unless they speak of the wise who are so pure that no dirt can touch them. Desires are the dirt on which these scriptures enlarge to put us on our guard against what the Russians call 'bad eternity'. Actually, for Buddhists all eternities are bad as long as they remained rooted in earthly lives, rebirths, reincarnations and so forth. The only eternity they accept and advocate is the one eternally linked to nirvana and I, for one, am growing weary of this word which does not seem to mean a lot. Of course it is a state of freedom from all suffering which, according to Buddhists, can be achieved by removing all personal wishes. But if you ask them where one can find this state or at least catch a glimpse of it, they point to the Buddha's statues and speak of their colleagues. Alas, we cannot meet these colleagues of theirs, for they already live on another plane, in another world closely associated with nirvana to which we have no access. So we always come back empty-handed –

but not empty-headed. And we should become empty-headed, empty-minded, empty-hearted and even empty-bodied, otherwise we had better forget the word 'nirvana'. And also the state this word seems to denote as it strives to convey its meaning to those who have been listening to it for months, if not for years.

Ockham is another word or rather a name to which we listen conscientiously as we continue to wipe buildings and human beings off the face of the Earth. Do we really need so many people around us, in our streets and parks, on our motorways? And what about traffic jams and overpopulation? And demography? What about it? The increase in the number of young people leaving to work in the cities has had a dramatic impact on the demography of the villages. And it is in our cities that we look from our nirvana-bound balcony supported by Atlas or one of his stooges. Sure enough, our nirvana-bound balcony is Atlas-supported – at the same time, in the same space. It *is* the small world; and the small time. Be that as it may, there are too many people in the cities we are looking at and so we are quite justified in wiping them – both the cities and their inhabitants – off the face of the Earth and from our own faces. No more worries, no more riddles, no more bags under our eyes.

Let us rewrite or rather update the Bible which is in the making, as George Bernard Shaw put it. Well, he was speaking of God but, as everybody knows, God is the Bible and vice versa. So we read either God or the Bible, and we recite both whenever we read the Bible out loud to our children or half-blind relatives. Instead of the injunction 'Multiply and replenish the Earth', from now on we shall recite our version of the future awaiting us beyond the horizon and also amidst the stars investigated by our astrologers. 'Decrease and desert the Earth.' And it is not high time to say, 'Easier said than done' because it is not as hard as one might think, given the training we have received in the course of our lives. This man deserted his wife and family for another woman. That woman deserted her husband and family for another man, for a Russian oligarch. And at some point we all deserted our respective villages and settled in Paris, Rome, London and New York. We have trained ourselves to desert our families, our villages, our countries and our armies. The Earth is nothing but a village, another village. Why not desert her, our Mother? It would be as easy as pie. This departure is all the more logical since our Mother Earth will soon have no more milk for her babies. In the foreseeable future.

So they have left the Earth thanks to our skilful use of Ockham's razor that is probably the most ideal and pure instrument one can resort to in the domain of Buddhism. You have to cut and cut and cut, as Buddhists say as they remove from their fields of vision both their visions and everyday reality. Ockham's razor is embedded in their minds so they need neither shave nor cut whatever they are determined to get rid of for the sake of their enlightenment and our

revelation. ('Enlightenment' is not the word traditionally used by *our* priests and saviours.) Jesus says that we should forget our families and follow his footsteps, in his footsteps, even if he happens to skim across the tops of the waves; and any burden, however respectable and reasonable, may affect the speed and loyalty of our thoughts. Suppose we are so exhausted when we get home from our work that we trail wearily up the stairs to bed, muttering under our breath, 'I'm tired, exhausted, weary, fed up and disgusted.' Is that how we should follow Jesus Christ or even an ordinary saviour who, for all his normality and triviality, can save us from drowning or a woman? Of course not. We should run, run and run; and we should be able to run a mile in four minutes, if we are resolved to keep up with our saviour of sorts. And if we do not manage to catch up with him, we should go to the gym and train ourselves until we are able to run a mile in three minutes; or two miles in seven minutes.

We continue to cut whatever we lay our hands on and our hands cut off both objects and subjects they are unable to touch. So humans and objects continue to disappear and we realise that we need only one human being on Earth and our decision to keep one specimen of our species may be likened to what was going on before the Flood. All right, we shall model our behaviour upon that of God – it is not the first time we are tempted to act like Him in order to accede to a higher plane of regard. We need a male and a female to preserve our species: one child would not be enough, contrary to what some of us think. It is not enough to put one child – either a boy or a girl – on a pedestal to show him or her to Martians, saying, 'They used to walk on our planet before the Revolution or another stage of Evolution.' No, we have to enlarge this pedestal of ours to allow another child to stand or lie on it, having sex with the other child. And these children of ours should belong to different races so as not to impoverish the future human race.

But first we have to teach our children to have respect for different races and appreciate the diversity of other cultures; otherwise they will kill each other before giving birth to their descendants. We all know that people should not be stigmatised on the basis of race, but some children may be unaware of the fact, on account of their immaturity. Let us not forget that even nowadays many Americans are still grappling with the issue of race. (I have no idea to which 'nowadays' this piece of information belongs.) Discrimination on the basis of race, gender, age or disability is not allowed, and even if our girl is incapable of conceiving a child, we should not banish her to the Hereafter. Let her stand on our pedestal, childless and helpless. At least *our* bodies will keep her company.

And what about putting a cosmic man (or woman) on the pedestal, a symbol of microcosm and macrocosm – Adam Kadmon, in other words and names? (Or Eva Kadmon.) According to

Zohar, Adam Kadmon or the Spiritual Man is ‘both the import and the highest degree of creation, for which reason he was formed on the sixth day. As soon as the Man was created, everything was complete, including the Upper and Lower worlds, for everything is comprised in the Man. He unites in Himself all the forms.’ Well and good. Alas, this definition does not suit our purpose because we should not forget that discrimination on the basis of race, *gender*, age or disability is not allowed. Where is our girl, in other words? Where is the Woman? Of course, according to Zohar, everything is comprised in our Adam. But according to us, *not* everything is comprised in him, for the Woman is conspicuous by her absence. To allow her to be conspicuous by her presence, we should correct the text as follows, ‘Everything is comprised in the Man and in the Woman. They unite in Themselves all the forms.’

But let us go back to the Buddha, to where he is sitting under his tree or just under the sun, under the polestar and the Milky Way. What does he say? ‘All created things perish,’ ‘all uncreated things perish,’ ‘all non-things perish,’ ‘any thing in itself perishes,’ ‘any out-of-itself thing perishes,’ ‘perish the thought,’ ‘perish the passion,’ ‘perish the emotion,’ ‘perish the greed,’ ‘perish the need,’ ‘perish the deed,’ ‘perish the undeeds,’ ‘perish the indeed,’ ‘perish the “I am”,’ ‘it is important to store perishable human beings in a cool place,’ ‘keep cool – neither shout nor lose your temper,’ ‘lose yourself,’ ‘loosen your tie and your ties,’ ‘loosen your grip,’ ‘don’t loosen your tongue,’ ‘you should loosen up,’ ‘a gin and tonic may loosen you up but you should not drink,’ and so on and so forth.

What does St Paul say? I am already in my library and I have so many books around me and even overhead that I do not know which one to choose. St Paul seems a proper choice because in churches his letters are commented upon as if they had been written *yesterday*, being influenced and affected by what is going on *today*. Suppose you are a doctor and sit at a table surrounded by your colleagues who talk and talk; and you realise they have nothing else to do. They are not in their surgeries, in their offices; they are not about to pull yet another of your wisdom teeth out, which might make them focus their attention upon their instruments, rather than words. Of course they often talk when pulling your teeth out; yet they are somehow distracted from their monologues and so you enjoy a kind of respite because their words are even worse than their instruments. They usually talk nonsense and you do not like nonsense in any shape or form, even if its present form is meant to make you forget your suffering.

Surgeons, on the other hand, do not talk and that is why most people prefer surgeons to dentists – to the point of being prepared to undergo operations, which might enable them to

enjoy peace and quiet, if only for one or two hours. Well, suppose you are a doctor and not just one of a doctor's patients. You sit at a table, in a room where one can see no surgical supplies/instruments/gloves. For want of anything better, you talk to the people sitting around you and drinking the tea they are offered by your secretary, or their secretaries. After a while you go home and write in your diary, 'The discussion focused on topical issues in medicine.' That is what one can say about St Paul, for his letters seem to have been written just after such a discussion focused on *topical* issues. For instance, he writes, 'For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour *you*, if a man take *of you*, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.' Doesn't that apply to you and anyone else, today, this morning?

Upon awakening you see a man who says, 'You're under arrest. And don't think it's just a bad dream, a nightmare you read about in Kafka's *The Trial*. It's not a book, my dear friend. The stark reality is you're really under arrest because the law is against you.' And if you ask this man to what term you have been sentenced, he answers, 'I'm going to devour you.' And he sets about devouring your toes, your left foot, your right leg, and you realise you can do nothing about it. You just say to him, 'Why are you eating my legs and tummy? I'll go and fetch a few croissants at the baker's. Of course you'll have an English breakfast, not a continental one. Scrambled eggs on toast, ham, orange juice. You'll be served scones with butter and jam. Eggs are better than human legs. In my opinion, they're even more delicious than frogs' legs. We had to dissect a worm and a frog in our biology practical last night. Disgusting.'

Meanwhile the man you see beside your bed sets about dissecting your body as if you were a frog or a worm or a mouse. He does not look like a cat; yet he seems to enjoy his meal as if you *were* a mouse one can find in any house, provided one looks for it for one hour at least. 'What do you take me for?' you say to the gluttonous man. 'I'm not a mouse, am I?' 'You are,' he answers without batting an eyelid. 'You're a mouse, a worm, a frog, a grouse. Don't you like grouse? I would devour myself, if I were you. Luckily for me, I'm not you.' That is how he rounds off because his mouth is so full his words cannot get through, and he seems to prefer your muscles to his own words. Is that what St Paul writes about in his Letter to Corinthians? But what does he mean when he says 'if a man takes *of you*'? According to another translation, it means 'takes advantage of you'.

All right, you are being taken advantage of and you do not seem to mind this operation or ritual. Why don't you call the police? All right, you call the police and say, 'There's a man in my bedroom. He's devouring me limb by limb. I'm a lamb, you know. All my life I've compared myself to Jesus Christ. I'm afraid this man will roast me on a spit. I'm afraid he'll end up cooking a lamb casserole.' But the police officer interrupts you to say you are talking

nonsense because you live in a free country and consequently cannot be ill-treated by ogres. And he adds after a pause, 'We must do more to smooth the country's path to democratic reform.' 'Is that your way of doing more?' you shout. 'This man exalts himself, you know. Soon he'll smite me on the face.' 'Why?' asks the police officer. 'Because it is written, "...if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face --"' 'If he does, you'll call us, I hope,' says the policeman before hanging up.

If you read a novel by Gabriel García Márquez or Graham Greene, you enjoy – or not, as the case may be – a series of figments of one's imagination, and however important this 'one' is, it is nothing but a figment and an imagination you come across. And let us not forget that you too have a lot of figments and a huge imagination, and you do not really need other people's contribution to your daydreaming and nightmares which you enjoy from time to time, given that they are not real and cannot harm you. Upon awakening, you realise that you are screaming for nothing, for a figment of your brain's imagination, and you heave a sigh of relief, saying to yourself, 'It was only a nightmare, nothing more, nothing else, nothing, nothing.' And what about Gabriel García Márquez and Graham Greene? For some reason their works captured the imagination of readers but you are not of their number because you are fed up with your own imagination and therefore do not need exterior figments and outer flights. 'Just another flight of fancy,' you say to yourself as you continue to hearken to your own homemade, brainmade stories. And you also hearken to St Paul's epistles because you need *reality* now and then; you need what may be journalistically called 'topical stuff'.

'But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.' Why is this verse topical? Because I think about myself as I read it and my perseverance or resistance – my act of resistance, as Deleuze puts it – seems to be echoed by St Paul's declaration, by *his* perseverance and resistance. Come hell or high water – or paradise, or purgatory – I will always do what I am doing now, whatever they say, think or make. Of course I am no martyr but sometimes it is better to be crucified, for at least they take notice of you and erect a cross for your sake instead of leaving you out in the cold. They may think you are used to the cold, and they may even say to each other, 'Anyway, he's come in from the cold,' thinking about someone else's figments, imagination, fancy and flights. Or they do not say anything, unwilling to make an effort on your account. Instead, they make a lot of effort as they help nonentities of all kinds and breeds by making names for them – for those who deservedly have no names. Adam did not take the trouble to name them and they had remained nameless until the day an important person took notice of them and began to make a multitude of names – household names and good names,

among other names. Why don't you give these humans a series of bad names?

Sometimes your life seems to stay outside your body – not necessarily when you listen to the orders given by your superiors and inferiors. Within the framework of democracy, your inferiors often grow so insolent they think they are entitled to order you about and that is more unpleasant than being pushed and mishandled by your superiors. At least what you call logic is respected and used when your superior says, 'What are you doing here? You should be over there.' And he or she does not even take the trouble to show you where this 'over there' is located; you go here and there, and nothing suits either your mood or your purpose. St Paul must know what you are to do today and tomorrow, but you do not always carry his epistles in your pockets or attaché cases. And you should carry his epistles even if they are too heavy for your puny constitution because what counts is not your constitution, however important it is for your life expectancy. What counts is your *mind* and whenever one speaks of the mind, one does not fail to mention a series of entities that Ockham would have eliminated either with his razor or bare hands. His bare hands were so used to cutting off edges and other superfluous bits that he did not really need either razors or axes or Kalashnikovs.

Deprived of St Paul's moral and mental supports, you are at a loss to know how you can help yourself and to *what* you can help yourself. You like chocolate and you wish you could help yourself to a box of chocolates; but both your superiors and inferiors had something else in mind when they talked to you about their agendas and your duties. So ask yourself what you can do and, first and foremost, ask yourself the following question: 'What should be done?' When you project your worries into the cosmos, you feel you are part of it and so it is worth your while to deserve universal love. How can you deserve it? By doing what should be done. If you do only what *you* have to do, you crawl/go/retreat/retire into your shell or hell, whereas you wish to address yourself to the cosmos and take part in its growth and history.

What is the answer you are looking for? The people you see in front of you shake their heads as if they had Parkinson's and you realise you cannot rely upon them, even if they tell you they teach at the University of Oxford and have a few Nobel Prizes. You do not have to say you prefer St Paul to Nobel Prizes because you should waste neither your words nor your breath. Nor should you waste your energy, your lungs, your heart, your soul, your liver and so on and so forth, as you usually say. But before going on, you had better consult a book on anatomy, otherwise you are unlikely to know what you may waste if you continue to talk to those people and to others, generally speaking. If you talk to your superiors, they turn a deaf ear to whatever you say, even if you shout, scream, stamp your feet and clap your hands. Their deaf ears are as deaf as the deaf who will not hear: for once, the will dissected by Schopenhauer

holds no sway over them. They are not far from nirvana, in your opinion, although you hope they are far from whatever you respect and worship. Why should they be in the middle of the bliss you cannot reach, for all your mental and physical gymnastics?

