

VALERY ALEFF

VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

PART ONE

THE CASE (CAGE)

At the end of his life— at one of its ends – Tolstoy wrote a book entitled *The Circle of Reading*. Tolstoy circled around his life and other lives which were his to the extent of the circle. And the circle was rather lengthy except that he stopped now and then, prepared to interrupt it and commit suicide because he was not wholly (holy) satisfied with his life and forthcoming death. But on his deathbed he heard a few excerpts from the circle I am enlarging upon to make it even larger so that it might look like the cosmos in an opera house where they perform *Die Zauberflöte*. They show us the Queen of the Night surrounded and almost devoured by a number of stars that exceeds all the stars described in our books. The stars devour the Queen, and her assistants say, ‘These stars have been sent by Zorastro. They are as evil as the evil about which Nietzsche never talked.’ But someone is right and all others wrong and so they say, ‘You’re not virtuous,’ and you adopt another way of living or dying, as they often say, and you take a few steps in *that* direction and become virtuous and good overnight or overday, as the case may be; and on this occasion the case is, is, is. There is nothing else in the entire Universe. There is only the case, your case, and you carry this case around as if there were nothing else in the world. And if they ask you, ‘What is it? What are you carrying with you?’ You just answer, ‘It is my case.’

Just in case you put Tolstoy’s book in this case and carry it about as if relying on it for some ultimate truth. But they say that the ultimate truth no longer exists, due to the death of God and other deaths – the death of Pushkin, for instance. All other truths are scattered around you and your shadow so that you both look like the Queen of the Night. As a Russian woman said to me once, ‘I no longer enjoy making love – I’ve become an androgyne.’ Was it worth my while making love to this death? For the sake of saying at last, ‘You’re right. Nor do *I* enjoy it, actually.’ But love is necessary, in any shape or form. You spot a form and say to yourself, ‘Its shape reminds me of love so I wonder if it isn’t the love I’ve been looking for all my life.’ No harm in trying – you pick up this form and kiss it several times as if to find out if it tastes like what they call ‘*real* love’. The taste is unreal and you fling the form out of the window. (You always keep one window open – just for that purpose, for your disappointments.)

Tolstoy quoted Buddhist teachers and sutras at length, and I am duty bound to make sure they also speak of love – not only of the absolute lack of sentiments, lives and hopes. I shall proceed in Tolstoy’s manner and measure so as not to waste my time and mind on searching for the right way of expressing my ideas. There is no such thing as the right way, and Tolstoy was often wrong; one is even tempted to declare he was *always* wrong. At least the Russians, their church authorities, think so because they are so dismissive of anybody else’s suggestions. For more than a century after his death, they have obstinately ruled out any attempt at reconciliation between his immortal soul and their moral, ecclesiastic code. Tolstoy went so far as to re-write the Scriptures. My ambitions lie closer to the Earth and its values because even the taste of fruit can save us not only from starvation, but also from damnation. And we should on no account discount serendipitous adventures which, under the circumstances, concern my usage of my library. I spoke about this usage (one is always tempted to add ‘abusage’) of my library in one my books entitled *The Pyramid*. The book was written in French, but it could also have been written in Russian, considering that *Piramida* refers to the same gigantic object I saw in three-dimensional reality 10 years ago. I might even affirm it was a four-dimensional encounter if I was not weary of all these dimensions and projections. Recently I said to a friend, ‘I’m living in one dimension only. In *my* dimension, to put it bluntly. Call me “a one-dimensional creature”, if you like. I wouldn’t mind.’

Needless to say, the books I see all around me are bound to come to life, sooner or later; what is more, they are far more alive than human beings, at least the ones we encounter in everyday life. I touched upon this aspect of our mutual existence as well so I might say I am going round in circles, and these circles are *reading* circles, as Tolstoy might have put it. Anyway, the doctrine of eternal recurrence which recurs rather often in my novels and essays seems to rear its beautiful head once more. Is it beautiful or awful, given the importance of karma; the importance of its absence, rather? *The Death of Karma*. (Or *Karenina*.) A nice title for a future book. One may write such a book in the Hereafter.

Men, driven on by thirst, run about like a snared hare; let therefore the mendicant drive out thirst, by striving after passionlessness for himself.

Dhammapada

I have no idea how a snared hare runs – for two obvious reasons. *Primo*, I am not a hare; *secundo*, I am not even a snared or shackled man. Even if I am absolutely free – no shackles, no handcuffs, no prison cells – I am unable to run, considering my legs' fragility. They fail me piteously and even walking is out of the question, now and then. Here is another eternal recurrence for you: I speak of it all the time; not only in my writings, mind you. It is as if I endeavoured to pray in earnest, on bended knees, on the floor of my library where I have not collapsed so far. Perhaps it would be wiser to collapse in that pyramid of mine, sparing my body an uneasy ride to a cemetery. Even the nearest cemetery is out of my reach, as far as my legs (my present legs and tendons) are concerned. It is too far for them; not for my life, though.

Only by touching real nature can we understand it: concepts are of no use in the kingdom of truth, sincerity, feelings and ideals. But I am not a hare so I am not in his shoes, as it were; or in her paws, if you prefer. I am still lying in the library as if my prophecy had come true: my library will turn into a pyramid, sooner or later. This sooner has probably come and later will make its appearance later, later – beyond the horizon, as they say; or beyond the farthest mountain. I wish I were a hare; even a snared hare would fit the bill, for I am snared anyway. I have always been snared, even when I wished to break the record for the 5,000 metres. In my childhood I ran rather often, up and down our street, just in front of our country house; as if I could not just stay at home, reading some circle or other. Men always run from something, my father used to say, although he invariably pointed out that they were not running from themselves. 'I'm running *towards* myself,' he would add after a pause. 'But I'm so far that I'll never catch up with myself. Do you see that horse, over there? I could catch up with this horse. I would outrun any horse, even Pegasus. I might grow a pair of wings and outfly both Pegasus and any poet riding on its back. But I'll never be able to catch up with myself.'

'Why don't you write poems?' I usually asked.

'Do you think I might catch up with myself? By writing poetry?'

'I don't know. You're older and far more intelligent than I am. You could tell me how one can catch up with oneself.'

‘One’s age doesn’t matter,’ he would answer. ‘You need to grow a pair of wings. I’m too old for that. I’ve only got a pair of shoulder blades, not a pair of wings.’

‘Do you want me to water your shoulder blades? That might help, you know.’

‘I don’t need trees. I need a pair of wings. If I had them, I would fly as far as Paradise because I am in Paradise, my inner, real self. But I can’t reach it.’

Hares do not fly, otherwise I would do my best to become one, even to the detriment of my human nature and body. I had better drive out thirst, and I would already have done so, had I known where this thirst is located. In my throat? Usually when you are thirsty, you point at your throat and someone offers you a glass of water or beer. But the sacred book I quoted (not at length, not at length) does not refer to this kind of thirst, otherwise I would already have been in the midst of saints, in the cosiest corner of Paradise. I suppose the book in question alludes to my private parts that have not always been private, if you see what I see. I used to share them with many people. Now I have nothing more to share, but that does not mean I have got rid of the thirst described in the book. The point is it is described, neither in great detail, nor in miniscule detail. Hares must know a great deal about this thirst, especially when they are snared, when they do their best to break the record for the 5,000 metres. Do they know anything about passions? Are they passionately in love with themselves? You run, you run and you mutter under your breath, ‘I’m striving after myself. Unfortunately, I can’t reach myself because I’m in heaven already.’ And then you fly about like a snared bird and mutter under your breath, ‘I’m striving after myself, and I know nothing about my whereabouts. Perhaps I’m underground, in the bowels of the Earth. In this case, I should crawl, fall and crawl and dig a number of holes. I might see myself in one of them, some day. On Monday perhaps.’

Striving after passionlessness for himself. There are individuals who kiss their bodies all the time; down to their astral bodies, mind you. They kiss their hands, fingers, wrists. They suffer because they cannot kiss either their elbows or their shoulder blades. They ask surgeons to remove their shoulder blades from where they are so they can kiss them passionately, almost hysterically, pathologically. The same goes for legs: you cannot kiss them unless you subject your body to yoga and its lotus-dominated exercises. They say to their surgeons, ‘The only way to assuage my thirst or rather hunger is called “amputation” in your jargon.’ They end up eating their feet, thighs, buttocks and even their private parts. When they realise they can no longer drink their urine, they say to their numerous gurus, ‘I’ve driven out thirst. What’s more, I’m no longer in love with myself. I don’t like eunuchs, you know.’