If you talk to your inferiors, they also turn a deaf ear because not only your superiors have a lot of deaf ears at their disposal. Anyway, they are unlikely to help you because even God helps only those who help themselves; and yet He might help *everybody*, especially those who *cannot* help themselves. We call them the poor, the infirm, the needy. It is true that God should not help the greedy and also those who *can* help themselves by calling their bankers and lawyers. These people say to other people, 'The company's results are in line with stock market expectations.' They are full of great expectations which dwell both inside and outside them as if there was enough room for hope in human life. Well, hope is believed to be a virtue and so you count your money and hope you will count even more money in the future. All right, you will not change the world, even if you become a messiah or a worldwide reformer – another Mrs Thatcher, for instance. Apparently it is not enough to become Mrs Merkel. Well, you are what you are, even though you have not yet become what you are.

At this point you are bound to recall St Paul for the simple reason that you never forget him, whatever happens and whoever you may talk to. You do talk to people now and then, especially when you feel like wasting your words, breath and the rest of your body and soul. You talk to them for the sake of talking – for your own sake, in other words. Why? Because you like both your words and yourself and therefore you could say, using Ockham's razor, 'I'm in love with myself. Of course I'm also in love with my words, but my words are part of myself so I can cut my statement down to size and just say, "I'm in love with myself." Please, don't turn a deaf ear to what I'm saying right now. I see your deaf ear everywhere and enough's enough, you know. At least one ear of yours can hear and I'd like to see this ear and not the other one. So please turn the former and not the latter. Sorry, it's the other way round. Turn round and turn all your ears in my direction, in the direction of my words. Do you see my words? Do you see in what direction they're going? Do you see their aim, in other words? You don't?'

Going home, going home. You are getting closer and closer to your library; its waves and particles reach your brain and touch it ever so softly so as not to give you a shock, for doctors say that any shock, however delightful, may damage one's nerves to the point of destroying them completely. But your library has a soothing vibe and you welcome its echo in the middle of a street you seem to recognise, for all your daydreaming. But you should not rush, whatever your desires, wishes and passions are this afternoon because your future depends on your safety,

on your body's completeness. Yesterday you were rushing along with your head down when you cannoned into an old lady walking the other way. You killed the old lady, for all you know: she was taken to hospital and you know nothing about her fate and health. But you assume she was killed as a result of this collision because she was an old lady and old ladies are as fragile as a case of wine. Be that as it may, it is your body you should think about and yesterday – and also the day before – you might have got run over by a car, and any car, however small and insignificant, may kill you or at least cut off one of your legs or arms.

Anyway, you are at home now and you head for your library where a lot of sacred books await your fingers which they know almost by heart. It is true that you often just touch them without being tempted to open and read anything: there are moments when you are fed up with instructions, injunctions and threats. All these books threaten you, saying you will go to Hell if your passions are not dead – even deader than the dead who may be recalled and in a way brought back by the quick. But you are not supposed to recall your former passions for fear of being dragged into loves, hates and other emotions, sensations and tensions. And you should say to those who are eager to discuss this crisis and that predicament with you, 'Look, I don't want to get into a fight with you over this, so let's forget it.' And you forget it or at least you do your best to forget it, for the Buddha and also St Paul advise you to get unpleasant tasks over and done with as quickly as possible – and even as impossible, as the Russians say from time to time.

Do you really know what sacred books are and how they differ from *unsacred* ones? Let us take Darwin, for instance. As soon as we consider him we realise we might have been born in a zoo or a jungle, and neither of these places suits us. Is his book sacred? No, because it says we might have seen the light of day without God's participation in the act of our creation, of our emancipation from *Nichts*, as Heidegger puts it. Frankly speaking, we do not like nothingness even if it has *some* affinities with nirvana, judging from what the Buddha says about removals, spring-cleaning, dry cleaning and other good clean-ups. But for God's activities and kindness, we saw not only the light of *day* – nothing to write home about: anybody can be born on condition that this anybody or nobody was already conceived by a man and a woman or in a test-tube. We saw the light of *God* and that makes all the difference. Of course there are individuals who turn a blind eye to the light of God and we often hear them say, 'This light makes no difference at all. There's nothing wrong with the sun and with our electricity.' 'Storms caused power cuts in hundreds of homes last night,' we say to them.

All this does not mean you can choose sacredness on a whim, on the spur of the moment; and given that there are many moments, an impressive number of moments, you are likely to

read all the books there are, provided God bestows immortality upon you, as La Fontaine puts it. All right, you are immortal and read whatever you can lay your hands and eyes on because you have nothing else to do: within eternity you have plenty of time, a sort of cornucopia you have to cope with so as not to die of boredom. You read Darwin, St Paul, Wittgenstein and realise that any book is sacred as long as you take it seriously and put it on the top of your life. And then you put it *at the core* of your life and live with it for some time, hoping it will help you cope with time, eternity, space, dark corners, fatal women, fatal men and dogs, wolves and crocodiles. You cope all the time and as you do you penetrate your brain like a bullet. You see what you are and you are frightened to death of your own fragility. Even within the kingdom of eternity you are fragile, unsubstantial; and you may be frightened to death, to another samsara, karma or whatever they call it in English, Sanskrit, Russian and German.

You are in the middle of the night and you enjoy this fact as you open your window and breathe what is called fresh air, although it is not as fresh as all that, according to newspapers which talk about pollution and dissolution. You are even tempted to coin a verb and come up with ‘to dissolute’, which means you are leading a dissolute life, drinking and womanising, playing cards and the piano or any other instrument. You need music from time to time – as Shakespeare’s characters do – and you indulge in this pastime: whatever time you encounter on your way to eternity, death and mess, is a sort of pastime or just a ‘sort’. You pass this time, that time, and you do not skip space; nor do you miss out on it. ‘Don’t miss out on the fantastic bargains in our summer sale,’ your neighbour says to you and you begin to love your neighbour after hearing this piece of news. But, for all your energy and perseverance – you keep going from one shop to another, from Paris to London – you miss out on these fantastic bargains and consequently on time, space and love. Usually you fall in love with the objects you buy, even if they are simple, cheap and look like keepsakes – they have great sentimental value for you – and not like real objects you can show to your neighbours and friends, saying, ‘I bought it in London, at an auction.’ You miss out on everything but your life grabs you by the scruff of the neck and throws you out of the coffin where you had already installed yourself for good.

When someone says, ‘For good,’ you are tempted to say, ‘For bad,’ because you are already mature enough to know that everything and everybody are *for bad*, and there is nothing *for good* except a few peanuts. Of course you pick these peanuts up because you are not a spendthrift and spend nothing if you can keep whatever you have without starving to death or putting your bed in the middle of a street, for want of anything better or worse. Well, once again you realise that St Paul and his epistles are far superior to your interior monologues, and so you pick up your copy of The Bible and start reading; and you keep reading the Epistles far into the

night. 'For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers (womenstealers?), for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine –' Everything is contrary to sound doctrine, to anything sound, because everything is unsound, as you pointed out a few hours ago. Never mind, never mind. So everything is unsound, according to you and many other thinkers with whom you are acquainted through books, epistles, letters and emails. St Paul is not of their number, or of your number because he is Number One, at least to some people. Well, let him be Number One; or Number Two, as the case may be. Or Number Four: he comes right after the Holy Trinity.

Whoremongers. Does he mean 'warmongers'? I am watching a documentary on the Second World War and recall the words someone uttered: all words are to be uttered sooner or later. This someone uttered the following words, 'For the Russians the war was yesterday.' I hope it was yesterday for everybody, for everything was yesterday; everything is today, whether we forget this everything or not. We may forget all the everythings that punctuate and fill up our history, but some of them should not be forgotten and that is why we do not forget them: we cannot do otherwise. Yes, for once there is no 'otherwise', no 'elsewhere', no 'on the other hand' – for the simple reason that there are no other hands. All hands are here and they hold a corpse, a multitude of corpses, and they also hold bullets, ropes, ravines, crosses and their absences. They also hold tears and blood, many bloods, and also 'also', and yet another 'also', and another, and yet, and another. Also, also, also, also. How can you hold all this in your hands, on your back, in your mind and memory, in your brain and outside it? You are holding our history and you have no alternative but to hold it without being tempted to collapse and forget everything, the everything itself; and the everybody himself, herself, oneself, no one self.

Is it a sacred book? Is this memory a sacred book? It is sacred – no doubt about that. But it is not high time to rely on doubts, saying, 'I doubt, I'm Cartesian,' because for once you do not doubt. All this happened, however incredible it may appear in the light of this and in the light of that. Of course you are tempted to say there is no light and consequently you were born into a dark family, into a family of darkness and void. And so you saw the dark of day, the black of day, the black eye of day; you were born into a black picture of day painted by someone you are not acquainted with. Sure enough, you are acquainted only with blackness; and also the void; and also a set of trials and tribulations; and also with manicure sets. You are acquainted with many 'alsos'.

My parents were born in St Petersburg and this city is still my city, wherever I may find myself as I settle down here and there, in France, in Germany, in England and even in New Zealand – whenever I drink *their* wines. I was born in Moscow but this birth of mine does not

alter my lifestyle centred upon St Petersburg and the 19th century when I would have chosen to be born, had I presided over my birth and its consequences. I did not and so was born in Moscow, and I cannot do anything about it now; nor was I able to do anything about it in the late Forties when French wines were at the height of their powers or will to power; or just will, intensity, longevity and so on, on condition that whenever you say ‘so on’, you think about wine and the richness of its nose.

And here is another image, another vision. You are sitting at your desk, surrounded by books and tubes that are supposed to symbolise knowledge, science and intelligence. Is this image edifying? Hardly, hardly. No one needs your books, whilst your wallets and credit cards have already been removed from your desk and even from the room where you are sitting and talking. Ockham’s razor is as sharp as ever and its efficiency accounts for many burglaries and other misdemeanours such as sexual harassment: in this case, it removes *virginity* from some female bodies. And while it is at it, it may also remove the *joie de vivre*, faith in the judicial system, faith in God, and faith in good faith. Did the criminal act in good faith for his victim? Of course not. So no one will ever act in good faith for anybody. There are only criminals in the world; the world itself is a violent criminal. Doesn’t it throw bombs on us? It does. And what about cultural, economic and spiritual impoverishment? Humans cannot be expected to shoulder all the blame for disasters and poverty. The world is also guilty and therefore ought to be sentenced to life imprisonment. Where shall we imprison it? In the Hereafter. But the Hereafter should also stand trial. For what? For Hell, for its very existence. Let us sentence it to life imprisonment too. Hell and Purgatory are to go to prison in the Hereafter; Paradise will come over here.

What is Hell on Earth? The Jews, of course. That is what Hitler thought and he said it many times, but for some time no one heard anything; only a few friends and fellow travellers did from time to time. The latter listened to what Hitler said and nodded all the time, and their heads ended up nodding even when Hitler was not speaking. He was just looking at them and they nodded their heads – and also their minds. And also their brains and their hearts – everything inside them agreed with Hitler. And whenever he uttered his favourite keyword ‘Jews’, they clenched their fists and ran towards those who, in their opinion, were the Jews or their representatives. They would have run as far as Jerusalem, but for Hitler’s practical mind: his mind knew that there were more Jewish men and women in Europe than in the Bible. Hitler was more interested in the Book of Realism than in sacred books.

Nietzsche thought that all anti-Semites should be shot and I wonder whether he wrote that before Hitler’s birth or after it. Anyway, Hitler ought to have been shot in his cradle, along with

other anti-Semites who might have been in their offices and elsewhere when Nietzsche sentenced all of them to death. Actually Nietzsche must have come up with this idea well before he wrote it down and sent it in an envelope to Overbeck or another friend of his: as usual I am too lazy and so do not feel like going all the way to my library to check the name of the addressee. What does it matter anyway? What counts is Nietzsche's thought and Hitler's death, and one regrets that they did not coincide in spite of the number of coincidences one has to deal with in everyday life. As we all know, Jung even devoted a book to synchronicity but I am not sure he spoke of Hitler and Nietzsche – in relation to the Jews and the destiny of anti-Semites. This does not matter either because death is always more important than books unless we are surrounded by books of life.

In all the places the Nazis occupied, the round-up of the Jews began because Hitler wished to create Paradise on Earth and in his mind the Jews were associated with Hell, with Evil and its only root. He thought that all evils would disappear from the world upon the Jews' disappearance, annihilation and eternal death. In his opinion – and in his mind, in his body – there was only one evil in the world and all other evils were just its auxiliaries. In other words or images, there was the Tree of Evil in Hitler's world and the Jews were the trunk of this gigantic Tree; whereas the rest or other evils had been reduced to the ranks, so to speak. In other words, they were just the branches of the Tree, its twigs, leaves and even a number of birds that were in the habit of singing their songs while enjoying the Tree's hospitality. So the Tree had to be cut down; in other words, the Jews and their evil had to be eliminated, root and branch.

'The colossal empire in the East,' wrote Hitler, 'is ripe for dissolution. And the end of Jewish domination in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a state.' In other images, Russia or rather the Soviet Union was yet another tree in Hitler's garden, and the trunk of this tree was almost identical to that of the Tree of Evil, given that it represented the Jews. And logically enough, this Tree was to be cut down as well so one wonders if Hitler was allergic to trees as such. Of course he was fond of the grass or grassroots, for he often said, 'The feeling among the grassroots of the Party is that the leaders are not radical enough. We should have eliminated the Jews a long time ago.' As long as his army was victorious he was in love with the grassroots of his Party, but the defeats it suffered in the course of the last years of his dictatorship turned his love into hate. At the very end, one could not even speak about a sort of 'love-hate relationship', for Hitler hated the Germans to the point of yearning for their annihilation: he had many Ockham's razors in his chests of drawers.

Hitler spoke about the dissolution of Russia as follows, 'Nitric acid will dissolve most animal tissue. And what about us and Russia? Are we inferior to nitric acid? Aren't the Russians

mere animals? Actually they're inferior to animals – to my dog, for instance. Aren't they, aren't they? Why don't you nod? All right, all right. Enough's enough. Have you already learnt the lesson? I hope you know now that the Russians aren't mere underhumans. They're more and less than that, worse than that. They're underanimals and underinsects. They're underflies and underworms. What else? Do you have any idea? Do you wish to complete my inventory? All right, all right. I'm not finished yet. I know you wholeheartedly adhere to my total doctrine, to my total war. Do you think the Nazis are unable to tackle this problem? You just dissolve a spoonful of powder in warm water. Easy, isn't it? As easy as a spoonful of powder. As easy as warm water. Don't you have enough water in your bathrooms? Not enough powder in your chests of drawers? All right, I'll supply the powder. The world has already supplied it. This powder is the Jews. Let us dissolve them in our water, in our warm ocean. Can't we heat up our ocean? Can't we dissolve and disintegrate Russia in it? As easy as the spoonful of powder. As easy as the spoonful of power.'

January 1942. About 4,000 people were dying in Leningrad each day. During the blockade of the city, more humans died than the *total war* dead of Britain and the United States of America combined. Nietzsche used to say, 'What does not kill me fortifies my body and mind.' And what if you get killed? Are your body and mind fortified by the snow? A Leningrader said, 'Every day I went to the shop where I was given my ration of food. On my way to the shop, I saw two corpses in the snow. On my way back I would come across four corpses.' This is what the total multiplication table is about. If you multiply seven by 15 you get 105. If you multiply two by four you get 4,000.