We can say that God and the actual world jointly constitute the character of the creativity for the initial phase of the novel concrescence. I am not sure I understand the meaning of this word, but I think that it combines three words, as German words often do. In England we have double-barrelled names, triple-barrelled names. In Germany they just put all these words together as if to create the semblance of a queue. You get the feeling they form an orderly queue, and no one (no word, that is) jumps the queue, contrary to what often happens in supermarkets and in the vicinity of theatres. (*Jesus Christ Superstar*.) This word conceals in its bosom the following notions: ‘Concrete, essence, creation, science, crescent,’ and so on. So the initial phase of the novel concrescence is made up of all these words – plus all other words we have no time to enumerate: the process of creativity is just *adumbrated* in this chapter. And the final phase looks like the following remark, ‘The moon was a brightly shining

crescent.’ Let us not forget that the moon is one of the most beautiful artefacts of the universe. The subject thus constituted, is the autonomous master of its own concrescence into subject-superject. (Not *superjet*, mind you.) It passes from a subjective aim in a concrescence into a superject with objective immortality.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*

I would like to settle some old scores with my old concrescence – before I set about creating my novel crescent, my new moon, my full moon, another life brimful with essences and crescences. If you say ‘God’ – and He is one of my favourite subjects or objects – you must know that His existence cannot be proved. You talk through your hat for hours, rounding off: ‘He makes me feel better in the world where the number of dimensions is reduced to four or five at most. That’s not enough. I must feel bigger than myself and He makes me bigger, if only by adding His own dimension to the picture I handle, whenever in my wakeful state, in my right mind.’ All this is sheer nonsense: you should not talk about what does not exist, even if this inexistence illuminates your life, your conscious and unconscious minds. Let them remain in the dark about whatever goes on. Or better still – stop whatever goes on, as Dhammapada says to you as soon as you open the book, determined to learn how to get rid of pain, suffering and obtrusive loves. Your passions obstruct your way; and yet there is no way, no way, as you say to yourself in a moment of exceptional lucidity. No way, no way. You nod your head or shake it, moving your shoulders up and down, down and up. Faith in God is an ocean, but you do not need an ocean to traverse the puddle to which our lives have been reduced over centuries. Just paddle through this puddle or peddle across it instead of struggling to pedal your bicycle up the hill. There are no hills; there are a lot of ups and down, and they all concern your shoulders or your legs, assuming that you are in a position to walk. And if you are lying in your bed or your library, you can boast about the total lack of ups and downs: you have already driven them out of your body and life; hopefully once and for all. Incidentally, you no longer shrug your shoulders: you are neither surprised nor malcontent. Nor do you understand what they are talking about. You just leaf through your books; or they leaf through your soul, through its books and brooks.

In him who has intercourse (with others) affections arise, (and then) the pain which follows affection; considering the misery that originates in affection let one wander alone like a rhinoceros.

Dhammapada

Once more I seem to have a problem with my identity as if I was heading for identities, not for pleasures which are the only aim of my life. As if I saw a placard in front of me or right behind me – it does not really matter where this placard is located. This reminds me of the famous remark I must have commented upon many times; or all the time, as the case may be. ‘Demonstrators marched past holding/waving placards that said, «Send food, not missiles”.’ My only present comment upon this statement boils down to identities and their utter non-existence, as Buddhists always put it. Send pleasures, not identity problems! I don’t need these problems or any other problems. I need poems where so many flowers are named and enlarged upon. When reading a beautiful poem, we get the

feeling we have come across a gigantic flower; or a blade of grass, as I always add. We walk along this blade of grass – not up and down, not down, not up. We walk *along* it, horizontally. And we realise how different this walk of ours is in comparison with time-walks: time always goes up and down in full accordance with our life's inconstancies and its own ups, its own downs. Even if your life is an uneventful life, spent or wasted in your partner's company, you quarrel from time to time. And, after a while, you reconcile yourself not only to your partner's unfaithfulness and stupidity, but also to life, to its ups and downs. But a quarrel ensues and once again your temper goes up. You are up in arms over this quarrel and life's unreasonable behaviour; or God's unreasonable stance, as you often say, when in a religious mood.

But what do you call 'my religious mood'? Tolstoy (and Dostoevsky, *entre parenthèses*) also speaks of God at the earliest opportunity which always comes too early; too late, in *his* opinion. A man whose death sentence leads him to the nearest gallows (this man is bound to swing, to sing his swansong) has a few hours left – in his lifetime, in his *lifetime*. He picks up the nearest Bible, opens it and finds whatever he seeks to steady his nerves. And Tolstoy quotes at length The Scriptures that some of us know by heart, resolved to fight efficiently what is called 'a bundle of nerves'. (Unbundle one's nerves, as they say.) 'And he said to him, "Don't fret – I'm with you. Just go to their gallows and you'll swing in peace. This gallows is just a swing – a seat joined by two ropes or chains to a metal bar or a tree, on which especially a child can sit and move backwards and forwards. I know you're no longer a child, but adults are allowed to swing too, not only on gallows. This swing will bring you to heaven in no time at all.' Contrary to what might be said about the above speech, the victim of human injustice does not say to himself, 'Just another example of gallows humour.' He smiles and says to himself and often to his guard, 'This book is right. I'm not alone. He stands by my side, he does.'

'Who?' asks the guard. 'This man with an axe? What do you call this man? I call an axe an axe. But what should I call this man?'

'Never mind. Don't pay too much attention to names and their equivalents.'

'What are you talking about?'

'About my forthcoming death. I'll be in heaven at the end of this appointed hour.'

'Do you think that gallows is a sort of airplane?'

'No, it is a swing.'

'But you should use a swing with caution. If you swing too violently, you might fall. The accident might leave you with permanent brain damage.'

'A swing is better than gallows anyway.'

I am going back to the rhinoceros they touched upon in Dhammapada, for the simple reason that Indian philosophers spent most of their time in the woods, looking at wild animals and their habits. They saw a hare and thought, 'I should say that one will run like a hare, if one doesn't get rid of oneself.' Sometimes they would snare a hare to see how it could run, when snared, gagged and garrotted, 'otherwise our scriptures wouldn't hold their mirror up to truth'. They saw a rhinoceros, followed it for a while and then wrote, 'This rhinoceros must be in love with its partner. It wanders alone because its partner left it a long time ago. They quarrelled, it slapped its partner's face and its partner departed without further ado. "What to do? What to do?" exclaimed the rhinoceros. And it decided to wander alone in the woods, whining and uttering its partner's name.' Upon writing the word 'name', very often Indian philosophers dwelt for a while on this concept which might lead them to the following

conclusion, 'Names do not count because one ought to be nameless.' Thus the concept of namelessness was born in Indian woods, in days of yore. So was the concept of loneliness. Whenever an Indian philosopher or mystic saw a wandering man or heard Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy*, he would whisper to himself, 'This man fell out of love with his life-companion. And now he regrets it rather bitterly.'

Of course every time one hears the word (or the notion) 'rhinoceros', one is sure to remember Ionesco who, once and for all, spoilt the pleasure traditionally experienced in the woods; the pleasure associated with rhinoceroses and their solitary walks. I, for one, feel no such pleasure when this word (or concept) is uttered in my presence: I think about Ionesco's play and the Nazis who have, however, nothing to do with this book except that my aversion to their deeds remains intact. I am not sure it has never influenced my general attitude towards the human race. And one does not have to go to a zoo for that, for recalling this play and Laurence Olivier who played the leading part rather convincingly, if the reviews I read in my youth can be trusted.

FORMS AND CUPS (AND MUCKS, AND POTS)

Man's shortcomings and sins are all due to the substance of the body and not to its form; while all his merits are exclusively due to his form. Thus the knowledge of God, the formation of ideas, the mastery of desire and passion, the distinction between that which is to be chosen and that which is to be rejected, all these man owes to his form; but eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, excessive lust, passion, and all vices, have their origin in the substance of his body.

Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*

I thought all this was the other way round; at some point, in the middle of my youth, I might have thought that everything was the other way round – in the universe itself. Or just adjusted *differently* – something akin to what happened with Kepler and those who had preceded him in the astronomical arena. His predecessors thought the planets were moving in circles – either around the sun or around the Earth. Kepler corrected their orbits so now they follow elliptical trajectories rather obediently, without deviating from them, if only for an hour. I thought that *l'homme était bon* and so on, and so on. (In my youth, that is.) This presumable goodness of man did not allow me to see the horrors of the world, its incurable atrocities. Then I began to realise there were forms, uniforms; and substances, on the other side. So there are Nazi uniforms and the substances of those who wear them. But I view this problem in a different light. A man could wear this uniform – von Stauffenberg, for instance. His substance, however, contradicted this form, otherwise he would not have attempted to assassinate Hitler. In other words, I thought (I still do) that forms may lead us into error. A lot of evil – the word used in relation to the Soviet Union or Russia – may hide beneath a courteous, benevolent exterior. This exterior is the form I am talking about, whereas the content hidden beyond it is so hideous you get the feeling you are in the presence of the Devil or at least of the Gnostic Demiurge. I still do believe (in spite of Maimonides' unquestionable authority) that form is just a form and the core of our being is far more important. A prince might wear clothes associated with beggars. The Russians say, 'You meet (or judge) a human being in accordance with her clothes. By the end of your encounter your judgement should switch to the opposite pole – you judge her in accordance with her spirit, psyche and overall disposition.' You often smile in the presence of your torturer because you are afraid he might resume his efforts if

you tell him a few home truths, driving your point home. Your smile beguiles your mental images, your ideas, oppositions and aversion. In our world, however, people come and go, and we continue to judge them in accordance with their clothes, cars, villas and political correctness. Never mind their fundamental ignorance, negligence and downright cruelty. What counts is the form that moves along the streets or around some hall or other; or sits at a table somewhere. We see a smile and we seldom probe into the meaning of the words the smile seems to utter. The smile says, 'Children are the future of the world. Children are the present of the world. The poor suffer a lot and our duty is to help them. The free world should be protected from whatever is tyrannical, from destroyers of freedom.' We seldom dissect the meaning of such and such an utterance because it is just an utterance, not a thought, not an action. And actions speak louder than words. That is why the world is different from newspapers, speeches, clothes and smiles.

Actually I have no idea what excessive lust means; or rather I would like to know what 'excessive' means in the context. Tolstoy was certainly oversexed, and so am I to some extent – to the Tolstoy extent, I might say in an outburst of utter sincerity. I drink, eat and have a lot of passions in my body and also in my mind. Political or social correctness are not my cups of tea. (I am going to drink one in a moment.) As I pointed out many times, some time ago – and both my enemies and friends can testify to this statement – I am neither politically nor socially correct. Neither was Tolstoy; and many documents testify to this unquestionable truth. He was not afraid to speak his mind both publicly and domestically, saying whatever he found important to his daughters, wife and visitors. 'You're silly, you don't know what you're doing, you're out of your mind, you're a cad, a scoundrel, an unparalleled idiot.' Today, if you say, 'He isn't the most intelligent person in the world,' you must unreservedly add 'but he's *so* nice and at Christmas he gives 10 roubles to a poor child.' And if you ask, 'How many children are saved from ignominious death of hunger through his generosity?' they answer, 'One child. But these roubles speak volumes about this man's virtues and dignity.' That is what dignity boils down to in this day and age. Today, Tolstoy would be regarded as an unmitigated cad and a representative of what they call 'the scum of the Earth'.

What counts today is the form you see or hear or pay a visit to either out of curiosity or just because you are a social animal. (Not just an animal, mind you.) You go to a concert and pay no attention to the pieces of music you hear, to the pieces you do not listen to. You look at performers, you are curious to find out how old they are, if they are beautiful or not. You also spot your friends: they have come to the same concert hall in the hope of talking to *their* friends in the interval. What counts is the social atmosphere, your cousin's presence and small talk. If there is no cocktail party after the concert, you go to a restaurant and discuss the conductor's charisma and the violinist's sex appeal. And if you disagree with these smooth talkers, saying, 'It was just awful, no structure, no texture,' they say, 'You're not kind, dear sir,' meaning you are an unmitigated cad and consequently should not be welcomed by goodies, by these masked representatives of the scum of the Earth. Such are today's masked balls.

There are always two methods of securing harmony: one is to unify all the given elements, and another is to reject and expunge all the elements that refuse to be unified. Unity by inclusion gives us the beautiful; unity by exclusion, opposition, and isolation gives us the sublime. Both are pleasures: but the pleasure of the one is warm, passive and pervasive; that of the other cold, imperious, and keen. The one identifies us with the world, the other raises us above it.

George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*

We (or rather Maimonides) spotted two elements which might constitute our nature, our very essence or nonsense, as I always add, being driven by a sort of despair unknown to Kierkegaard. One is our substance, the other is often called 'form', although every time we say 'form' we mean something different as if we were ourselves and others, at the same time. One of our others say, 'Form is beautiful and beauty is the essence, the very sense of the world without which this world of ours would be as nonsensical as the poems written by Lewis Carroll.' Another self – it might belong to a different person – says, 'Form is a garment we should remove, for what counts is our nakedness, the nakedness of our selves.' God sees everything, but humans always err either on the side of caution or on the side of recklessness or outright madness. They are capable of confusing you with your clothes unless you strip them off, performing thereby a spiritual striptease. 'How spiritual this man is,' they will say, looking at your curves and spare tyre.

Other people speak of their contents, alias their hearts, souls and goodness, adding that clothes are a superficial, froth-like element in their lives. In other words, they think their hearts and generosity are much more important than their appalling ugliness. Their ugliness wreaks havoc on your senses of beauty – there are several of them – so that you understand what the beautiful maiden must have felt in the presence of the beast. What is more, the monster you come across in an innocent-looking street is not likely to turn into a prince; and if any metamorphosis lies in store for him, it is another monster he will become sooner or later. And, according to your reason, there is no difference between one monster and another. What counts is your sense of beauty and you do your best to protect it from monsters. You say to your friends and foes alike, 'I don't care a hoot about his soul – I'll never take advantage of its virtues because I'll never see this monster again. And if I do, I'll die before his generosity enlightens and illuminates my life.'

'What if he gives you 20,000 dollars?' asks a voice.

'OK, I'm prepared to accept this boon, on condition that he does it anonymously. Even my bank account would be appalled by his ugliness. His name must be as ugly as his face and body. Bodies bear such a resemblance to names that we must shun both, whenever a monster looms on the horizon.'

Be that as it may, I am not in the habit of unifying *all* the given elements, for ugliness and inanity live in our midst in such proximity that we often speak of melting pots. (We don't have to go to New York to witness this phenomenon.) And we don't say, 'Here's a melting pot, and here's another.' We just say, 'Here's a huge unpalatable borsch, end of story.' As for myself, I like neither borsch nor melting pots, and so I just expunge most of the elements I am supposed to deal with in the course of my life story which has not ended yet, according to the voices I hear now and then. 'How are you this morning?' 'Did you sleep well?' In the Hereafter they do not ask such questions: in the kingdom of eternity you sleep like a log and that is why the best painting devoted to the subject represents a number of logs in the Elysian Fields. Anyway, no unification can be envisaged in the Elysian Fields of my solitude. So I just hack away at the bread; and yet I am duty bound to cut it properly, otherwise I run the danger of being submerged by monstrosities. And monsters have a tendency to unify as if conscientiously following Marx's doctrine announced in his *Manifesto*. I don't mean they are all proletarians; I mean they are human beings. They don't refuse to unify – far from it. So I wholeheartedly adopt the second method advocated

by Santayana: I reject and expunge all the elements that refuse to disappear of their own accord. Unity by exclusion, opposition, and isolation gives us the sublime. Such is my life in a nutshell. My own unity. And my cup of tea. And I never add sugar to this cup.