We shall struggle on, drawing our strength from the courage of others. That was not enough under the circumstances. Sometimes you have no alternative but to draw your strength from your hate and not from your love, contrary to what sacred books affirm as they teach us how to cope with death. (Hate keeps a man alive, says a character in Ben Hur.) Love triumphs over death – that sort of thing. For once, it is not as easy as falling off a log. You fall off a log and say to yourself, 'It was easy, wasn't it?' And what if you fall flat on your face in the snow? Dying from what? From hunger/cancer/a heart attack/your injuries. It revolts you to know that the world spends so much money on arms when millions are dying of hunger. And what about Leningrad? What about the blockade? What about the corpses you met on your way to buy food or whatever passed for such? Bread was made with sweepings, cattle-cake, sawdust. People ate soap, linseed oil, wallpaper paste. Call it 'food', if you wish. There was lots of food and drink at the party. Where? When? In Germany, in January 1942. And in January 1941. At least there was a lot of food in Hitler's official residence; and in his bunker.

Leningrad. January 1942. March 1942. Melting snow revealed thousands of corpses in the streets and yards. A campaign was launched to clean up the city. Just another Ockham's razor. 'I have found this razor a most fruitful principle in logical analysis,' wrote Bertrand Russell. So did Leningrad's authorities, although they did not find themselves in the domain of logical analysis. Never mind – the city was cleaned up; as a result of this winter-cleaning, the inhabitants of St Petersburg did not have to wage war on epidemics.

Did they draw their strength from the courage of others? And what about those others? What did *they* draw their strength from? Did the latter draw their strength from the former? Did the former draw their strength from the latter? A vicious circle? A Catch-22 situation? You cannot have strength if others do not have it, but others cannot have strength if you do not have it. A Catch-4,000 situation. There was no strength left anywhere except in the libraries that stood open. People read poetry and sacred books. Not the Bible, though; not St Paul's epistles. There were no Bibles in Soviet libraries and bookshops. 'Nothing is sacred to the Russians,' said the Nazi officers. 'Even cows aren't sacred to them.' But the Russians called this war 'sacred'. It was a sacred war to them.

They drew their courage from poetry, from Pushkin, Lermontov, Baratinsky. In one of his poems, Lermontov is lying dead in a dale of Dagestan. (Not in Leningrad, not in the snow.) 'The deep wound still smoked on.' The blood was trickling drop by drop. He is lying on the sand and has a dream. An evening feast, with merry conversation. A young woman looks at his corpse. Leningrad. They were both dead and immortal. An evening feast, with merry conversation, a dream. Perchance a life, a real life. In yet another poem Lermontov signifies his desire to fall asleep. But the sleep he has in mind is not akin to the eternal, cold, grave-provided sleep. His chest rises and sinks; the leaves of an oak-tree rustle overhead. 'But before thee, Thought, trenchant as a naked sword, earthly life grows pale,' writes Baratinsky. No one can chain up the thoughts of a stoic. 'I've set up to myself a monument not wrought by hands. The public path to it will not grow weedy.' Two corpses, four corpses. Nabokov's translations.

They drew their courage from hate, disregarding the doctrines of Spinoza and St Paul. 'And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' All right. But you are driven mad by destruction and murders, and you may say to yourself and your God-fearing, St-Paul's-terrified cousins, 'Yes, I'm nothing, nothing. But this nothing of mine will kill the Germans who have desecrated my country. I'll kill all of them, not only Hitler and his cronies. There'll be no exception to this rule of mine, to the hatred I nourish towards these butchers. My nothingness is filled up with hatred. Sometimes nothingness is more

efficient than fullness. I admit that my present life boils down to hate. Well, you should envy me the fullness of my life.'

'Recompense to no man evil for evil. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.' 'Give place unto wrath' may be translated thus, 'Leave room for God's wrath.' But let us not forget that the Russians could not wait either for God or for the British and Americans, considering the extent of the damage caused by the Nazis and their will to extermination. So they killed German soldiers, raped German women and razed German towns. They neither fed nor spared their enemies whose cruelty had left psychological, physiological, psychoanalytical and architectural scars everywhere. And had they been acquainted with St Paul's epistle to the Romans, they would have gone on with their revenge, for they were not likely to understand what he had meant by heaping coals of fire on their enemies' heads. Your right hand gives your enemy a drink; your left hand heaps coals of fire on his head. In other words, your right hand does not know what its left counterpart is doing. Anyway, it is easier to shoot your enemy dead and rape his wife. As you rape her you say to yourself, 'What a pity he is not a Muslim – I might rape four women instead of one. Never mind – I'll rape his daughters, nieces and nephews.' Why should you waste your precious coal on your foes?

'We cry no longer, for no tears could quench our burning hate. And hate is our only course. The guarantee of life, the cure for grief, the one uniting, warming, guiding force.' I have no idea who is the author of this poem. Not Lermontov, not Pushkin, not Tyutchev. Never mind, never mind. What counts is hate, not the authorship of war poems. 'Wait for me, and I'll return. Only, wait very hard. Wait when you are filled with sorrow as you watch the yellow rain[...]Wait when others have stopped waiting, forgetting their yesterdays[...]Wait for me, and I'll return defying every death.' According to the English documentary, everyone knew this poem by heart. Even I know a few lines; and yet I was born after the war.

I used to wonder why the rain you were watching had this unusual colour. The yellow rain. Why? Is the sky muddy too? Even muddier than the Earth? German aeroplanes got bogged up in the heavy mud. Revenge is sweet even if it takes place in a dream or in a book. Oddly enough, this poem sounds better in English, especially if it is recited by Laurence Olivier. Wait for me even if there are no more calendars around you, if time has stopped forever or just for a few years. Wait for me even if there's no more space around you, no more room for my body, my corpse. Wait for me even if I'm already in a mass grave. I may rise from the dead and come

to you. Don't you believe in the resurrection of the dead? Read St Paul's epistles and the rest of the New Testament. You should know that our body is 'sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: / It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: / It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.'

And your beloved or wife or bride immediately answers you, 'What are you talking about? I need a *natural* body, not an *unnatural* one. I couldn't care less about your *spiritual* body. What would I do with it? Am I supposed to caress your *spirits*? What for? To push them to a higher plane of regard? A couple of drinks will raise my spirits as well. We'll be in *high* spirits – I can assure you. We'll be in seventh heaven, providing you come to me in the flesh.' Alas, he turns a deaf ear to her supplications and goes on reading out loud, 'And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. / Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.' 'The Bible isn't obtainable in the Soviet Union,' she shouts. You turn a deaf ear to her shouts.

What does memory mean in this context? Of course one is tempted to say that nothing means anything, and to some extent one is justified in complaining about the lack of clarity we encounter whenever we leave our body and venture outside, into the outside world. It is meaningless – to some extent, to all extents and purposes, and whatever you say and conclude means only that you go on thinking and drawing conclusions as if any conclusion could be drawn from what you see around you and in the sky where no angels fly and take care of the clouds and stars. Both must be taken care of, otherwise they would fall or dissolve in the atmosphere, in the air and ether, but they neither fall nor dissolve and you are holding out in spite of starvation, deprivation, privation, privatisation. Whatever happens is painful, even if you happen to swim in the sea, in a swimming pool, within a Japanese bath meant for swimmers and sportsmen in general. Life is nonsensical but you go on drawing conclusions and jumping to them; and the higher you jump the more nonsensical everything grows. What is more, everything you come across is cliché-ridden: life, the human condition, the animal condition, trains of thought, trains and planes. You are weary and disgusted, but you realise that your human condition is rather humane in comparison with what Leningraders underwent in the course of their blockade.

You eat a piece of bread and as your mouth starts to feel it and deal with it you recall the blockade, their bread made with sweepings, cattle-cake and sawdust. You look at a dog and say to yourself that all dogs were eaten in Leningrad and you wonder why the dog you are looking

at has not been eaten yet. And you also wonder why you are not starving to death, considering there is nothing more natural in human life: every human being is doomed and sentenced to starvation. And you are also supposed to *freeze to death*. A blast of cold air hits you as you open the window, as you open a box of chocolate and any other box so that you freeze to death without exposing yourself to the outside world and the trials and tribulations it has in store for you whatever happens and whenever you see the light of day. And if a blanket of snow lies on the ground, you say to yourself that sooner or later this snow will melt, disclosing thousands of corpses. And when this eventually happens, you look at these corpses, hoping they will rise and talk to you about the weather and the beginning of a new tether. And you are so happy they are alive again that you let them talk nonsense to their heart's content because there is no other talk in the world and outside it.

Yes, life must go on. After a while – and this while lasted for more than a year – Leningraders got running water and took showers, baths and whatever they could take, and no one said to them, 'Take it or leave it,' for the answer was known in advance. Why should you say anything if you know answers and questions and foregone conclusions and foregone decisions? There were a few trams in their streets and that is what they called 'resurrection' in those days because they still had no Bible in their libraries and bookshops that stood invitingly open. To them the Resurrection was not on the Cross or in a grave; it was a tram, water, another piece of bread, a dog in the street. Schoolchildren and professors of botany helped to plant every open space with vegetables – just another facet of their overall Resurrection. You eat these vegetables now and recall both Leningrad and the Resurrection and probably the Cross, although for once you see a city on it, not a human or a god. Call it 'the City of God', if you wish.

The enemy has not been removed by Ockham's razor. The enemy's cannons go on hitting where it hurts; and it hurts everywhere. And you cannot hit back, whatever you undertake, even though you are convinced that this is one of the largest aid projects ever undertaken. You also undertake remedial work on dilapidated buildings, but there will be no remedies in your city as long as the enemy is nearby; and yet you cannot say his army is a stone's throw from where you are staying, for this army has not been stoned to death. Yes, you would have stoned all your enemies to death, if you were in a position to do so, if your whereabouts were close enough to his soldiers and cannons. Within your reach there are millions of stones but you cannot use them unless you think they might make you forget humankind and its cruelty. A stone falls into the water with a plop; another stone falls into the water with a plop. You count the stones and the plops; you listen to the plops, to their time and timing. Is that what time is about, duration?

Is that what killing time is about? Every plop raises time from the dead. Plop, plop, plop, plop. Flop, flop, flop, flop. When you get home from your time excursions, you are so tired all you can do is flop down in front of the television.

You remember a lot of concentration camps, although it is probably enough to remember one of them and single out one body, one member of this body. No, it is not enough. You should remember every body, all bodies, all members, all pains, all chimneys, all wounds, all words uttered and written by those bodies. A lot of rebuilding took place in the aftermath of the war: everything and everybody had to be rebuilt. The Germans were made not to just look at, but to re-bury the broken bodies. That way perhaps they would never forget – that is what the Allies thought at the time. They might have been right. They might have been wrong. Who knows? No one is skilful enough to probe into the mysteries of human memory. Did they count on so-called tactile memory?

And suddenly you remember that Hitler had only one testicle. Your tactile memory has nothing to do with this memory, needless to say. Do you need this memory? Do you need Hitler's other testicle? What for? To throw it into the Neva? Plop, plop, plop, plop, plop. How do people spend their time? Students learning computer studies spend two days a week in a computer lab and four days in the classroom. You have to spend three months of the year away from home, but there are compensations like the chance to meet new people. What do you need these new people for? Do you think they are new under the sun? Is it really one of the compensations? What are others, may I ask? Never mind, never mind. Talk to these new people if you feel like it. You have dinner with them and see if they can drink you under the table. And if they cannot, you will be disappointed and look for another bunch of new people. But even this pastime is more rewarding than the one I saw on television last night.

The Russians found Hitler's corpse and as they subjected it to unfair treatment, they discovered he had only one testicle. They did not wonder whether it was a kind of sign – like the Devil's cleft foot, for instance. They wished to know whether the testicle they had – the one that remained attached to Hitler's body – belonged to Hitler or somebody else. In short, they were looking for Hitler because they had been asked to find him in Berlin; and Berlin lay in ruins after months of bombing. They found a corpse that did not look like Hitler because it was partly charred, and Hitler was not charred in his lifetime – neither partly nor wholly; nor was he scorched. Perhaps he had always had only one testicle, which may account for his incapacity to have progeny. But what do we care about his progeny and his posthumous incapacities? All corpses are impotent and lack the will to power that every human being – especially the ones who persevere in their being – is believed to have against all odds.

In short, Hitler had only one testicle; at least his corpse did not have the second testicle and the scientists who had been asked to find out whether the world was dealing with Hitler's corpse or a sort of fake understandably did not take the trouble to find the second testicle. After all, they had not been asked to restore Hitler's body, to resurrect it with all its capacities and incapacities. So they limited their autopsy to solving the identity problem related to Hitler's corpse or mortal remains, given that what remained of his body hardly deserved the name of 'corpse'. At least it was not a dignified corpse but no one in the laboratory really thought in terms of dignity, for any autopsy lacks dignity and every specialist is aware of the fact. Well, our specialists and scientists cared neither about their own dignity or about that of the corpse they were dissecting to find vestiges of Hitler's immoral life.

They examined his dentition and realised they needed his dentist's assistance, but they failed to find him, for all their exertions. They found only his assistant – a woman who was capable of talking about Hitler's teeth for hours on end. 'I told him, "Brush your teeth thoroughly morning and night," but he was too busy and often forgot to brush his teeth, hair and even trousers. Almost every day his trousers got covered in mud, but luckily I was always by his side and so was able to brush them clean. Once he fell and knocked a chip out of his front tooth. I can show you the chip, if you wish – I still have it in my private Hitler Museum. Actually he had razor-sharp teeth and could devour all his enemies. But he was too kind, too humane and so used tanks and aeroplanes.'

The specialists ended up showing the corpse's teeth to the woman, whereupon she exclaimed, 'It's him, it's him! It's him all right. Could I have these teeth? No? Just one tooth, then. This one. This is my favourite tooth.' For a while, the woman stood there, looking at the teeth, and one could see she knew the ins and outs of how they had worked in the course of Hitler's life. But she did not know whether he had taken a poison capsule or shot himself and only shook her head when the following question was put to her: 'Did your patient die a dog's death or a soldier's death?' She shook her head and arms. 'Do you know the difference between these two deaths?' She shook her head and feet. 'If you shoot yourself, you're a man. If you take a poison capsule, you're a dog or a woman. Actually Eva Brown took a poison capsule. Did you know that?' She shook her head and shoulder blades. 'Do you know anything about Eva Braun's teeth?' She shook her head and armpits.

That meeting achieved absolutely nothing; it was a complete waste of time. Of course the scientists and specialists knew now that the corpse lying in their operating theatre belonged to Hitler. If, at that point, someone had inquired about Hitler's personal belongings, the specialists would have pointed to the corpse, saying, 'Over there.' And Hitler's biographer might have

written, 'He led a simple life, with few belongings, and never owned a home of his own. He was a staunch friend and ally of St Francis of Assisi whose *Canticle of the Sun* he sang every morning. He gave all his belongings to the poor, the needy, the infirm and the underdog. Yes, he gave his corpse to the underdog because the underdog was his only *raison d'être*. And he could not give the underdog anything else, for he owned only his own corpse. Incidentally, St Francis often spoke about corpses on whom his numerous followers were supposed to model themselves.' 'Let us give his corpse to the dogs,' said the scientists. They did not.