Whenever they (human beings) are led by the wants of the body to that which is low and avowedly disgraceful, they are grieved at their position, they feel ashamed and confounded at their situation. (I don't think they are. These old standards are not applicable to today's world. They say the American Constitution was written for decent people; for gentlemen, so to speak, so to live. But nowadays there are Trumps and trump cards. Nothing else counts. And once again I ask myself if they know who Trump is, considering that in the centuries to come and go they will not be acquainted with his soap operas, his Dons Giovannis and Boris Godunovs. I hope they will be fond of commentaries, in those centuries.) They try with all their might to diminish this disgrace, and to guard against it in every possible way. They feel like a person whom the king in his anger ordered to remove refuse from one place to another in order to put him to shame; that person tries as much as possible to hide himself during the time of his disgrace; he perhaps removes a small quantity a short distance in such a manner that his hands and garments remain clean, and he himself be unnoticed by his fellow-men. Such would be the conduct of a free man, while a slave would find pleasure in such work; – he would not consider it a great burden, but throw himself into the refuse, smear his face and his hands, carry the refuse openly, laughing and singing.

Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*

I cannot hide from myself the fact that I am slightly perplexed by this excerpt because I am reminded once again of St Francis and the loathing he displayed in the presence (often imaginary) of money, associated in his mind with excrement. His disciples or followers were proud of themselves whenever they put a few golden coins at the very core of a heap of garden or a kitchen refuse; or at the bottom of a pile of dog muck. Naturally enough, they were not only elated at the very prospect of coming in touch with muck and refuse (they never refused to carry out these tasks) but they literally wallowed in whatever their mouths had to cross on their way to their bottoms or middles or insides – the bowels of muck and refuse, in other words. Or their hearts, as the case may be and often was. St Francis enjoined them to go to big cities, displaying the muck's remnants for the sake of pedestrians and authorities – the Pope himself, if you please. 'Where does the muck come from?' the Pope would ask.

'This morsel of muck comes from Verona.'

'And this one?' the Pope would ask, pointing with his staff at another morsel.

'This one comes from Pisa.'

'Thank you for showing me these morsels. I suppose you did your best not to lose them on the way to my majestic abode.'

'Not a molecule of the muck did we lose on our way to your Holiness,' the pilgrims would answer.

I know a woman who often said to me, 'Could you convince my husband to throw this pair of trousers into a rubbish chute? They're so old-fashioned. If they associate my husband with this pair of trousers, I'll never become the president of our charity association.'

‘I think these trousers are better than any association, any society,’ I said. ‘These trousers, any trousers, any shirts, any underwear.’

Your look depends on how you see yourself – not only in your heart of hearts, but also in your stomach of stomachs. You might give yourself indigestion if you look at yourself from your bowels, for instance; or even from your lungs. And that is what counts in my life: I never pay attention to my neighbours’ or pedestrians’ eyes because the only eye entirely worthy of my time and preoccupations is my own eye – my spying on myself. Tourists and other busybodies (not busysouls, mind you) drive around areas and countries to spy out the land. I never do this; it would be a needless exercise or a snub in relation to my mental life and its intensity. Of course it is easy to maintain you have everything within your body and soul – even the bathroom to which you direct your steps several times a day, which is disputable, to say the least. I have no idea where the information you have put at my disposal – more or less, more or less – comes from. As I usually say, when confronted with enigmas: ‘This comes from more or from less. Leave me in peace.’ And they do leave me in peace, oddly enough, as if they were angels or other tangible, material creatures that hover over me, their wings or thighs brushing against my hair or cheeks. And yet they are not longing to kiss me goodbye or good day. That is why my days and nights are not always good, deserving a medal for harmony and beatitude. Often they deserve neither medals nor laurel wreaths. My room and the rest of my solitary abode exhibit neither of these items.

ANTI-BIRTH, ANTI-DEATH, ANTI-WEIGHT

It is generally agreed upon that God cannot at a certain time acquire knowledge which He did not possess previously; it is further impossible that His knowledge should include any plurality, even according to those who admit the Divine attributes. (If God sees two persons, a man and a woman, he comes to the following conclusion, ‘I see only one person, and this person is me beyond a shadow of a doubt. An androgyne indulged in a bout of self-satisfaction.’) As these things have been fully proved, we, who assert the teaching of the Law, believe that God’s knowledge of many things does not imply any plurality; His knowledge does not change like ours when the objects of His knowledge change. (There is only one object of His knowledge; and one subject.) Similarly we say that the various events are known to Him before they take place, before the Big Bang, let alone before the birth of the human race; He constantly knows them, and therefore no fresh knowledge is acquired by Him. Eg., He knows that a certain person is non-existent at present, will come to existence at a certain time, will continue to exist for some time, and will then cease to exist. (Never, never. This person is always existent.) When this person, in accordance with God’s foreknowledge concerning him, comes into existence (never comes, never goes), God’s knowledge is not increased; it contains nothing that it did not contain before, but something has taken place that was known previously exactly as it has taken place.

Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*

I wonder why I came into existence instead of remaining in God’s mind as an idea, an impossible virtuality bordering on blasphemy and insanity. Isn’t it blasphemous not to come into existence if you are already there? Virtuality is also a state, a stage in the process they often define as ‘coming into existence’, which is the opposite of ‘going out of existence’, or ‘crawling out of existence’, or ‘sliding out of existence’. Well, you are there: your

virtuality fills a substantial part of God's mind – fully in accordance with your overweening pride, ambitions and aims. You aim at heaven, like the Tower of Babel which should be destroyed, taking humanity down a peg or two. (How many pegs did this proverbial Tower display for the sake of tourists?) Why hadn't God taken me down all these pegs before I was born? I might have become as miniscule as Higg's invention – even smaller, tinier, humbler. I would not have become at all, doing my best to resist the life force, the pleasure force, the caviar force, and *tutti quanti*. And all the bottles of Chianti you can find on the surface of the Earth; and also in her intestines, considering that the Earth drinks a lot of Chianti during her meals. (The Earth's taste in these matters is not outstandingly refined.)

Well, I suppose I have to accept the fact of my own existence, even if I disagree with its premises and the aftermath of my birth. But at least I can go out in my pyjamas, despite the number of eyes and glances scattered all along the street where I usually take my walks. God has my pyjamas and my different personalities in His jewel box or within His refuse – let us not get bogged down in details. So He collects my pyjamas, my trousers, my looks, my insults and even my blasphemies, although I am not quite sure I have ever blasphemed in my life. What does it matter as long as I speak of God! So it would be ridiculous to think that the Almighty says to Himself or even to one of His angels, 'Here goes the author of this stupid book I've never taken the trouble to read. I've no time for ramblings and ravings.'

'There's nothing else in the world You created, Your Majesty.'

'Don't call me "Your Majesty". I'm not a King, you know.'

'Can I call you Your Holiness? You're not the Pope either, but I have to say something, when speaking to you of the decline and decay of your Opus Magnum.'

'I'm nameless. So you can call me "Your namelessness."'

In His eyes I wear everything at the same time, in the same space, as if submitted to the rigour of the Siberian *zima*. And all my words have been stored in His all-encompassing mind since – at this point philosophers often content themselves with drawing a line the length of which depends on the number of pages they can avail themselves of. Something along this line

Of course if the line is not long enough, critics give the book the thumbs down, and the author sees on his computer screen a number of thumbs turned downward. All this baby talk and comparisons and illustrations are angled at the 8-75 year-old men's and women's market. Whatever they write, compose, paint and sing today is meant for children of all sizes and shapes. Tolstoy understood this trend and saw its ramifications, bifurcations and future at the beginning of the last century, when he began to write his didactic works about the Devil and his victims. There is one peasant who resists temptations and allurements, being as adamant as the diamonds that the Devil showers upon him, literally and metaphorically. The diamonds fall from heaven, but the peasant says to himself, 'It hasn't been raining since July. Good for the crop.'

'It's not the rain, you idiot. You're not Danae, are you? And I'm not Zeus.'

'Nice for my wheat.'

'It's not the rain, you dimwit. With these drops you can buy posh cars and aeroplanes.'

Tolstoy raised his fingers which held a pen at the ready and began to think as if trying to solve Poincaré's *theorem*. 'What am I talking about? What? Who? The Devil? God? The peasant should prove to his fellow-villagers that only work can save them from damnation or from the Devil himself or herself. All right, so at the end of my tale the wise peasant has a lot of money because he picked up the golden rain or rather its drops. But being wise and incorruptible, he bought neither a posh car nor a luxurious airplane. Nor did he build a launch pad or an airport. He constructed a huge table and invited all his fellow-villagers to share his meals and a modicum of vodka with him. But before making them feel at home in his house, he asked them to show him the palms of their hands. If the hands he saw were either horny or callous, he said, "Please help yourself to whatever you see on my dinner table." But if the hands he judged from the Wuthering Heights of his wisdom were neither horny nor callous, he shook his head and thundered, "I never want to see you here again! Those who don't work, neither do they eat nor drink!"'

But what about Danae and Zeus? Once again, Tolstoy's pen began to hover over a sheet of paper. 'A hawk hovered in the sky, waiting to swoop down on its prey,' he muttered to himself. 'What about Zeus? Did *he* hover in the sky? Sure enough, Danae was his prey. But why should I talk about Zeus and not about our Christian God? What does my peasant know about Zeus? Does he really care about Zeus or Poseidon? He might care about Aphrodite, for all I know – not about Zeus.' Tolstoy's quill pen landed on the writer's notebook and wrote, 'God said to Ivan the Foolish, "I'm not Zeus. I'm your God, your Almighty God the Father. But you're not Danae, you know.'

In fact, it appears to be precisely the most self-sufficing that bear least hardly, least painfully, on other things, while the heaviest and earthiest bodies – deficient, falling, unable to bear themselves upward – these, by the very down-thrust due to their feebleness, offer the resistance which belongs to the falling habit and to the lack of buoyancy. It is lifeless objects that deal the severest blows; they hit hardest and hurt most; where there is life – that is to say participation in Being – there is beneficence towards the environment, all the greater as the measure of Being is fuller.

Plotinus, *The Enneads* (trans. by Stephen McKenna)

TIMES AND SIGNS. AND WEIGHT AGAIN. AND FORMS AGAIN

Psychology can boil down to preventive measures because a thorough examination of people you encounter is out of the question on account of our lack of time; ours, theirs. We have no time and this formula concerns *not only* our times, whatever we are tempted to say on the subject, eager to find an apology for our negligence, indifference, callousness and utter withdrawal from life. In former times, when early Christians were still on our and their own agendas, people would judge each other in accordance with a few signs – not only the sign of the Cross. There were microscopic, enigmatic signs which might be confined to a finger sticking out from a pocket or a jacket. We would recognise our brothers and sisters through fingers, a few moans performed pianissimo and accompanied by an upward glance. This is a thing of the past unless you meet some Freemasons and look at them for a few hours, without losing a single atom of their movements and of the objects they show to each other. But what does this amount to, you wonder? This day and age offers us a miserable life, utterly devoid of God's aspiration and even

of the ordinary respiration that is vital for our spiritual survival. Yes, we do not have to learn the yoga technique of dealing with our lungs to realise how important it is to breathe unsullied, unpolluted air. You go to the woods and suddenly your legs begin to lift your body instead of sticking to their guns or rather to the ground. Your head is often in the clouds, and you think you are usually at one with heavenly creatures. But when your legs begin to move upward, you can *boast* about your link with angels and with God who keeps your legs and their upward movement in His museum.

And then you look around and realise your fellow-creatures (sic!) still put their feet on the surface of the Earth as if their indifference towards heaven were incurable. Well, they end up going to hospital – to what kind of hospital? To a monastery? – and say to the chief monk, to the president: ‘Could you please help me unstuck my feet?’

‘How do you mean? Are you stuck in a groove?’

‘The Earth, the Earth. Can’t you see where my legs are?’

‘I can.’

‘Can’t you see they stick to their guns?’

‘To their *guns*?’

‘To the Earth, to the Earth.’

‘Do you aspire to become a sleepwalker?’

‘No, no, no. I’ve no wish to walk around roofs and suchlike.’

‘What’s *your* dearest wish?’

‘To float, to fly.’

‘Do you wish to *jump* from a roof? You shouldn’t commit suicide, my son. It is prohibited not only by the Church, but also by our council.’

‘I wish to find myself in the vicinity of my superior.’

‘Just follow me.’

‘I mean God, you know. God and His angels.’

So you see a man whose gait does not exhibit the naturalness associated with faith, the sounds of organs, the voices of children and icons, their inner voices. They are not lame, contrary to what might be supposed. You might think this man just hobbled or limped across a patch of tar which deprived his legs of their capacity to explore both cityscapes and woods. ‘Sticking to my guns, sticking to my guns,’ he mutters under his breath. What does all that mean? Plotinus warns us against such people: they are liable to collapse on our bodies and weigh them down: we might find ourselves on a patch of tar without knowing it. We might think our life is all beer and skittles, but actually this patch of tar is the only thing we chance upon in our possessions. And we cannot dispossess ourselves of this unintentional acquisition.

I think there is a song my friend used to sing before he died after swallowing an impressive number of sleeping pills. ‘Life is a bowl of cherries.’ Life is a patch of tar to which we are glued, unable to walk or sing praises to God.

Suppose the photograph you are looking at shows a man lying prone on the pavement, a puddle of blood about his head, a morsel of tar in his mouth. What could he do in this position, predicament, under these circumstances? Under the weight of death, in other words? The point is in such a predicament there are no other

words; there are no words at all, to be exact. When there are no words, logos is silent, even if your lips are subject to uncontrollable tremors. My uncle told me once, ‘I saw a man who was dead, to all appearances. And this time one could trust appearances in spite of all the warnings we might have heard in our lives. His lips kept moving, as if he was Orpheus, as if he wished to convey some news from the Hereafter to us.’

‘There is no news in the Hereafter,’ my father cut in almost tactlessly.

‘And the wounds? Don’t you think their number increases every night and every morn, as the poet informs us?’

‘No, the number of wounds remains exactly the same – throughout eternity,’ my father pointed out.

‘And what about pain?’

‘Pain intensifies during twilight and at dawn.’

‘Why?’

‘Because pains are unruly phenomena. They decided to augment their productivity or output around 5 p.m. – for no reason at all, apparently. And around 5 a.m.’

Pain or no pain, the bodies we encounter on the Earth (not in the Hereafter – in the here and now) are deficient; at least they are incapable of bearing themselves upward. They often confuse ups and downs – on account of their deformities, downtroddenness. (Oddly enough, on the Earth there is no such thing as uproddenness.) And sometimes they lean upon your body as if you were a banister or a column or a pillar of strength and society. And even if you manage to keep your balance, you ask them, ‘What do you think you’re doing?’ And they answer self-confidently – where does this confidence come from? you wonder – ‘My parents were always on the move and so my childhood was spent being dragged from pillar to post.’ And sometimes they dare ask you the following question, ‘By the way, are you a pillar or a post?’ As Plotinus pointed out earlier, these lifeless objects – not subjects, mind you – deal the severest blows one can picture to oneself. These blows are both physical and psychological, for you say to yourself you belong to the same species and so you might degenerate; you might be disqualified. You might be demoted to a nervous or a quivering wreck – in no time at all. Let us suppose you are a pillar now, not necessarily a pillar of the community; but a pillar nonetheless. Suddenly they let the air out of you as if you were a mere tyre. They deflate you as if you were a mere balloon. ‘All right, I’m a balloon – you win!’ you cry. ‘Let me soar into the sky and leave you stranded on the rocks.’ ‘I’m not a glass of whisky,’ you hear and then your mind goes blank or black, which amounts to the same thing.