Why did they waste their time on this search and on the identity problem which was far less exciting than the one continuously tackled by philosophers, bureaucrats and amnesiacs? Because they thought that if Hitler had been spared by poison, bullets and his cronies, he might have created another Nazi party and launched a devastating attack on our peaceful, harmonious and ideal universe made up of democracies, freedoms and liberals. And such onslaughts and provocations should be nipped in the bud, otherwise we are likely to suffer once again under Hitler's dictatorship, his ships or rather U-boats, alias submarines. I do not like the way the drivers whip their horses; nor do I like the way the former chancellor and president whipped humans for more than a decade. But we could have nipped his power and cruelty in the bud without wasting our time on his barbarously charred corpse, teeth, testicles and chips. We might just have thrown a mini atom bomb on his corpse and on his stooges, cronies and mourners – on *their* teeth, testicles and intestines.

Anyway, whoever you face or miss produces what is called side-effects; and they are everywhere, on every side. Even if you are not attacked *directly*, there are side effects and your sides cannot be saved round the clock. You are on the safe side now, but in a few moments you find yourself on the unsafe side and nothing can save you from this side; and you are quite aware of the fact. You are aware of your death and you brave it as long as it makes sense – your bravery, that is – but then you realise it does not make sense any longer, and you withdraw and retreat – either into yourself or into some wood or other. And you bet on your rebirth and on that of the civilisation you have got used to because barbarism is even worse than any civilisation and evolution. Well, there is what they call eternal recurrence or occurrence: you begin to mix up these terms and everything else, although everything is not eternal. Only something is, assuming there is such a thing as an eternal thing or something. But it is better to stop before you go too far; and yet you cannot go too far because nothing is really too far or just far, far away. Everything is near at hand – your right hand, for instance.

There are still many Hitlers around us and one cannot help wondering where they come from. And one will never tire of asking this question because one is not tired of saying the same

old thing every day and every night, whenever one cannot go to sleep. One is reminded of Pol Pot or Mao Pot or just Pot. Or just P/ot, as Stalin might have put it. Why should one memorise all these names? One just says, 'Hitler, another Hitler, another Hitler,' and everyone understands what and who one is talking about. Marx insisted that by changing the environment it is possible to do anything down to altering genes and swapping them for other genes.

Hitler should be placed in Churchill's environment, if not in his mother's womb which, in the general opinion, would be reluctant to welcome him. So Hitler or rather Churchill was born on November 30, 1874: time is also part of what is called the environment and we cannot neglect this aspect of our ritual, otherwise the whole thing may fall through. Alas, we do not have a multitude of time machines in our laboratories, factories and depots. So we are duty bound to recreate this sort of environment artificially, using the documents related to the epoch in question and going so far as to rebuild the palace where Churchill was born. And if the palace is still where it used to be on the day of Churchill's birth, we should rent it and put Hitler's embryo – along with his future mother or at least her womb – in one of the bedrooms.

Now in Hitler's veins both American and English blood run and he feels called upon to promote their unity, in peace and war. To each his or her own unity: Marx took care of proletarians, whilst Churchill gave us a rare symbol of pure Anglo-American harmony. And now Hitler was said to be his successor, for he was awaiting his birth in the womb of Churchill's mother and in the bed where Churchill had seen the world for the first time. A wonderful instance of eternal recurrence. Marx must have rejoiced in his grave upon learning about this experiment which was to confirm his theories once and for all: if Hitler could become Churchill, Marx was right and all others – Crick and Watson – were wrong.

So the world awaited Hitler's or Churchill's birth and at some point the world and its journalists realised they did not really know for whom they were waiting. And it was pointless to answer automatically, 'We're waiting for Godot,' for they were waiting neither for Godot, nor for God, nor for any ordinary being, either human or not. They were waiting for a sort of hybrid and their great expectations were at a loss to understand what they were supposed to expect. But, according to the wise, the greatest expectations are experienced by those who do not know what they are expecting and accept whatever comes their way, being happy through their mere existence and march forward. They are going towards some point or other and the process itself fills them with joy and boundless happiness about which so many philosophers spoke at length as if determined to find out what it is. And the Buddha says to you, 'Here it is'; so does Jesus Christ, which means that happiness is within your reach and can be found under your very nose. But you do not look at your happiness because you look *elsewhere*: you always

look elsewhere and cannot get rid of this pernicious habit of yours. You are such a creature of habit. You always have to have a biscuit and a cup of tea at bedtime; and you only look at the biscuit and the cup of tea instead of looking at your happiness that awaits you under your nose. And if asked why you never look at it, you say, 'My happiness is enclosed in this biscuit and this cup of tea. And also in this habit of mine. Why should I look for it elsewhere?' Perhaps you are right. Perhaps, perhaps.

In the meantime Hitler was born at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, in full accordance with Churchill's biography, biographers and admirers. From his father he was directly descended from John Churchill, 1st duke of Marlborough, the hero of the wars against Louis XIV of France in the early 18th century. And everyone knows who his mother was and so there is no point in describing her in detail; even her name is so well known we have no need to mention it. Anyway, we are to resort to her services and womb whenever we need to turn an arch criminal into the most renowned hero of the Second World War. But let us leave her alone for the time being: we shall come back to her when we detect a growing need for a hero and for the metamorphosis we have just explained. Socialists think that prisons perturb and pervert human beings who rot in them instead of blooming in their cells, becoming wiser and purer. Apparently we should educate them in the open air or by turning them into Churchill or one of his assistants. On no account should we turn them into Stalin: not all prominent figures suit our purpose, even if they are part of the Second World War.

Churchill was born prematurely; so was Hitler. He did not mind staying in his mother's womb for another month but we removed him from it, saying he had no right to stay there as long as he wished because it was not *his* mother's womb after all. So we extracted Hitler from his mother's womb and looked at him to find out if he looked like Hitler or Churchill or Stalin or Roosevelt. He looked like none of these leaders, two of whom are still regarded as the greatest heroes of the 20th century, whatever we might think about their contribution to human history. Yes, he just looked like an ordinary baby and his screams sounded like Churchill's scream, for all screams of this kind sound alike: babies acquire their personalities in their cradles, not upon leaving their mothers' wombs and bodies. So we may leave Hitler alone for a while – or rather in his mother's company. We should wait for his personality to come into being.

What does his personality look like today? Both Hitler and Churchill passed an unhappy and sadly neglected childhood, and this well-known fact makes things easier for us. We do not really have to keep Hitler at Blenheim Palace any longer because we are short of money and cannot afford to rent this building for years and years, waiting for Hitler to come to terms with life, history and the 20th century. But we should provide a nurse for him and his family – not

only on account of Churchill's biography where his nurse, who goes by the name of Everest, has pride of place. We have concerns about whether the government will be able to provide poorer families with viable social services. And every poor family needs a nurse, especially if the poor family in question has to bring up Adolf Hitler who may be led astray by any hooligan, any future Nazi; or any *present* Nazi, for that matter.

'After indifferent preparatory schooling,' write Churchill's biographers, 'he entered Harrow, where his conspicuous lack of success at his studies seemingly justified his father's decision to enter him for a career in the army. It was only at the third attempt that he managed to pass the entrance examination to the Royal Military College.' And Hitler did not pass any entrance examination; the same goes for exit examinations. Hitler did not like examinations – at least as far as *he* was concerned; I mean, as far as he himself was examined either by historians or scientists. On the other hand, he was delighted when he had enough time to subject either his cronies or ordinary citizens to interrogation. 'Do you believe the Nazis will triumph over the communists?' he asked them. 'Yes, yes,' they answered. 'Do you believe in God?' he asked them. 'Yes, yes. You're our God and we believe in you.' 'Because I'm standing in front of you?' 'No, no. We believe in you because you *are*.'

It is pointless to go any further – as far as Hitler's metamorphosis is concerned: nothing can correct Hitler, putting everything and everybody right. He will never become Roosevelt, whatever environment we offer him; and even if he sees the light of day in the United States of America, he will not become an American, contrary to laws and customs. And even if we manage to inject Churchill's genes into Hitler's veins, the latter is unlikely to mend his ways, let alone his way of thinking. It is easier to mend *fences* with your opponents, isn't it?

Cells can be persuaded to take up foreign DNA by applying an electrical current that opens up pores in their membrane. So what? All right, we put Hitler in an electric chair and apply electric current to his cells but not to the rest of his body, otherwise he may die before our eyes and under our nose. Nothing happens, nothing doing. Perhaps the cells of patients could be taken out, engineered to incorporate a new copy of the gene, and returned. With luck the symptoms of diseases like Anti-Semitism could be cured. Hardly. A friend of mine said recently, 'Why are there still Anti-Semites in the world? After the Second World War.' 'Anti-Semitism is an incurable disease,' I answered. There are high hopes for gene therapy. Already, some very rare diseases are being treated, and even cancer cells might be altered to prevent them dividing and causing more damage. Cancer cells. Perhaps. But not anti-Semitic cells. They divide, cause damage, divide, metastasise.

Actually even specialists admit that the possibility of using genetics to improve the human

race has receded with every discovery made. So we have no alternative but to fall back on sacred books that may improve the human race in the future, although they have failed to do so thus far. Even church-goers must admit that the Bible's attempt to turn us into saints has always ended in failure, even though some of us become popes and are therefore worshipped by congregations and tourists, by passers-by and hagiographers. If we have Hitler memorise St Paul's epistles and recite them every morning, every evening and every afternoon, we may hope that Hitler will become Roosevelt or John-Paul II. And if he does not, we shall have him memorise a few Buddhist sutras, turning him into the Dalai Lama or just an ordinary Buddhist. Even an ordinary Buddhist is unlikely to come up with the Final Solution and raze historic monuments.

No one is perfect and we are quite aware of the fact: no one really needs to remind us that we are not perfect. We are not even *semi*-perfect, for all our virtues, readings and yoga classes. Almost everyone – every human being, every Martian – carries a potentially damaging gene, and most people become murderers because of their own inborn imperfections. And no one will ever extricate all these imperfections from human nature, even if one has laser-guided pincers in one's laboratory. Anyway, it is much easier to read a thousand books, saying to oneself that the book one is reading is sacred and that sooner or later its sacredness will rub off on one's mind, heart and soul. And then one will become sacred – not only to oneself. Robert Frost said once that Shakespeare was not sacred to himself. I, for one, think he *was* sacred to himself – not only to us, his worshippers and clumsy interpreters. He was *sacred* to himself, otherwise he would have written neither *Hamlet*, nor *King Lear*, nor *Henry IV*, nor *Macbeth*, nor *Titus Andronicus* that Auden did not deign to comment upon, pointing out it was just trash.

So once again we are confronted with borrowed sacredness that is said to penetrate our souls as we consume all the books recommended by booksellers and spiritual guides whose only aim is to inculcate a sacred spirit into our quasi-impenetrable skulls. As soon as our skulls notice a sacred nuance or tint, they shut themselves off to the point of turning into impregnable fortresses; such is the nastiness of human nature. We automatically reject whatever is pure, virtuous, immaculate, generous and compassionate. We seldom if ever take pity on our fellow creatures who are ill-treated all over the world. They live like galley slaves and have no idea what destination the ship they are pushing is bound for. In other words, they do not know what to do and when they are to die; and where their deathbeds are located, and if they are located anywhere at all. Perhaps they have no deathbeds to speak of and are destined to die in some field overgrown with weeds – not on a battlefield, mind you. The same goes for us, by the way; and yet no one takes pity on us, on our human condition, sorry plight and dire straits. 'Our

commiserations to the losing side!’ they shout whenever their favourite team loses a game or a championship. But why does no one give me a look of commiseration as I enter this room, that castle?

To find out more about commiseration, we have to go all the way back to the Buddha or Schopenhauer, and we may forget about Nietzsche for a while: we do not need his superman this afternoon. Let us become *middlemen* first: we are decorating our souls in stages so they will not be ready for another couple of months. Actually one should not *decorate* one’s soul, for there are too many frills in it already and consequently one should *remove* these frills before embarking upon a journey to various nirvanas. At least we and one and others know a lot about our final destination and this knowledge permits us to reconcile ourselves to our lot and our destiny which is resolved to turn us into galley slaves.

If you come into existence and see the light of day or anything else, you see Being and not a non-being, for the simple reason that you *see* it, and whatever you see *is*, otherwise you would not *see* it. But even if you do not see this or that, they exist because you say to yourself, ‘I do not see this and that,’ so you know you do not see them. But you think about this and also about that and, according to Parmenides, ‘Thou canst not know what is not – that is impossible – nor utter it; for it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.’ Both this and that appear in your brain, and you call them ‘this’ and ‘that’; and thus it comes to pass that they are endowed with being or the Great Being. Actually there is no such thing as Small Being: we should think big, otherwise it is not worth our while to think at all. We think, therefore there are beings of all kinds; or rather, there is the One and Being which are identical twins because all this cannot be otherwise. There is only one Truth – and whatever is, is this Truth – and so we draw the logical conclusion that there is no such thing as a lie: there is no room for it in the universe. Truth is everywhere and has no intention of withdrawing from where it is because Truth does not like small corners and always opts for centres: we can affirm that Truth is the centrepiece of the universe. But you can also find it in corners, nooks and crannies; in craniums, noodles, poodles, puddles and bubbles. And even if all these bubbles burst, you would find the same truth in every burst bubble. Do not forget that whatever you say exists and so every burst bubble has its own existence, its windowless existence, so to speak. And speaks and specks are also in our midst, and we have no alternative but to welcome them with open arms, open mouths and open souls. We open everything, everybody, and welcome speaks, specks and spooks.

‘In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.’ So how *do* we resurrect? The trumpet sounds, and even if we do not hear it, being dead and buried under a thick layer of

our Earth, it does sound and God listens to it, saying to Himself, 'It sounds. It is high time. It is high tide.' Metaphorically speaking. Time is a sort of tide and when it comes – when both of them come – you have no alternative but to submit yourself to new rules or the Last Judgement, in common parlance. The tide comes in very quickly here and you can soon find yourself stranded – figuratively speaking. You are stranded and the Supreme Judge – whoever he is – is about to sentence you to 100 years' imprisonment in Hell. But before going to Hell, you ask this eternal question: 'Who is the Supreme Judge?' What does it matter! You are going to Hell; at least you know your final destination that is really final, for it is the final solution to your life, karma and nirvana. So if a taxi driver asks you, 'Where to?' you will say, 'To Hell' – without the slightest hesitation. Of course you would rather say, 'To Paradise,' but you are not allowed to say anything like that, otherwise you may be sent to yet another Hell – a deeper Hell, a further Hell. There are many hells, if you must know; and you must know or at least you wish to know to which hell you are going now. So the answer comes after a while, 'You are going to the First Hell.' 'Is this the First Circle?' you ask. 'No. It is the First *Hell*.' 'What's the difference?' you ask. 'Don't you know the difference between a hell and a circle?' 'Yes. But some circles are hells in disguise. The vicious circle, for instance.'