Its every utterance is a lie. (Whose utterance? Everybody’s utterance, everything’s utterance. The thing you are looking at talks to you, saying, ‘This is my form. What you’re looking at is my form. But you also think about this form, analyse it, dissect it. What ideas do you come up with? You think my contents are A+B+C. But my form lies to you; so do my contents. Whatever you see is a huge lie because all other things, the whole world and cosmos are lies, small and huge, microscopic and macroscopic. Let’s go on, let’s go on.) It pretends to be great. (So many things and beings pretend to be great. ‘I’m great, I’m great,’ they say emitting rays, signals and vibrations. And every wave, every particle of theirs says they are great. They are not. Only the Authentic Existence is great. But what is authentic in this world of ersatz things?) And it is little. (This is what it, he and she are. They are all citizens of Lilliput, not giants. They are not little flowers either: nothing to do with St Francis, you know.) To be more and

it is less. (To be more is to be less. Less is the new more. A Christian doctrine. To be more or to be less – that is the real question. It is better to be less so as to grow invisible – in the end, at the end of every thought, every breath of air. That’s what wisdom and Taoism are about.) And the Existence with which it masks itself is no Existence, but a passing trick making trickery of all that seems to be present in it, phantasms within a phantasm; it is like a mirror showing things as in itself when they are really elsewhere, filled in appearance but actually empty, containing nothing, pretending everything. (I think I had better become a mirror where everything can be found. You turn this way and that, and the bliss you are looking for has been captured by your mirror that sees and feels everything worthy of your attention, of your consciousness. Only by submitting to the vibes and wives, as they say, can you experience the happiness you have been yearning after for years, centuries and millennia – in all your former and future lives put together by your mirror, through its intermediary and celestial calm. Just turn round, around; or don’t turn at all. The whole world will turn around you as if you were the sun or the Son – the Son of the Authentic Existence. They also call it the Absolute. Don’t call it at all. Neither names nor nicknames. Nick, nick, nick, nick – that’s all you can say about the Absolute. Or you can say to yourself you are a thing devoid of worries, sterile pieces of information. You are just a guitar. There is always something wrong with humans: they are too complex to be perfect. What’s more, they are alive, which is a defect you cannot erase either easily or painfully: you cannot erase it at all unless you erase yourself and grow invisible. Growing less and less, less and less; in other words. So you are just a guitar: a piece of the Authentic Existence. Almost perfect. Apart from a few nicks in the varnish, the guitar is in very good condition, my angels say about you. I am prepared to disregard these nicks. You got up here just in the nick of time, my dear.) Into it and out of it move mimics of the Authentic Existence, images playing upon an image devoid of Form, visible against it by its very formlessness; they seem to modify it but in reality effect nothing, for they are ghostly and feeble, have no thrust and meet none in Matter either; they pass through it leaving no cleavage, as through water; or they might be compared to shapes projected so as to make some appearance upon what we can know only as the Void. (All those men and women of genius; or those tyrants, conquerors, Tamerlanes, Napoleons. Where are they? Where are their conquests? And Lenin? Where is he? In the mausoleum? And Obama? And Osama? And whatever, whoever? Where are they all? Devoid of Form, unless you look at the mausoleum or go to Waterloo and say to yourself, ‘This is a form, if I’m not mistaken.’ You *are* mistaken.)

Plotinus, *The Enneads*

ONLY MIRRORS, ONLY ERRORS. COUNTING OUT HIS MONEY

To tell the truth, I am fed up with mirrors and suchlike, although I have no idea what ‘suchlike’ may mean in the context; only *out of* the context does this have some meaning. We are accustomed to halls and castles packed with mirrors – in the works of so-called sophisticated authors; as if there were no other way of creating perspectives and parallel universes. I have no wish to reflect or include whatever comes my way or just stands in front of me, arms akimbo, refusing to move. (You can speak in this manner about objects as well: most humans are rudimentary *objects* having nothing in common with Louis XV’s chests of drawers, armchairs and courtiers.) Of course I can remain supine in my garden for hours and hours, without looking at the sky; not necessarily. And everything (not everybody, God forbid!) will come to be reflected in my body and all its components down to the soul and to the soul of souls. (The Authentic Existence, the Absolute?) Or I can just stand in front of one of my windows, arms

akimbo, refusing to talk or walk away. And the stars will come in dribs and drabs to salute my being or non-being: it depends on my moods, on my Chinese, Indian or Russian moods and whims.

‘The Great Vacuity is clear. Being clear, it cannot be obstructed. Not being obstructed, it is therefore spirit. The opposite of clearness is turbidity.’ Sometimes I feel like being my own opposite. Of course I am clear, as clear as day, as clear as a bell. But I may feel like being clear as mud (or hell) – just for the heck of it, as they say; as I say, whenever my whim inspires me to use this combination of words. Usually I am not obstructed, but if a foreign body interferes with the flow of my thoughts and beings, I just say, ‘I’m clear, I’m clear. What are you doing here?’

‘You’re as clear as mud,’ the foreign body replies now and then.

‘Do you mean to say I am turbulent?’

‘Dog turds on the pavement. That’s what you are.’

‘Do you mean to say I’m one of St Francis’ disciples?’

‘No way, no way.’

‘To identify life and death, forget joy and sorrow, and being able to sing in the presence of the corpse is the perfection of the transcendental world.’ I did not sing in the presence of my parents’ corpses. I can sing now, although the world is a collection of corpses. Not a museum, mind you. Just a collection, a collection of sorts. Is it enough to sing, ‘La-la-la’?

‘Hello, corpse. Hello, corpse.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Just call me corpse.’

I should use two voices for this song: my own voice (a baritone) and the corpse’s voice. (Must sound like the Commander in Mozart’s opera.) The following aria, however, does not require two voices for its execution. ‘He who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me; I am not lost to him nor is he lost to Me.’ There are only mirrors in the universe, even if you are not prepared for higher lives, even if you are just a sorcerer’s apprentice, even if you are just an apprentice and there are no sorcerers around; not even on the moon.

If we could count the stars, we should not weep before them. While we think we can change the drama of history, and of our own lives, we are not awed by our destiny. But when the evil is irreparable, when our life is lived, a strong spirit has the sublime resource of standing at bay and of surveying almost from the other world the vicissitudes of this.

George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*

All right, you begin counting the stars and there is the multiplication table in front of you; and also a box of matches. If you forget how to count, you consult the multiplication table and then empty the box and count the matches you find on your writing desk. You write the number down and count the numbers you get on your

computer screen. Do you weep? You do not because all these stars have been stored in your personal mirror for centuries, if not for millennia, as affirm all those who believe in their former lives. I was, I was, I was, I was they repeat all day long as if they had nothing else to do. They do *not* have anything else to do so they count their former lives, their lucky and unlucky stars. And they end up weeping, crying over their spilt milk. There are so many of them they lost count, and no multiplication table will ever give them a helping hand, a helping digit. And then they make an effort and go beyond their multiple lives and deaths, hoping to survey them from the other world. Or they just break their mirrors and realise that every splinter contains all those mirrors, all those discarded monstrosities. And with any one of them you can slit your wrists. But is it worth your while, anyone's while? Can't we while away both afternoons and evenings, playing cards in front of the fire? We could while away eternity, in the same fashion, if need be. Could we while away eternity, should the need arise? Why not? I can while away anything, provided there is something to while away.

Suicide can also be regarded as an experiment, a question we put to nature and try to make her answer, namely what change the existence and knowledge of man undergo through death. But it is an awkward experiment, for it abolishes the identity of the consciousness that would have to listen to the answer.

Schopenhauer, *On Suicide* (trans. by E. F. J. Payne)

WINTERREISE

I said it earlier, perhaps this morning: questions are out of season in winter. We are at the end of September, but the atmosphere reminds us of Siberia where I spent a month in my youth, eager to worm information out of nature. What information? What nature? I just wished to know if my thoughts would not freeze in Siberian woods, in the dead of winter, in the dead of my brain and will. I don't recall my thoughts, the thoughts I had either in the woods or on the lakeshore – I was in close proximity to Lake Baikal, as they still call it. Isn't death somehow identical to frozen thoughts, feelings and love? Or to frozen hate, come to think of it? As if I did not think about hate rather often – more often than about love, friendship and worship. You froze your thoughts a little bit and remain in this state for quite a while, eating, drinking, discussing problems with your wife who might say to you, 'Aren't you somewhat stiff today?' You might say you are not feeling well because your thoughts suffer from sciatica and 'whenever we change the subject, I feel a tremendous pain in the frontal lobe of my brain'. Or you had better start with your legs because the brain is unpredictable – to such an extent that they often remove a few particles from it in their search for cancer and other sources of death. They remove a particle, show it to you and say, 'Here's where your death has been hiding for more than a year. Now you're on the safe side. Do you want us to show you this side?' And they light a candle right under the particle and first you see it glitter, sparkle and twinkle before your very eyes, and then it dies; and you go on living. Not for long, though. So they remove another particle, saying, 'All right. We made a mistake. Your death is right here, you know.'