But the Minotaur no longer listens to you. He takes you first to the First Hell and then to the Second One. 'I can't stop for a cup of tea – this is just a flying visit,' you say to the guardian of the Third Hell as you go on flying through different hells and their suburbs. 'I visited a few hells while I was in the Hereafter,' you say to your friends. 'Did you?' they ask. 'Yes, I did,' you answer. '*Ah bon*,' some of your friends say, for some of your friends are French. All of a sudden, you hear the sound of a trumpet, whereupon you realise that the sound you are listening to comes from the same trumpet – the one you heard before embarking upon your journey to Hell. And you say to yourself and your friends, 'I'm leaving early tomorrow morning, so I'd better pack tonight. I haven't packed my clothes yet.' And then you turn to your wife, 'Could you pack me a spare pair of shoes, please?' She does not seem to hear you or to understand what you mean as if you were speaking to her about Heidegger, Kant or Mallarmé. 'Could you pack a spare pair of shoes for me, please?' you say to her as you raise one eyebrow in a meaningful way. And then you raise the second eyebrow in a way that is even more meaningful than the first one. Well, you just pack your bags and walk out on your wife and children.

So you are standing on the threshold of Hell and still do not know to which Hell you have been invited by God or Satan. Of course some people think that God has nothing to do with Hell because taking care of Hell would be beneath His dignity. But there are others who think and say that nothing is beneath God's dignity and the argument they put forward is not hard to

follow, for it is rather simple – as simple as true beauty and truth itself. They always speak about Mozart's simplicity and say that if a work of art is not simple, it cannot be beautiful, however intricate and ingenious it appears at first glance. So their argument boils down to the fact that God is omnipresent and if you are omnipresent, you do not neglect nooks and crannies and dark corners. It is true that some corners of your kingdom – of the Kingdom of God – are dark, but they make you aware of light and its brightness by contrast. So they serve a purpose and are not just another gratuitous insult. There are people who pretend that the universe is just a joke. It is a joke, it is just an insult, isn't it? Your mother – and father – conceive you and your mother bears you in her womb for nine months during which she is not allowed to do this or that and does not consume wine and even beer. So she suffers serious privations as you suffocate in her womb where you are also deprived of decent food and gorgeous drinks. Both of you suffer and no one – not even religious fanatics – disputes the truth of this logical conclusion. Every human being needs the ability to construct a logical argument, even if the issue you discuss with your friends and colleagues is as simple as Mozart's *Jupiter*.

I shall just summarize the main points of the argument in a few words if I may. God is omnipresent, omnipotent and so on; so He also rules in Hell which is the darkest corner of the universe, according to Dante and other explorers. So you are still on the threshold of Hell and you know now that you have been invited by God Who wants you to describe His dominions in a book entitled *The Tragedy*. Of course you are not the first guest of Hell, even if you penetrate it as a tourist, not as a sinner who will never get out and see the light of day, according to Dante. You are neither the first nor the last; and if you are the last, you are not the least and this fact is a great source of your civic pride. So you feel a great sense of pride as you cross the threshold on which you have stood for some time and enter the Hell proper – or improper, as they say. Never mind, never mind – you are *in* already and no one is about to throw you out.

Gogol said once that it is much more rewarding to talk about Paradise than about Hell because the reader prefers the former to the latter so that those who write about Hell are not likely to be read all over the world. No one will ever say about them, 'His latest book has gone to number two in the bestseller list.' What is usually said about them boils down to this, 'His latest book has gone to number two in the worstseller list.' 'His latest book has gone to the bottom of the seller list.' Actually Gogol was wrong and everybody knows that: he lived in barbarous times when witches were burnt at the stake. What is more, he lived in Russia, in a backward country where all crops were harvested by hand and by serfs. Of course he knew nothing about our bestsellers and horror stories, movies and atom bombs; and our vampires, and our living dead. Actually he did know something about them, but he stubbornly maintained

that writing about virtuous landowners was more profitable and instructive.

Well, you are now inside Hell and whatever is associated with Hell comes to the fore and surfaces as if to welcome you heartily, as if you were a local resident, not an interstellar visitor. People like neither foreigners nor strangers and often ask you impertinent questions such as, ‘Where do you come from?’ meaning that you had better go back to where you have come from because there is not enough room for visitors in *their* fatherland. But the matter stands differently in Hell where there is enough room for anybody, however far this body’s fatherland is situated in space and time. There is enough poisonous fruit in Hell; the more you eat, the more you know, and in the long run you are sure to realise you are in Hell *forever* and no earthquake will ever dislodge your body from its furnaces. Of course it is better not to know anything about your sorry plight or any plight you may find yourself in, for ignorance is bliss and even if you happen to be happy, you had better know nothing about happiness. And if all of a sudden you realise you are *really* happy, you are likely to grow unhappy in the twinkling of an eye. Why? Because you are likely to ask yourself if you are really *happy*, whereupon you may realise you are mortal and old and not as rich as movie stars. In blissful ignorance, in blissful ignorance.

Enoch says that Paradise is located between corruptibility and incorruptibility. I, for one, have never been able to unravel not only the secrets of genetics, but also the mystery of this remark. Suppose you wish to spend the rest of your eternity in Paradise, which is a commonplace wish and actually you do not claim to have come up with a new concept that Deleuze might have approved of, had he got acquainted with it in his lifetime. No, it is just an ordinary wish you share with every human being or earthling; for once you are not in a class of your own. You are rather as unique as each person’s genetic code. Well and good. So what? Where is your Paradise? Where is everybody’s Paradise, the gates guarded by St Peter? (For once, we are not dealing with St Paul.) Where it is? Where? Where? Where are you supposed to direct your steps and thoughts?

You believe that God will guide your steps because you believe in God and His bounty, magnanimity, forgiveness – you are an inveterate sinner – and the shortness of His memory. (You cannot really count on His forgiveness, can you?) So you re-read the beginning of *Secrets of Enoch* which is a sacred, God-dictated book in its own right; at least you have every right to believe that this book tells the truth and nothing but the Absolute Truth. ‘There was a wise man, a great artificer, and the Lord conceived love for him and received him, that he should behold the uppermost dwellings and be an eye-witness of the wise and great and inconceivable and immutable realm of God Almighty, of the very wonderful and glorious and bright and many-

eyed station of the Lord's servants, and of the inaccessible throne of the Lord, and of the degrees and manifestations of the incorporeal hosts –' Of course you would be driven to quote the whole book, if you did not have to write your own book that is still as inaccessible to the reader as the throne of the Lord. So you stop in the middle of a sentence and reflect upon what you read as you longed to glean some information from this travelogue. But do you really need this piece of information? Sooner or later you will find out what all this is about and your patience is proverbial – according to you. After all, you have lived for more than 60 years and no suicides, no attempts on your own life can be found in your personal book of human existence.

Besides, there is no point in reading about Enoch's journey because you will not be allowed to taste any fruit he saw and described as he went from one realm of Paradise to another. Well, you have a lot of fruit on your dinner table and you may derive great satisfaction from the fact that none of this fruit is forbidden. Some of the mushrooms that grow in your garden and the nearby woods *may* be forbidden, for all you know, but they are not forbidden on the grounds that they will teach you Absolute Knowledge if you dare to eat them. And what about the *partial* knowledge you are likely to glean from *Secrets of Enoch*? As I said a few minutes ago, you do not really need this knowledge because you are not sure to visit these realms, even if you behave yourself and demonstrate to the otherworldly examiners and judges that you have more than a literal understanding of Sacred Books. You were a perfectly well-behaved child, a perfectly well-behaved teenager, a perfectly well-behaved middle-aged man and a perfectly well-behaved old fogey. So what? Are you a member of 'The Elect'? What is 'The Elect', by the way? It is an exclusive private club. Are you a member of this club? You are not; you are just a visitor. But visitors must be accompanied by club members, you know. Do you know any member of this club? Enoch? All right, all right. Do you know him personally? Do you think he will agree to keep you company?

Meantime Enoch continues to speak of the very marvellous elements of the sun and you wonder why you utter the word 'eunuch' whenever you read Enoch's description of marvels, lights and the lack of nights out loud. *Secrets of Eunuch* you say, repeat, and your words resound in your room and even throughout the house where you have lived for more than a year. There are no eunuchs in this house of yours and the sounds you produce are all the more meaningless and even nonsensical since you are completely alone and even your charwoman cannot hear whatever you say or recite. And even if she *could* hear you, she would be none the wiser: there are no eunuchs in your house and Enoch is far away too, for your house does not look like Paradise and one would be unable to speak of the marvellous elements if invited to share a meal with you. Your house is always in a mess and even when your charwoman happens to come

and spend a few hours in this space of yours, she always says, ‘I can’t deal with all this mess. After all, I’m not Heracles.’ And she goes out after picking up a few cigarette butts and you are left on your own or rather in the company of your own mess and shambles. So whenever you talk about eunuchs, you seem to address your mess, and your mess listens to you, for it has nothing else to do: its only aim is to stay where it is. It is its nature and it also perseveres in its being and struggles for life with cleanliness and order. It struggles with charwomen and cleaning ladies and domestic helps who are said to use vacuum cleaners, among other utensils. So your mess struggles with them too – with vacuum cleaners, brushes of all kinds, dusters and liquids. All messes are in the habit of clinging to dirtiness, for it is their creed and they might lose their personality if this creed or credo vanishes into any air it can find around it.

Yes, you make a terrible mess when you are cooking and you have no intention of denying it because you are not a liar; you are a *messer*, but you are not a liar. Doesn’t this mean ‘knife’ in German? *Messerschmidt*, for instance? Some planes bore this name during the Second World War, but you are dealing with *your mess* today, and even if the Second World War was messy, to say the least – and one is too disgusted and horrified to say the most – its own mess has nothing to do with yours. And no aircraft will ever help to clear up that mess in the kitchen or anywhere else. It is pointless to recall aircraft, planes and *Messerschmidts*. It is all the more stupid since you have no idea how to write these German names. So you say to yourself, ‘I can’t stand mess,’ and go to the kitchen where your gaze alights on the fridge and its contents. You take something out of it and eat what you have found without bothering to look for plates, napkins, forks and spoons. Nor do you look for *messers* because you no longer wish to clutter your brain with German words – even if you continue to misspell them. Even in *your* shape and form, they succeed in putting a spell on your mind and you have no wish to waste your time on breaking the spell. You would rather break the mess you live in, but it is easier to break cutlery than messes, according to Laurel and Hardy.

‘...for since the crown of its shining is in heaven with the Lord, and guarded by four hundred angels, while the sun goes round on wheel under the Earth, and stands seven great hours in night –’ Well, Enoch speaks of the sun and he does so from the point of view of someone who walks on the surface of the Earth and looks at the sun from its surface – not from heaven, not from Paradise. You can also walk on the surface of the Earth and that is what you usually do, although you do not always look at the sun as you proceed to gate 26 for boarding. Of course you are not forbidden from walking in the streets, but even if you happen to walk along a boulevard, you are not in the habit of looking at the sun that keeps the same shape and form so one might say, ‘There’s nothing new *in* the sun.’ Why look at it?

Of course if you were in Paradise, you might look at it from time to time, especially since, according to Dante, you do not have to put on a pair of sunglasses whenever you feel like looking at the sun – in Paradise, in heaven, inside one of those heavens you cannot see from where you are standing this afternoon. So, once in Paradise, you will look at the sun to your heart's content but, if I were you, I would look at its guardians, at four hundred angels, for you are unlikely to see them on Earth, even if you take the trouble to put your sunglasses on. You can also cast a glance at the crown of its shining, especially if you like crowns, kings and queens – as every Englishman does. So does every Englishwoman, by the way. You can also cast a glance – not the same glance – at the wheel traditionally used by the sun, for you might think this wheel is part of Apollo's chariot. And you would not miss Apollo's performance for anything in the world.

And what about the elements of the sun? We spoke of them at the beginning of this reading session and they are still there because the sun's behaviour is more akin to Parmenides' theory than to that of Heraclitus: it does not change like rivers and human beings. At least it does not change as quickly as rivers do, let alone our bodies, genes, cells and so on. Where are the elements we have been thinking about for more than an hour? Right here, on the same page. 'Then the elements of the sun, called Phoenixes and Chalkydri break into song, therefore every bird flutters with its wings, rejoicing at the giver of light –' At the river of light. Of course one can speak about light in these terms because light is made up of particles *and waves*. So it *partly flows*, doesn't it? For once, it is more interesting to speak about slips of tongue than about the text one is reading out loud. The giver of light is God of course and so it is useless to quote Enoch to the end: '...and they broke into song at the command of the Lord.' Of course, of course; it goes without saying. At whose command do we usually break into song? At the Lord's; otherwise we would never sing. Why should we sing? What could we sing? Requiems? Not for an instant do we forget that we are bound to die and no rejoicing can enliven our days irremediably spoiled by this very thought, by this future event. Our sages say, '*Memento mori*,' and we do *memento* this *mori* whenever we are stone-cold sober. Only alcohol can make us forget our death – as long as the intoxication lasts. And while it does, we may break into song and this song of ours may even sound like the song enjoyed by Enoch in heaven, considering that any heaven has whisky galore.

'Of the singing of the angels, which it is impossible to describe.' Can you describe a drunken song? Of course you can and you can even quote it, if you are in no mood for doing anything else – for chatting with your neighbours, for instance. 'I love...love...you...where...not here, with me...your husband...where...why...bitch...a real bitch...life's bitch

anyway...any...way...alone...solitude...o...o...' And how would you *describe* a drunken song? 'In the midst of the heavens I saw armed soldiers, with incessant voice, with sweet voice, with sweet and incessant *voice* and various singing –' Terrestrial soldiers do not drink on duty and that is the only difference between heaven and Earth – the only difference we can detect at this stage of our analysis. Whenever we hear a drunken song, we notice that the voice producing it is incessant to some extent – to the extent of drunkenness. If the performer is very drunk, the voice we are talking about is semi-incessant, for the drunkard is already in the arms of Morpheus. Well, not quite, not quite. But Morpheus' fingers have already touched his shoulders. Morpheus has already patted him on the shoulder. If Morpheus carries on treating his customer like that, it will only be a matter of time before the latter falls asleep. 'Sleep...sleep...where...here, with me...sleep...death...friend...thanks...thanks a lot...'

'These are the archangels who are above angels, measure all life in heaven and on Earth –' What do they measure? Our rivers, our houses, our lands, our sins? The main bedroom measures 24ft by 18ft (24' x 18'). So what? I am speaking of *my* main bedroom. Is it too big, too small? Is it a sin to own such a bedroom, given the sorry plight of the homeless? Should I join them in the streets or elsewhere? In the fields, for instance? And how do you measure sins? What machines do you use? Do you have no machines in your heaven, in your Paradise? You must have very good manual dexterity – no doubt about that. But do you still work on old manual typewriters? Do you know that computer-controlled robots are taking over manual jobs in many industries? Of course you know everything – we are quite aware of that. You know all our sins by heart and can recite them day in day out. You also recite them at night, for there are no nights in heaven, if I remember rightly. If I am not mistaken, rather: I do not remember anything of *this* kind; and of other kinds too, as I am used to saying whenever I speak of my memory. Is there any significant difference in quality between long sins and short ones? Are long sins always mortal? I think it is a sin to waste food, when so many people in the world are hungry. Is it a long sin or a short one? Does this depend on the number of people dying of starvation? At least I think about this sin and my thinking about it is a virtue, isn't it? What is more, I do not *waste* any food, eating whatever I find in the fridge and in gourmet shops. Another virtue, isn't it?