'Is it another death?' you ask.

'No, it's the same death.'

'How come, how come? How big is my death?'

'As big as the universe, considering the importance of the second law of thermodynamics.'

‘What are you talking about?’

‘All our attempts to cheer you up proved futile. You think only in terms of your death.’

‘What terms do you offer?’

‘Nothing I could say would cheer you up,’ says an old doctor. ‘My dog came and nuzzled your foot to try and cheer you up. He didn’t succeed either. Do you remember my dog?’

‘What are you trying to insinuate?’

‘Sure enough, he tried to cheer you up but found himself unequal to the task.’ And they remove yet another particle from your head.

And they say to each other, ‘This particle looks like life.’

‘Not like *eternal* life, though.’

‘All right, all right. A hundred years would be quite enough.’

‘And what about these icicles? His brain is frozen hard.’

‘We could go skating on it.’

All this is too dangerous: the doctors you trust, to whom you hand over your brain, life, happiness and misery are capable of butchering you in no time at all. They *are* capable of skating on your brain’s ice: I wouldn’t put it past them. So you had better stage this experiment at home, using your pipes as guinea pigs.

During your stay in Siberia you often realised that your pipes were too sensitive, too fragile, unprotected and unreliable: they froze several times in the course of one winter. You ended up listening to their music, to their monophonic music which had nothing in common with Flemish polyphony, with Okegem and Obrecht. (Nor did they remind you of Brecht, to tell the truth.) You listened to them for hours on end as if your own life depended on their music, on their imagination thus displayed in the domain where Mozart, Bach and Schubert are still rather prominent despite the notorious lack of worthy performers: conductors, pianists. You adore Schubert and so you hoped that, sooner or later, the pipes would execute one of his pieces, which might demonstrate the resistance of your brain to low temperature and to diseases of all kinds; and to death himself. So now you find yourself in some hospital or other, and a circle of doctors – just another circle of Hell – endeavours to put you back on your feet again; and yet your feet (as well as your brain) are quite unreliable and can let you down at any moment – without warning, mind you. You ask these doctors, ‘What do you hear? Do you hear anything?’

‘We hear your death rattle.’

‘And apart from this rattle, apart from it? What do you hear? Don’t you hear Schubert’s *Moments musicaux*?’

‘We just hear a few moments, a few moments of your life. Your last moments, to tell the truth.’

Actually you are far more interested in your death at this point of your existence. The question you put to nature as such is: ‘What change do the existence and knowledge of man undergo through death?’ You begin to wonder whether you will hear Schubert’s work beyond the threshold of death. Apparently they perform his music round the clock – in the Hereafter or in one of its regions. At this particular moment – is this moment really particular? – you cannot hear anything, not even your death rattle, which might mean you have already crossed the threshold often described in Tolstoy’s books. You remember a series of awkward experiments you undertook in the hope of finding out what kind of consciousness you would deal with after your demise. Does death abolish the identity of the consciousness that yearns for Schubert’s melodies, moments, sonatas and *lieder*? And then the

answer comes; and Schubert remains in the wings, if any. ‘No.’ What does it matter? you ask yourself, repeating one of your favourite questions, resorting to it on the brink of a nervous breakdown. (Could one have *any* breakdown in the Hereafter?) What consciousness is about to succumb to the allurements of a nervous breakdown that might justify your hysterical behaviour, hardly tolerated by your fellow-corpses? Arrayed in front you, a few specimens of consciousness exhibit their qualities as if during a beauty contest; as if there were any beauties, any contests in the Hereafter in which you now belong; unless you are in Paradise. But you are *not* – the inhabitants of Paradise listen to Schubert round the clock. So you know you are not in Paradise, and what does it matter, the number and name of your consciousness if you are sentenced to death? There are only death sentences in the Hereafter except in the domain of Paradise to which you have no access unless you repent on your knees. But you have no knees so you cannot repent: all other kinds of repentance have no value in the realm where, for some obscure reason, you found yourself several hours ago. Have you really forgotten why you undertook this perilous journey? You wished to know what kind of consciousness you could have in your possessions after your untimely demise. (Any demise is untimely, as we all know.) Do you know the answer to your question? No, no, no, no, no. There are no answers to such questions. And if there are any, you are not likely to grow conscious of them.

Thus if physically we suffer very severely or continuously, we become indifferent to all other troubles. (I disagree with you altogether. I am *always* aware of *all my troubles*, however insignificant and subordinate. If my partner betrays me, I protest most vigorously, brandishing my fists and crying bitter tears in spite of my gout. Or *because* of it: you are seldom aware of the *real* source of your tears.) Only our recovery is uppermost in our thoughts. (What kind of recovery? The *absolute* recovery? We use this word exclusively when talking about some philosophers – Plotinus, Bradley – and forget it, even when our despair is at fever pitch, overflowing whatever is adumbrated in Kierkegaard’s famous book. Our despair looks at this book and says, ‘You’re nothing, my little brothers. Even when you’re called “despair unto death” or “the human being I’m in charge of went into a dive”. In this case, whenever such a dive is discussed in books and lunatic asylums, you must think in terms of the *absolute* recovery, otherwise you’ll never recover wholly on your own initiative. If you just dive for oysters, someone is sure to reproach you for this unmistakable lack of courage, “Many dolphins can dive to depths of 200 meters.” Why wait for cancers and strokes? What about skyscrapers?’) In the same way, severe mental suffering makes us indifferent to physical suffering; we treat it with contempt. (I don’t know what they are talking about, whenever they talk about *mental* suffering. What? Unrequited love? Could I care less about all these loves and lives they offer: kisses, tenderness, little presents, warm and hot and burning looks, open arms and legs? So if we fail in this domain, we shall succeed elsewhere, with another partner. The Earth’s population is large enough to offer us as many partners as we can wish for. And I wish for nothing or rather for nobody. Of course I suffer in others’ obtrusive and unwelcome presence, but if my gout comes to the fore during our conversations, I interrupt everything, everybody, and hasten to my bed, to my glass of wine that endows life and even death with forgetfulness. What is death but another life, another bout of gout?) In fact, if physical suffering should predominate, this is a wholesome diversion, a pause in the mental suffering. (I wonder if Schopenhauer ever suffered from toothache or earache. If you do suffer from one of them, you begin to pull your teeth out, even if you have no appropriate instruments for such a ritual either on your writing desk or in one of your chests of

drawers. You remove one tooth after another and you array them on the dinner table as if about to swallow them in the course of your dinner. Actually these teeth of yours remind you of a myth you read about in your childhood. You sow a number of teeth and suddenly there comes from the Earth the same number of dragons, making their way to heaven, as you might conjecture, although you are certainly wrong: your conjecture is hasty and inconclusive. Their growth is interrupted by their unquenchable thirst for human blood. It is an army you see in front of you now as if you had challenged somebody, as if you had declared war on dragons and other monsters hiding or rather living under the surface of the Earth where only the dead are supposed to live, in accordance with your conviction and point of view. But what about your ears? Don't they continue to ache as if no other preoccupations were on your hidden agenda, on the agenda hidden in your body? What other preoccupations? 'Other pains, for God's sake,' answers your daimonion or guardian angel or Gabriel. Well, you tear your ears from your head and life, and suddenly you realise you hear the universe, all its symphonies and tunes. You put your ears on your dinner table – as if they were pigs' ears that are eatable and enjoyable – and suddenly *they* realise they can hear the universe, the whole of it. That is the sort of detachment you need in everyday life, allowing you to hear the inner life of the cosmos and its suburbs.)

Schopenhauer

Frequently he quits the large palace and hurries into the open, for the house disgusts him, until he suddenly returns because out of doors he feels no better off. Or else he gallops off to his country-house as if it were on fire and he were hurrying to put it out. But as soon as he has crossed the threshold, he yawns with boredom or falls asleep and tries to forget himself, unless he prefers to return to the city.