I do not deny, however, that I do not give anything to the needy – neither my food nor any money, in any shape or form. I might give them a few rooms and pieces of furniture, but I have no idea where to look for them. Of course one can say one just has to venture outdoors and find an ordinary tramp either under a bridge or in a street, in a park, in a corner. All one has to do is open one's bag and take out a few sandwiches, a bottle of Coke and a dessert: a

cake, an ice-cream, or candyfloss. (Is it possible to carry candyfloss in a bag?) And one should not forget dental floss, for one – any tramp, that is – needs something of the kind to clean between his or her teeth. And you can give him or her a few banknotes which are always welcome, even though, upon seeing them in your hands, your tramp does not say to you or rather to them, ‘You’re welcome.’ Whether the tramp says it or not, you should give him or her or a child these banknotes, for they are always welcome, whatever they say or do not say. Tramps are not always polite, which is not surprising, given their way of life, their nonstop starvation, and other trials and tribulations they have to put up with as they struggle for life in our streets, in Central Park or Hyde Park. Be that as it may, their impoliteness should not detract you from the beauty of your gesture and deed. For once, you have proved your willingness to be virtuous and even demonstrated your virtuosity in this domain. Now you are ready for your encounter with St Peter, St Paul and the guardians described so vividly by Enoch and the book where one is sure to come across a lot of secrets.

But it is of no help to those whose struggle for life is not over yet, for the simple reason that they are still in the vale of tears; and they do not cry for joy. They mostly cry for help and if no help comes to relieve them of their suffering, they begin to cry and literally burst into tears instead of bursting into song. Before putting this book away, however, we must unravel the mystery that has remained unravelled so far. The point is we struggle for life not only for the sake of our terrestrial life which is of no account, according to many philosophers and all Christendom. So we struggle for life for the sake of Paradise because, if we give up this struggle and commit suicide, we shall not be admitted to Paradise – no admission, in other words. Anyway, this Paradise of ours is situated in Heaven, in one of the heavens that Enoch enlarges upon as he proceeds to yet another heaven or sky in the company of angels, guardians and guardian angels. Actually our Paradise may not be situated in heaven, for all we know; and we know a lot today, thanks to Enoch’s travelogue, his frankness and literary precision.

Enoch says that Paradise is located between corruptibility and incorruptibility. What does that mean? And how can you reach this Paradise of his and ours? How are you supposed to proceed? You should find corruption and incorruption. You look for corruption in the East and find out that the old corrupt, totalitarian regimes you used to denounce in your articles and speeches have been overthrown. Reluctantly, you acquiesce to the New World Order, think for a while about your search and realise you have to do it all over again. You come across some ruins or other and call for checks to discover whether corrupt officials are being bribed to connive in shoddy construction. Everything seems to be under construction and there are ruins everywhere. Many people work in the construction industry, but an even greater number wait

for bribes because they are called ‘corrupt officials’ and therefore cannot live without bribes and corruption in general.

So you have got one group of people on whom you can count when in need of corruptibility as such: but for this group and place, you are unlikely to land up in Paradise. Now you are facing an even greater problem; what consoles you, however, is the fact that the solution to this problem is sure to provide you with the only key to Paradise which is more or less identical to the Holy Grail. In a way, you could embark upon a journey towards the latter instead of desperately looking for the former, but one wonders if it is not easier to find Paradise than the Holy Grail: after all, there are a few places on Earth called Paradise, *Paradiso* and so on. For instance, you must have heard about the ‘Cinema Paradiso’ which is partly responsible for your conviction that any paradise is just an ideal version of this cinema frequented by children and adults alike. But you are unlikely to hear about a cinema called ‘The Holy Grail’ because not many people know what it is, for all Dan Brown’s triumphs.

The problem you are facing concerns what they call ‘incorruptibility’, but they may call it whatever they wish; they may give names to the objects and non-objects that Adam took care of a long time ago – even before we were born. People often think that nothing happened before they were born and even history books do not teach them anything because the history they read about is just one of many histories; not real life, not their lives. And they are only interested in their lives and their beings that have to persevere for fear of disappearing somewhere and somehow – either into the air or into the Earth. And as their beings persevere at all cost they inevitably become corrupt and one wonders if incorruptibility can be found only among those who do not persevere in their being. In other words, one must find those who persevere in their non-being and care neither about death nor about life.

We have already laid our hands on ‘corruption’ whose omnipresence strikes one as one goes from one street to another, from one country to another world. All you have to do is go out and make a few steps in any direction, along any boulevard or avenue or river. Open your eyes and look around you. What do you see? Corruption, corruption, corruption. And this is not just a word you can erase, strike out, wipe off the face of the Earth. You cannot wipe the slate clean, in other words. No slate can ever be wiped clean, whatever slate you are talking about this afternoon. No harm in trying, you say to yourself. You see a lot of slates around you and all these slates are frightfully dirty, grimy, soiled, muddy and polluted. You pick one of them up and start cleaning it with a dishcloth. You clean it for ten minutes, for half an hour; the slate is dirty, grimy and so on. Perhaps it is not as *frightfully* soiled as half an hour ago, but it is still muddy and polluted, and there is nothing you can do about it, even if you resort to your vacuum

cleaner and the services of your cleaning lady who can clean everything with the exception of slates.

Well, we seem to be on the right track, but there is no denying that we are still far from our goal, from incorruptibility. Let us look for it in a monastery where we should analyse old monks and their morals, for they are already impotent and cannot dream of young women for whom they do not feel anything except indifference and even hatred: some of them led these monks astray to the point of making them withdraw into this monastery, giving up worldly goods, aspirations and triumphs. Of course you can be triumphant even inside a monastery but your fame remains within its walls unless you look half-starved, have stigmata and see either Jesus Christ or the Holy Virgin every other day. If this is the case, you do not really have to spend your life running after fame and fortune. Stay in your cell and get closer to the window whenever the crowd yearns to have a look at your stigmata, your beard and emaciated body. And if you want all these people to see your lice at close quarters, you can invite them to your cell.

We find a man whose incorruption and inborn purity tower about all the rest – even above his colleagues' stigmata. All around him there reign corruption and inborn – and born – impurity; even in his cell we detect a few dirty atoms which may be likened to the proverbial fly in the ointment. These atoms fall from the bodies and clothes of the monks who are in the habit of callings on our symbol of chastity and perfection. And he cannot forbid them to walk into his cell because he is polite to a fault and the law of hospitality takes priority in his private life and also in his social life, assuming that what they experience in monasteries can be called a 'social life'. At least there are no social climbers among our monks and nuns.

What to do? We have got a piece of incorruption but we are unable to isolate it from corruption; and Paradise is located *between* corruptibility and incorruptibility. Anyway, we had better find out what this definition means and how we are supposed to handle it. Never mind – let us take it at face value and look for a space or a spot located between corruptibility and incorruptibility. We have got both and now we are facing another task which is no less daunting than the first one. Suppose we ask our monk to shut the door of his cell forever and nail a sheet of paper on it: 'No admission to unauthorised personnel. No personnel are authorised.' Suppose he complies with our wish, acting in good faith for his supporters and admirers – for us, in other words. His cell is rather small: he himself is cramped for space inside it. And what about Paradise? Of course what counts is not its *material* size: it can be located on the point of a needle. It is its spiritual dimension that counts. How to live on the point of a needle? What to do? By no stretch of the imagination could I visualise the human condition of this sort. Or

should I *shorten* my imagination instead of trying to *stretch* it? Should I reduce it to the size of a needle, of its sharp point?

All right, I am living now on this point of the needle and feel happy because I am a stoic and believe in my mind which can organise my life in such a way that I may find a lot of happiness anywhere, even on sharp points, in prison cells and concentration camps. I can always look at the clouds that are beautiful and inconstant – as inconstant and treacherous as our fate. But at least they are beautiful; what is more, you can see a few snatches of sky where so many paradises await human beings. You can snatch these snatches from the sky and put them into your inner eye that will see them whenever your thirst for beauty, salvation and eternal home reaches its peak. Now it is at its peak and you see the sky, although you are in a concentration camp and can see only barbed wire and a lot of ceilings that get in the way when you feel like flying and getting out of your miserable life.

You are still inside your prison cell, but your spirits are neither affected nor infected by your *material* conditions. Your immaterial or spiritual condition remains intact and you smile in spite of the fact that you see no sky, no clouds, no trees – no proofs of God's existence. But God exists in both your mind and soul, and that is quite enough, as you say to yourself. You often repeat this sentence you came across so often in the books devoted to happiness, nirvanas and serenity in every shape and form. You visualise this serenity and as you try to enter it once and for all, you realise you are in the midst of the garden described by the Koran. As you walk through this garden you come across a great many women hanging from trees and hiding behind bushes and bushels as if reluctant to come into the open and to the fore. But you know that all these women are tailor-made for your body and you speak to them so as not to be accused of impoliteness. It is bad manners to eat with your mouth open, but you eat with your mouth closed and no one can say, 'He needs to be taught some manners.' And you salute the women who wait for you on branches and behind bushes. In short, everything is all right and you say to yourself, 'If all goes smoothly, I'll enjoy these women's caresses in no time at all.'

And what about space? Have you really forgotten your sorry plight, your prison cell, your concentration camp and its guardians? Your guardians, their shouts? Your own screams? At first you deny screaming during their tortures but you later admit to it and even say you are not mature enough to keep silent when they push pins under your nails and gouge your eyes out. Try as you may, you cannot rein in your emotions and their manifestations; you prefer to faint at the outset of their tortures and your ordeals. Your friends and colleagues used to say about you, 'He took one look at the hypodermic needle and fainted.' That is why you finally relinquished the idea of undergoing plastic surgery on your nose that should be straightened if

you wish to get married and live happily ever after. The same goes for collagen implants and injections which you rejected on the grounds that you could not bear the sight of hypodermic needles. As a result, your lips remain thin and look as old as the men whom Rembrandt painted at the end of his life.

Today you *can* bear the sight of a hypodermic needle designed to make you look younger and far more attractive. But you still faint – or wish to faint – when you see the needles getting closer and closer to your nails, as if guided by a supernatural force. Actually you do not see the fingers and hands that guide them towards your nails, your torture and suffering: the needles wholly monopolise your attention. Nor do you hear what your torturers say to you as they drive a lot of points home, ‘Modern military aircraft use computers to help them zero in on their targets. But we don’t need computers, do we? Of course we need them in other domains and we do have a lot of computers in our office, otherwise we might have problems locating our victims. But this ritual – ours and yours – should be neither computerised nor mechanised. Don’t you agree? Would you rather face an army of computers?’

You see neither the sky nor the angels who usually hover in it, determined to protect you from torture and nervous breakdown. You know you are supposed to enjoy your life and any other life – in any shape or form, in any prison or camp, during any torture or ordeal. Yes, life is beautiful and God merciful. God is full of mercy; so are humans. One can even say they are merciful to a fault and it is your fault you do not appreciate their mercies and do not say, ‘*Merci*’ day in day out. You do not say ‘*merci*’ when they gouge your eyes out; nor do you say ‘*merci*’ upon feeling their needles inside your eardrums. Is this feeling so unpleasant? Why don’t you say to yourself, ‘This feeling is very pleasant and I continue to enjoy life to the utmost’? Well, you end up saying to yourself, ‘I feel at one with the world and with God, whoever He is and wherever His castle is situated. His castle is everywhere because I am a monotheist and pantheist. His castle is right in the middle of my cell and my guardians are gods in their own right. They’re the Almighty in disguise. Why should the Almighty disguise Himself, by the way? Is he afraid of being recognised and fêted by churchgoers both in this concentration camp and abroad?’

You can get rid of all the fears that have beset you from the day of your birth. But, try as you may, you cannot get rid of the fear of death which is the biggest fear one is exposed to: all other fears are temporary and often disappear of their own accord. Suppose you are in pain and suffer a lot on account of this pain which you seem to feel throughout your body in spite of its whereabouts. Actually this pain is confined to one of your teeth, but you feel it in your whole body as if it were a gigantic tooth – the source of a raging toothache.

Suppose you are in pain and this pain originates in your tooth and your whole body that is reduced to the size of a tooth, metaphorically speaking. But if you no longer shudder at the sight of a hypodermic needle, in the evening you will say to your colleagues, 'The injection provided temporary relief from the pain.' Incidentally, we are still talking about death because we cannot get rid of it, whatever we write about and however often we can say to ourselves, 'Don't think about death. No *memento mori*, please! *Memento vita, memento viva vita. Remember vivat!*' Nothing doing. (How often do you say 'nothing doing'?) You remember death and no injection will ever provide a reprieve from this thought and deed. Of course you can go to a funfair and spend the whole day on a rollercoaster. And you can say afterwards, 'The rollercoaster provided a temporary reprieve from the fear of death.' But didn't you fear death during your rollercoaster rides? Didn't you say to yourself, 'What if the whole thing collapses? What if this coaster comes off the tracks?'

Well, after much soul-searching you come to the conclusion that you think about death under any circumstances and almost everywhere: at these latitudes, at those longitudes. The same does not go for the Almighty Who never thinks about death because He is immortal, eternal and omnipotent, otherwise no one would ever have called Him the *Almighty*. They might have called Him the Semimighty or Partmighty. But they call Him the Almighty and they are absolutely right. They are not *all* right, for they are mortal, corrupt and therefore subject to the second law of thermodynamics. But they call the Almighty the Almighty and some of them even say to their colleagues, 'Why not call the Almighty the Almighty?' And their colleagues answer them, 'All right. Let's call Him the Almighty, whoever He is.'

The Almighty is omnipotent to the extent of being able to undo the past and death which, in His case, is really dead, as if anxious to conform to English poetry and its inner and outer conviction that death is dead: 'Death, thou shalt be dead' or something along these lines. There is nothing above these lines, but there might be a few poetic thoughts situated on the same level, on the same plane of regard. For instance, 'Human beings are divine' or 'Man is the crown on the head of Creation' or 'Man is as perfect as perfection itself, for he is the Platonic idea of perfection, beauty and wisdom' or 'Man is more paragon than all paragons put together'. If you say that death is already dead or will be dead in the near future, you think about Jesus Christ whose sacrifice dealt a fatal blow to death. 'Death has been in bed with the flu and he is still a bit unsteady on his feet,' wrote an English essayist. 'Death's legs are still feeble and wobbly,' wrote another English essayist. 'Death was standing in the middle of the desert, swaying uncertainly and trying hard to stay upright,' wrote an English novelist.

The Almighty undid death, but for reasons best known to Himself or Herself or to Them

and to They, He limited death's death to His own life and persona: no human can take advantage of this triumph. Of course we die but at the same time we do not because we turn into glorious beings; at least our bodies grow glorious and this glory's progress can be interrupted neither by worms nor necrophiliacs. Yet we prefer our inglorious bodies to anything offered by the Hereafter and our religion that does not seem to care about our ordinary desires. So we deduct our bodies from the notion so dear to Christians and their sympathisers – glorious bodies; and we cling to our bodies and make them persevere in whatever they have got inside them. Half a body is better than none and we accept our human condition that constantly deprives us of the adjective 'glorious' unless we wage many wars and can boast many a glorious victory. And we always take our hats off as we come to a standstill in front of a memorial to the glorious dead of two world wars. But does any memorial of this kind talk to us about glorious *bodies*?

You continue to live in your cell, even though you are not in the habit of talking about life in the following terms: 'It's a prison', 'a death-sentence', 'a life-sentence', 'a sentence in the Book of Life', 'a letter in the Book of Life', 'a page in the Book of Death'. You look out of the window and say to yourself that life is beautiful in spite of the Nazis who walk under your window every day. And you fear they might notice you if they look up and spot your window, your head, your glittering eyes that consume the beauty they contemplate as they scan the horizon for any sign of deliverance. On their way to the horizon, your eyes see the beauty of life, of houses and pedestrians, of stray dogs and rubbish bins, of this one and only moment. Everything is beautiful and blessed. So many poets sing the beauty of life. What about its ugliness? What about the Nazis walking under your windows? Aren't they the Almighty? Everything is Him, Shim, Tim, Tom. God is your reflection in the water, shimmering in the moonlight. Don't you realise you are as ugly as sin, as guilty as sun? As miserable as God?

'The world is on the brink of a new Cold War,' said Gorbachev in Berlin. Some say we are on the brink of a new *Warm War*, an old *Hot War*, for it is easy to talk as long as you can do it without being taken to a courtyard where a firing squad awaits you, rifles at the ready. So you talk unless a cannon ball hits you in the stomach, making you collapse under its weight and might. Anyway, you are bound to die, whatever your and others' sacred books might say about resurrections and 'good news' that is as old as any news, any deaths, any gods.

There are many sacred books in store for you – in a bookstore – and you might be accused of being prejudiced against other sacrednesses, their remedies, teachings and panaceas, if you dared ignore them. By the way, sacredness is always in the plural, even if you believe in one

God only, for you live in a multi-ethnic, multi-faceted society and one of these facets – one that belongs to this society – may be different from *your* God and *your* sacred books.

Of course all gods converge into one God and if this God stands on a gigantic roof and not in your room, you should take a ladder so as not to lose Him forever, irremediably. Nor should you lose sight of His divinity without which you are utterly powerless, helpless and ludicrous, even if you are a multimillionaire and Shakespeare's peer. So you go to your tool shed, fetch a ladder and prop it against the wall leading to the roof where God seems to have been rooted (or roofed) to the spot as if waiting for you. I think St Paul says something to this effect, reflecting on God's patience and readiness to wait not only for the elect but also for prodigal sons, daughters, latecomers – all those who are last but not least. Not in the least, as a matter of fact. And while getting higher and higher thanks to the rungs or steps on which you step, you realise you are not alone, far from it: there are many ladders all around you and also around the roof. All these people are also determined to reach the Almighty because, in spite of nuances, wordings and translations, they all worship the same God Who is also *our* God; otherwise we would not have taken the trouble to fetch this unreliable ladder and put our slippery slippers on its steps or rungs. Or runes, come to think of it. Are we allowed to forget the people of northern Europe and their ancient alphabet they used to cut into trees, ladders and bushes? Are we permitted to ignore or deport those marks, their secret and magic meanings?

Until the 20th century most human beings allowed no alien sacredness to enter their private libraries, let alone their minds and whatever is attached to them; but such blatant discrimination is now disappearing. So we open a book on Taoism and quote from it so as not to be accused of racism or anti-Taoism: 'Heaven's net is indeed vast.' It is enough to cast a glance at heaven and its canopy – there is nothing new under its canopy – to realise it is so vast you do not need to watch a documentary on the cosmos (Carl Sagan is somehow related to it) to say to any Taoist, however old and venerable, 'I know that heaven is vast. So what? And what about this net of yours? Are you alluding to St Peter who uses a net whenever in need of converting a heathen or a Buddhist and saving the damned?' And the Taoist says, 'Though its meshes are wide, it misses nothing.' 'You're right,' you say, 'Jesus Christ misses nothing. The same goes for His Father and the Holy Ghost. The whole Holy Trinity is in heaven, if you must know. Of course there are a few atheists on our Earth and they manage to squeeze through these meshes, to slip through God's fingers. A punishment waiting to happen. Actually the Chinese also believe in retribution, if I remember rightly.' 'You're right,' says the Taoist. 'This belief formed the basis of popular Taoist religious treatises such as the *T'ai-shangkan-yingp'ien*.'

When you read Chinese philosophers, you realise that death is just a season and the spring

will come in due course, even if nothing is due to anything and there are no courses to deal with, not even a five-course dinner. They think that death is as natural as birth and you will be reborn because you were born, and death is another birth or another death, another winter or summer. So you can kill yourself as many times as you wish; the spring is in store for you whatever you do and however often you swallow arsenic or other poisons. But safety precautions should be observed as a matter of course: you are not supposed to kill yourself every other day, as some Japanese do, disappointed as they are with life and the seasons they have always lived through and throughout. In, through, out, in. That is how the Chinese depict our existence or rather their own existence that differs considerably from ours – in temperament, among other things. They say, ‘He died from natural causes,’ which means that, in due course, he will be *born* from natural causes. From our point of view, death is always unnatural, whatever causes lie at the root of the ritual in the course of which we find ourselves in the Hereafter or within its absence. As a matter of course, of course.

All sacred books are full of contradictions. The more you find as you read *T'ai-sh...* the more you become convinced that the treatise contains nothing else. For instance, its author maintains that people are not afraid of death; and he contradicts himself in the same breath, even if his breath is a yogi-breath or Taoist. Of course this piece of information seems to render heaven's net quite useless and the author is fully aware of this fact. So he says – in the same breath, no doubt – that there are *some* individuals who might be afraid of death and therefore the net is quite useful, given that God can drag them up to heaven and *punish* them in one of His ovens. And they will react to this punishment by screaming with pain and begging for God's forgiveness and the Holy Ghost's anaesthetic, if any: there are no anaesthetics for a haughty sinner. How dare you thumb your nose at death, at God's eternal punishment? At the doctrine of original sin? At St Augustine and Jansen?

According to some theologians, St Peter uses a fishing rod, for the elect are few and far between and one does not really need a net to catch them with a view to conveying their bodies and souls to Paradise. And reprobates find Hell on their own: they just fall into a hole or rather a tunnel that inexorably leads to Hell, whatever you do and think; and no cars, no rockets will ever get you off the hook, or out of the hole. But one should not compare this hole to a black hole, for once inside this hole of ours, you realise you are in for *eternal tortures*, no matter how quickly you repent and repudiate St Peter's charges. Eternal torture, not a quick, merciful death – the one particularly favoured by Julius Caesar. You may even try to *glide down gracefully on your knees* in the hope that God and His Son will appreciate the beauty of your fall and your prayer's sincerity. Nothing doing: you are *irrevocably* damned and an army of angels drops

thousands of stones into the tunnel, aiming at your back, head, stomach and sexual organs. They would stone you to death, but for your punishment: it is to be eternal, otherwise no one would ever take Hell seriously – certainly not sinners and their admirers. Of course I am alluding to those sinners who are doomed for a certain term to walk both night and day. And they are also doomed to live in Hell – everlastingly. Walking, talking, screaming. Not sleeping, not fainting – God forbid!

But even if those sinners flout Christian laws by not taking either Hell or Paradise seriously – they pay attention only to their shallow, earthly delights – they walk in this night of ours amidst the elect or in the crowd of the reprobate that Jansen characterised as ‘the mass of perdition’. The masses, in other words. Let us not forget that Christ was popular with those who were prepared to embark upon a spiritual quest, but failed to win the support of the masses. In his book dedicated to St Augustine, Jansen must have talked about everything under the sun and the Earth, but this is none of our concern, for his book was condemned and probably damned by Pope Urban VIII. No one knows where Jansen walks, talks and lies supine, his eyes looking at falling stones. Or does he listen to the *Rolling Stones* instead? In Paradise of course.

Augustinus Cornelii Jansenii...was published without the authorisation of the Holy See (and the Holy Ghost, presumably). Five propositions that Nicolas Cornet, syndic of the Faculty of Theology of Paris, claimed to have discovered in the *Augustinus* were condemned by a bull issued by Pope Innocent X and by a constitution of his successor, Alexander VII. Does this mean that, prior to all these condemnations and accusations, both the book and its author had been damned by God, by *His* bull and constitution? Had all these popes dared to condemn the book, had the Almighty not granted them permission to do so with apparent impunity?

So popes write and sign their bulls, forbidding books and hoping that such and such a thinker will go to Hell and spend a dozen eternities in it. But they are bitterly mistaken and God or one of His emissaries reminds them of this as they stand on the verge of the precipice at the bottom of which one can see nine, ten or eleven circles of Hell. Do numbers and circles really count in one’s life and afterlife? Suppose there are nine circles in Hell but only *one* circle concerns your eternity and suffering. What counts is Hell and nothing else because Paradise may not exist, according to the latest scientific/medical research.

Of course I am alluding to global warming and other global catastrophes which wholly (not *holy*) depend on our folly – not on the sun, not on nature itself. Nature is kind; so is the sun. We are careless, reckless and constantly take a lot of suicidal risks; these endanger our planet, our species and our future that no longer lies ahead of us because it is already behind, far behind. At some point we turned our backs on this future and the point I am speaking about

is one of no return: even if we glance back we shall not see any future, however hopeless and less-less-less. We shall see a scene of desolation, annihilation, destruction. Many people are very concerned about the destruction of the rainforests. And what about the destruction of the Earth? Of the universe?

What did the popes object to when they unequivocally forbade Jansen's homage to St Augustine? (O my dear Augustine, Augustine, Augustine.) They might have been preoccupied by the problem of free will that had been bestowed upon the human race on the day of Adam's birth. Adam was born at last and God said to him, 'You can choose to be virtuous and wise, but don't forget that original sin is not far away, whatever the serpent, alias the Devil, says to you or your future wife. So I would choose virtue, if I were you. But I'm not you and you're not God. So you'll have to choose between good and evil – God and Devil – between virtue and sin. (Between a holiday or a new washing machine, in common parlance.) I call it free will. Please feel free to interrupt me if you don't understand anything.' Adam understood everything and God's monologue drew to a close, whereupon He withdrew into Himself or into the Universe, leaving Adam high and dry.

Jansen, however, was determined to extirpate free will from human beings and he was doing so in the wake of St Augustine's treatise directed against Pelagius. Our staunch partisan of the saint's doctrine seemed to have forgotten that the latter had not envisaged our fate with such vigour and cruelty, especially if we take into consideration his struggle against the Manicheans. But we should not disregard the context in which all our struggles take place, allowing us to survive both physically and psychologically. St Augustine did not have to struggle *physically* with the Manicheans and to some extent his bodily functions did not hang upon any doctrine, however fallacious and anti-Christian. But his mental equilibrium was partly lodged with all his polemics that might have driven him mad, had he not defeated his numerous opponents. Indeed some individuals go mad and die if they cannot get their own way. St Augustine was of their number and luckily for him the Holy Trinity was on his side. The Manicheans are known only through St Augustine's works; the same goes for Pelagius. And St Augustine's masterpieces are read all over the world – even in the countries that have nothing to do with Catholicism and Protestantism. Time and God tipped the balance in favour of the saint and his writings. And even if time had been abolished – by Borges, among other people – the saint would have won hands down because saints and martyrs always win – by the grace of God.

As for Jansen, one wonders if his victory – if any – is due to God's grace or the doggedness of time that favours those who do not give way, even if they cannot get their own

way. Even if you are wrong, you should not give way and yield because it is written in a poem and on a gravestone – ‘And not to yield.’ Both the poet and the hero are famous – to the point of abolishing time that is unable to obliterate their gifts and deeds. You may become famous in your turn if you do not yield and show your determination to overcome all obstacles, however insurmountable and terrifying. Jansen worked on his masterpiece for 22 years and rounded it off as follows, ‘I leave my work to the judgment of the Roman Church...I retract all that she will decide that I ought to retract.’ The Church decided that he ought to retract everything but he died and his book defied time and space, as usually happens with immortal masterpieces. The Church was defeated for once because, instead of removing 22 years from Jansen’s life, she tolerated his presence on Earth; for some obscure reason, both death and Earth tolerated him too. So he finished his book and now we are aware of the fact that some of us belong to what he called ‘the mass of perdition’. Mass murder, mass starvation, mass deportation. There is also such a thing as the mass of perdition and we have no alternative but to get used to it. (But there is no such thing as the mass of *salvation*.)

You do not get used to it because you cannot know in advance if you are damned or not unless you are a prophet in your own right. If you are, you say to yourself – not to others, God forbid! – ‘I’ll go to Paradise because I’m a saint’ and, sure enough, you go to Paradise, although no one knows whether you are a saint or not. What does it matter! What counts is that you are in Paradise *already*: you are in the middle of what is called ‘Paradise on Earth’. *En attendant, en attendant*, as the French point out. Meanwhile, in the meantime. What does it matter! Sooner or later you are bound to land in Paradise because you are a prophet and your free will will convey you to Paradise in due course. But there are many free wills you will have to cope with on your way to Paradise and on any other way; as usual, there are many other ways and things and any things. So you cope with them and they say to you, ‘Your will is not our will. And our will forbids you to go to Paradise.’ Oddly enough, all these wills and ills speak to you for hours as if to prove that language is more important than anything, as Lacan put it, said or wrote. He said it, put it and laid it down on his writing desk; and on his chest of drawers. So what? So we think and talk about ‘so’ and ‘what’ and Paradise that does not need our quotation marks. Paradise is unquestionable, isn’t it?

Anyway, you are not afraid of death and do not think much of Paradise that may turn out to be just another golf course, for all you know or do not know. So you are not afraid of death, as some Taoist treatise says; and so you are not afraid of death. And suddenly you feel fire, a lot of fire, and the immanence of fire means you are no longer on the surface of the Earth: you are *under* it. You are under all surfaces, all earths and under everything else; even under false

pretences, although you do not pretend anything.

One wonders if Socrates was still on the surface of the Earth when speaking to his friends on the day of his execution. He was, to all outward appearances, otherwise his friends would have called him the ‘underground man’ when walking down a mythical staircase that separates this world from Hades. Socrates was eager to leave this world or vale of tears and fears to join the Platonic ideas situated above all the worlds in this world of ours. Even other galaxies and Milky Ways were beneath his dignity; he had always been going up and up before landing up in a prison cell where he was fettered like a run-of-the-mill lawbreaker. On the day of the execution, he removed his fetters, alias his body that was beneath contempt, and talked to his friends; they were mostly in tears. He said he would see the gods instead of just *feeling* their presence and protection; and he rejoiced at this thought, for the gods were superior to his *daimonion*. (They still are.) As for myself, I neither see nor hear *daimonions*, demons, gods, demigods, demiurges, and so on. (Only demagogues.) After death I shall witness neither sos, nor ons, nor eons, nor anemones, nor animas; nor shall I suffer from anaemia. And I would give anything to suffer from anaemia – or anything else, for that matter – *after death*, not in my lifetime. The only suffering I do not wish to endure now is death, whatever Epicurus says about it and its (or his) non-existence; or about a painless transfer from this world to any other world or *word*, as a Kabbalist might say.

So Socrates is on the surface of the Earth, of the world, and he aspires to leave these surfaces to meet the gods and remarkable people who cannot be found on any *surface*, be it that of the Earth or Mars. Only in Heaven does one meet remarkable people and discuss the subjects that are out of our reach with them: we are just surface-people and our subjects are shallow. And then Socrates salutes his soul’s departure; now it is on its own and the fetters imposed by the body are no longer *de rigueur* either for men or women. Philosophers yearn for death because no life will ever let them enjoy their soul’s wisdom and aptitudes to the utmost. And you should take your soul’s personal aptitudes and abilities into account not only on your deathbed but also in the streets where you walk and enjoy yourself. Your body walks, jogs and goes swimming, but you should say to yourself that all your muscles and tendons are nothing but a huge hindrance that prevents you seeing the light of truth. And only your soul can reach this light and bathe in it, if divorced from the body and life as such; from the surface of the Earth.

And what if the soul does not exist? Then you die for nothing and your corpse is offered to vultures, like Mozart’s. Anyway, vultures are everywhere and everything; so are graves and graveyards. And what if you are not a philosopher? You do not care about truth, wisdom and

Socrates who drinks his poisonous cup like Gertrude or anybody else, provided this anybody wishes to die instead of staying on the surface of the Earth. What *do* you care about? About breakfast, brunch, lunch, high tea, middle tea, low tea, underground tea, dinner, high dinner, heavenly dinner. (No heavenly hosts.) About women and men, their legs, breasts, eyes, chins, skins. (No souls.) About all *unphilosophical* aspects of life and all its *unsoulful* aspects. About *the eternity of pleasures* and *the immortality of joy*. About the surface of the Earth and *earthly* powers and paradises.

I am a nobody who yearns to stay on any surface, provided this surface is not situated on the *other* side, *another* side, within another size or dimension, be it the fourth dimension, or the fifth. I will persevere in my being, non-being, anti-being, on condition that all these and those beings are mine and no one else's. 'This is *my* Earth,' says a man in Dovzhenko's *Earth*. This is my Earth, my Plato, my prison cell, my fetters, my hemlock, my time. This is my I, my Own, my Me, my Right Hand, my Left Hand, my Right Foot, my Left Shoulderblade. That is why *I* am forsaken. Socrates was *not*.

You are born, grow, mature, fall in love with one man, one woman. Then you fall in love with another woman, another man. The former hates the latter and kills them. The latter hates the former and kills them too. You have a child who dies because God desires to put him or her in His lap. You cry and somebody else says that he or she understands you; and you sleep with him or her. And you wake with him or her and repent and cry and scream. And they say you have cancer and you realise you have *something* instead of having *nothing*. And something will come of something, as Shakespeare and many actors point out; in due course, in undue course, in the course of justice and injustice, in the course of rivers and rivulets.

Well, you (and I) have THIS moment and no one says *anything* on the subject, even if one could say *something* to the effect that you have nothing at all, not even this moment, let alone your body and all the nobodies you have left behind. You had better not use the word 'behind' too often, because everything is *before* you, *in front of* you, and that is called 'the future' unless you call it 'the past' or 'the thing of the past'. No, no, no – there are no things either in the past or in the future. The thing you are facing – even if it turns its back on you – is the present and you are supposed to be happy within this present without paying attention to anything or anybody else. There are many bodies in your past but you should not repent, even if you used to beat all these bodies to death. You no longer do it because all these bodies are dead and some of them are even buried. So you do not beat them any longer – either to death or to life. You leave them alone and they rot on their own; they can rot to death or another life or karma without your help, your hands and virtuous thoughts. You are virtuous and your

virtuousness can exert considerable pressure on the world and your own life without ‘being paid’, as they say. They always think in terms of payments and money and land of milk and honey. You do not, you do not, you do *not*.

You are alive and that is what counts; and if it does not, you yourself count and you count this and that, otherwise the world does not exist. The world exists only if all its components are put together and hug each other. All these components are put together and you can see them, even if your eyesight is not as strong as it used to be. The components are before your very eyes or under them: the floor of your room is *under* you and not *above* you, otherwise you would call it ‘a ceiling’ and not ‘a floor’. You do not call it anything at all and all the names you may utter go somewhere because they are useless – as useless as the matches you are holding and looking at. What could you do with them? You could light a few candles. What for? To celebrate your birthday or spend Christmas in your God’s company? In any Other Company? There are no Christmases for you, no Istmases. Nothing at all – try to remember that.

Is, is, is, is; *ist, ist, ist, ist*, as they say in Germany. They do not say anything in Austria, and even if they *do* say something, they do, they do, they do, they do. They do this and that and nothing else. Is there anything? Perhaps. If he eats anything with wheat in it he is very sick. This *anything* is *something*, so the universe exists. Your life is *ist, ist, ist, ist*. Today it is is, is, is, is. Do we have to speak of tomorrow? About i, i, i, i? About s, s, s, s? Yes, if we speak to capital letters: I, I, I, I, I, S, S, S, S, S. We always speak to capital, even if some of our dialogues are disappointing, for instance, ‘We’ve put £20,000 capital into the business, but we’re unlikely to see any return for a few years.’ And the business says, ‘Yes, you’ve put your money into us, but we don’t guarantee anything. An economic/financial crisis, you know.’

So this moment is over there – along with life and whatever we think about life and other metamorphoses. This moment is also over here and we can touch it, if we feel like it; and we can feel it if we feel like it; and we feel like it if we are like it. But we are not like it because every human being is unique and in a class of his or her own, in a race of his or her own. He or she owns a lot and all of his or her belongings are now in this room where one is to spend one’s life, disregarding other lives and ones. You have to adjust to this life, room and cell because you cannot change the world which is unchangeable, as the saying goes. There are many sayings and they all go in the same direction, otherwise they would make no sense, and they must make something; it is their *raison d’être*. They are *être* and *raison* and so they are, and even if they are on the verge of a nervous breakdown or death, they *are* and one should cling to whatever *is* and shun whatever is *not* unless one is a Buddhist and hopes to reach nirvana in this life of theirs. And nirvana is not, or rather a collection of nots, and you go through these nots, notes,

zeros and mirrors, saying to yourself, 'I am not. I am hot. I am cold. I am a grave, my own grave.'

If you are your own grave, you do not have to fear death because you are already dead and buried. And if you are already dead and buried, you should not fear death or any other disappearance you can be subjected to as you go along this boulevard or into that boudoir. You go along, so you go and live; and if you are dead, you do not go. You do not go at all. You are at all, so to speak. You are all, so to speak. And you speak, you speak, you speak. And you say, 'All, all, all. I am all, all. I am, am, am, am. I am m.' You are also a river, even if you cannot bathe in it twice or thrice or any other number of times. You put your foot into it and say, 'I'm bathing in it. This is my swimming pool and I'm the richest man in the world. I've got a few thousand pools like that and my thousand feet bathe in these pools. I'm the Buddha or Gothama or whatever you pronounce or mispronounce. I am you and not.'

You adjust to life and to its flow, for life is flowing even if it seems to be rooted to the spot and to the pot about which you know nothing or next to nothing. You know *something* about your chamber pot; and yet you can walk as far as your bathroom where you can relieve yourselves and others – the figments of your imagination. You relieve them and they relieve you – for once you are not let down by your friends and their friends who can also come to you, descend upon you because they have no time to phone. Had they had time to phone, they would have called you to say, 'We'll come to you at 5 p.m. We hope you don't mind. We'll come and ask you to cook some vegetables because we don't eat meat or anything of the kind. So you'll have to cook vegetables and rice. And we'll need a lot of fruit as a dessert. Oranges, apples, pears and bananas are all types of fruit. And please don't ask us, "Would you like some fruit for dessert?"' Yes, we would. We like fruit and vegetables because they are good for our health. The cherry tree in your garden is in fruit, isn't it? And other trees are in vegetable, aren't they?

And there are newspapers that are ready to pounce on you with their news and sheets of paper; and you allow them to descend and pounce upon you because you must keep up with the times, otherwise the times will let and keep you down. You do not wish to be down, do you? Of course you wish to be up and this wish is understandable in any context, even if there are no contexts to speak of and write home about. If you are up, you can pounce upon this and that, and win this war, that battle and many games. You can even become a world champion if you are up or even up-and-coming, for you can say to yourself and others, 'I'm already up so I've come. Can't you see me?' They do see you and applaud, and you come down from your pedestal to salute them cordially and show them your magnanimity. You are as simple as all these people; you are an ordinary human being and they should not fear you, not at all. They should

worship you because you are both great and simple – like Lenin wearing a cap. He wore a cap instead of a hat and every proletarian understood him or rather his cap. Does it really matter what people understand and why they do not kill you at once? They may understand your cap, your trousers, your smile, one word. They do not understand anything else, but one word and one cap are enough and so you are still alive in spite of everything, of every boulder, of every brick that does not fall on your head.

Newspapers bring you up to speed with yourself and you feel you belong in this day and age, although you do not seem to belong in the newspapers because they do not speak about you: they have other things to do and you are not within the scope of their interests. They do not even take the trouble to say to you, ‘I’m afraid your life and trials are beyond/outside the scope of my pages.’ Nor do they say, ‘Your tribulations don’t come within the scope of our news because you are not in the news. Anyway, you are too old.’ And if you say to them, ‘You could broaden the scope of your enquiries,’ they answer, ‘We would not like to widen the scope of the enquiry and look at more private matters.’ So you remain outside these and other newspapers; but at least you can read them and they even *want* you to read them. At least they want you to *buy* them and it does not really matter whether you read them or not.

You read the newspaper you bought this morning and realise that cybersecurity analysts say that chip technology has also been a focus of hacking attempts aimed at foreign companies. You realise that, that, that...that there are so many things you have no time to realise what you have already realised during your exertions and excursions into the outside world. You realise there is such a thing as cybersecurity and you ask yourself what this means and you answer you know the word security; you also know you are not secure in this world or any other world. Even in the next world or the next-to-nothing one you are sure to be insecure. But what does it matter? You are reading a newspaper and so you are alive, even if you are not kicking. Do you really have to be kicking? To be alive, you do not have to be kicking, for you can say, ‘I’m alive,’ and everybody will understand you are still in the vale of tears. They will hear your words and see your mouth through which your words habitually come and go. That is enough and enough’s enough. And to prove that you are in the vale of tears, you just have to shed a few tears: the dead do not cry. Why don’t they cry? Because they are happy in the Hereafter?

You are alive and kicking and you do not care about cybersecurity, whatever that is, unless it intervenes in the currency markets today to try to stabilise the exchange rate. No, no, no. You are not on the right track in the network where you found yourself as you began to read your newspaper that belongs to other people, groups and corporations. What does it intervene in? What? This word? What word? Which word? Cybersecurity. Security does not intervene

and if it does, one does not mind its intervention because security is our top priority. One does not know much about cyber and even if one takes this word, nothing comes of it – neither of the *word* nor of *it*. Ber, ber, ber. Cy, cy, cy. What can come of it? Nothing except ber, ber, cy, cy. And BBC. That is what you are left with, so to speak. And you do speak so you are alive. But that does not mean you are kicking.

You *are* kicking and you can prove it. You are kicking, aren't you? You see a ball and kick it as hard as you can. And if you do not see one – or two balls – you put a few balls on your only carpet and kick them for a few hours. These balls are not alive but thanks to them you prove to everybody you are alive and even kicking. 'Even kicking,' you say to everybody, especially for the sake of the blind. Of course they can *hear* you kicking these balls but they do not know exactly who is kicking what and you have to spoon-feed not only the blind but also the deaf. And if they do not believe you, you kick a man in the face. And if they still say you are dead, you ring your mother up and ask her to come to your house at once. She comes and you say to her, 'I am your son, am I not?' 'You are,' she says. 'So you are my mother, are you not?' 'I am,' she says. 'And all mothers think and feel that their babies are still inside them. Am I right?' 'You are,' she says. 'Every mother is a mother hen, isn't she?' 'She is,' she says. 'So you are a hen, aren't you?' 'I am.' 'And I am inside you.' 'You are.' 'Don't you feel my body inside you?' 'I do.' So you say to all Doubting Thomases, 'My mother is feeling the baby kicking inside her. Kicking, feeling, feeling, kicking. Isn't that enough?'

It is enough and they leave you in peace, saying to themselves, 'He's alive and kicking, and kicking, kicking,' especially if you have an opportunity to kick them in the face and faces. What will you do now? You must do something now and the next day, otherwise everyone will think you are dead and not kicking at all. So you kick whatever you can kick and do something so as not to die prematurely, on the spur of the moment, of the wrong moment. You had better not die even on the spur of the *right* moment because it is not right to die, even if it is written overhead, in the sky, on the moon, on angels' clothes. Have you ever seen their clothes? You might have seen them once or twice. And so you know that what is written on them boils down to this, 'You are to die but we shall help you. We are your guardian angels, you know.' So you look at their clothes and die in peace. You should not die in war, come hell or high water. Even if Hell comes, you should not die in war, otherwise you may be ill-treated in the Hereafter. And if high water comes, you say to yourself it is low water and your stratagem works because everything is in your mind, even high and low waters; and high hells, and low bells.

And if it is some kind of low water, you can pour it into your bath and take your bath, notwithstanding meteorology and other inconveniences. You take your bath and if your bath is

large enough to allow you to swim in it, you swim in it and sing all sorts of hymns to creation, for nothing is more beautiful and rewarding than singing in one's bath. Even singing in the rain – and one always thinks about rain in relation to singing – is inferior to the baths where you sing. What else do you need? You need the whole world and you need to triumph somewhere, preferably in this world and also in all other worlds you are likely to come across as soon as you leave this world of ours. How to triumph in this world, in our world, in their world? It is not easy and one might say it is rather difficult. Within our Christian world, the last are not the least and they are far superior to the first. So you become a hostage and celebrate your remarkable triumph over appalling adversity. You become a prime minister and sign this agreement or any other agreement: what counts is your signature and agreements. And journalists say, 'The signing of the agreement was a personal triumph for the Prime Minister.' And then you say to yourself that you will not have smallpox and the same journalists write, 'The eradication of smallpox by vaccination was one of medicine's greatest triumphs.' You think about changes and modifications, and other journalists write and say, 'The constitutional changes have been hailed as a triumph for democracy.' Democracy triumphs; so do you. A match ends in triumph for the French team. You end in triumph, although you are not the French team or any other team. And you return in triumph from the sales with a half-price stereo system.

You are surrounded by triumphs; you bathe in them. Do you need any other bath salts?

And no, and yes. And so many.

So any, any. The last train, the least.

The least and the last.

'Least' is 'leaf' in Russian.

And a shiiiiit of paper.

This leaf, that one, that.

POSTSCRIPT

What can I do with this? Nothing and so this and that still go there and here. And I sit where I am and look at them, at you, and this alters neither my outlook nor inlook; it alters nothing and nothing alters anything. And everything, sometimes.

So it is over. I am as free as
Winds and windbags and bags,
That house the biggest collection of
Myself and other antique toys.