Lucretius

If I remember rightly, Lucretius speaks of someone whose riches do not offer sufficient protection from ennui, as they say when alluding to winter (if deprived of winter sports, of *Winterreise*) and I am almost sure the poet is bent on making us realise that money is *not* tantamount to happiness. What is it tantamount to? Money is tantamount to itself, being loyal to itself. Well, you have no money – not even for a dentist, for his or her instruments that are used to pulling one's teeth out. So you pull them out yourself, arraying them on your dinner table. And given that no dinner is in store for you (nothing is stored either in your kitchen or your cellar) you begin to eat your teeth, one by one; whereas the billionaire goes out, says a few words to his chauffeur and then to his pilot. He lands in an opulent land where one finds only three-star restaurants and posh hotels; and lots of Porsches. He eats, drinks, grows weary of luxury, makes love to a few bathing beauties, grows weary of human bodies and returns to his bed. After a while he gets up, goes to the lavatory, vomits to his entrails' content, goes back, curses life and death in the same breath, realises that his sleep will not be sheltered from nightmares – not on account of his sins, contrary to what might be presumed. He is just too rich to be able to sleep like a log. Some guru or other told him once, 'You shouldn't grow too rich, otherwise you won't be able to sleep like a log. Don't forget that logs own nothing except the memory of the trunk in which they once belonged.' The point is the billionaire has too

many trunks in his possessions; and not a single piece of peaceful sleep, for all the sleeping pills he has collected over the years.

Why are you restless? There are many answers to this question, and you cannot wriggle out of the procedure that might enable you to find a tailor-made answer, the answer fitting to perfection your mentality and constitution. Suppose you say to yourself and your wife, 'I'll sell everything and give the money to the poor.' Of course your wife will burst into tears, but suppose you are adamant and so do sell your cars, planes and estates, resolved to shower the poor with your divine gifts. What will you do afterwards? You will just sit in front of your dinner table, pulling out your teeth, one by one, two by two. And when there are no more teeth left in your mouth? And in the mouth of your spouse? Well, if you are really hungry you can eat your hat. You can also eat your coat, raincoat; and you can drink raindrops, if you feel like it. And even if you don't feel like it, you will do it almost mechanically if there is nothing else to drink, as the Ancient Mariner repeats over and over again. But let us leave all these questions and answers aside for the benefit of the problem arisen at the beginning of this paragraph. Why are you restless?

In Nietzsche's footsteps, Ronald Dworkin assures us that 'the only real imperative of life is living – the creation and affirmation of a human life as a singular and wonderful creative act'. I wonder how many philosophers, poets and ordinary people live their lives in Nietzsche's footsteps. Suppose these footsteps are visible thanks to the snow that continues to cover the Earth as if she needed a cover, as if she was afraid of losing her heat. One goes out, sees a blanket of snow on the ground; and this one also sees a lot of imprints left by a pair of boots. 'Nietzsche's boots,' says a sign. So you can walk along this Nietzschean, superhuman path, leaving your own imprints in the same snow as if to demonstrate your affinities with the German philosopher. (There are many parallel lines in the field I am talking about.) Or you can likewise put your feet into the tiny holes made by Nietzsche's boots. Actually these holes are not tiny, considering that myriads of people have followed in the footsteps of the same pilgrim's progress or regress: I am not sure Friedrich Nietzsche was infatuated with the future. Incidentally, these holes were rather long or deep and you might plunge into them as if determined to reach the centre of the Earth and investigate its contents – in Jules Verne's footsteps. There are so many footsteps in the world that one does not really know which row to choose unless one is in love with the *surface* of the Earth and resolutely rejects an itinerary related to its centre, to underground volcanoes and cities, to our distant ancestors' tombs. Yes, according to a new thesis, our tombs may remain where they are, but no one is able to prevent our astral bodies from going 'deeper and deeper into the matter', as some philosophers put it. We journey to the centre of the Earth instead of flying to Mars or Venus which cannot teach us anything new, given the amount of information we have already got from our sputniks and other contraptions one often confuses with shooting or flying stars.

A singular and wonderful creative act. That is what your life will become with the passing of the years, provided you spend these years focused upon your mentality, trains of thought, your soul's wanderings in the unknown and so on. Your soul departs from its abode, and you know this should happen at midnight in accordance with the Hindus or other representatives of what is habitually called 'the universal mind'. All right, all right, call it what you wish unless you have no wish to follow your soul's itinerary; or just the train of your thoughts. So your train is derailed; it comes off the railway tracks and rolls somewhere – out of sight and mind. And you say to your guru, 'A singular and wonderful creative act. Don't you agree? A real creative impulse is never content with

following a fashion or the crowd. And what are the railway tracks? What do they symbolise? The crowd, public opinion, crass ignorance and nonsense.'

'The railway track you're talking about,' answers your guru, 'is a symbol of determinism about which both St Augustine and Luther spoke at length and in the same breath – *ne vous en deplaise*, my dear sir.'

'And what about my free will?' you ask.

'Your free will is lying on this railway track – like Anna Karenina, my dear sir. The train of destiny – or God, if you prefer – is on the point of tearing her (and your) body into pieces. I could come up with another simile, in case you don't like Tolstoy or women in general. Suppose you go to a shop and buy a lot of food and one sandwich. You put it at the bottom of your bag and go home. At home, in your kitchen you begin to empty your bag and realise that your sandwich got squashed at the bottom of your bag. Have I made myself clear?'

You can argue that whatever you do in this life is a wonderful creative act because it is God who inspired your actions, thoughts and attitudes towards your neighbours and next of kin. In short, whatever you do is inspired, is a sort of masterpiece you should store in your memory, in your body's memory that can give you a helping hand as you proceed along some tracks, some lives of yours. (Your *Winterreise*.) You are keen on yachts – Why do I so often speak of yachts? I have no sea legs, no river legs. What about my winter legs? – and so you take your car and go to the nearest yacht-shop adorned with a few representations of sails and similar objects that remind everyone of the delights majestically hidden in a lake-voyage, in a river-voyage; let alone in a partial sea-voyage. You buy a luxurious yacht. You have no itch to return to your courtyard and castle, whatever Lucretius might say on the subject of riches and boredom and restlessness. It is true that, for a while, you run around the deck to enjoy the intoxicating sentiment of freedom known to everybody thanks to a multitude of books where yachts are described in great detail; and also at great length.

So you run around the deck (your Deckreise), a bottle of champagne clasped between your fingers, and you say to your companion, 'Just another masterpiece, isn't it? Do we need anything else?'

'We need a bed,' says your partner.

'We have two beds,' you say. 'What more do you want?'

'Three beds,' says your partner. 'For a series of threesomes.'

Anyway, your riches do not distract you from the delights associated with them, with the Riviera and other places – a lot of islands in their midst – where you can blow off steam, assuming you have a sufficient quantity of steam in your lungs, heart and intestines. Sufficient? For what? For enjoying yourself thoroughly: it is so pleasant to blow off steam, especially if this ritual takes place on your own yacht. What other ideas of happiness can you come up with, considering that you have a lot of money and burst into laughter, whenever Lucretius and his masterpiece cross your mind? There are many ideas in your head, and their number almost equals the number of billions you buried in Singapore many years ago. From time to time you say to yourself, 'Should I exhume it? Should I perform yet another autopsy? I'm badly in need of money for yet another airplane or helicopter. I don't remember which, I'm afraid. I'd better go and see what happens in my garage.' You go to your garage and see two planes, five helicopters. So you say to yourself that, for the time being, five helicopters will fit the bill. As for the airplanes, they look shabby and woefully inadequate, you are afraid. So you buy two Boeings and your happiness returns to the fold. It comes back in double-quick time. What was Lucretius talking about? you wonder. Your wonder grows in spite of the feeling of happiness you describe to yourself in the journal you keep for the sake of

your son whose knowledge of the world and its beauties, delights and ecstasies is not up to your standards, to the standards of your money and jewellery.

One airplane, another airplane, a flight to Boston, to numerous archipelagos about which you speak at length in your diary. Sometimes your descriptions are far more voluminous than the islands you visit to quench your thirst for excitement, ecstasy, harmony and joie de vivre. (*Kein Winterreise*. A multitude of Summerreises, rather.) Your son consults these accounts of bliss and says to himself and also to you, 'Are these islands you're talking about as big and beautiful as your prose, your similes, metaphors and tropes?'

'They're much better, my son. Someday we'll go and explore them together, to our feet's content.'

'But let us first explore them from on high, from one of your airplanes or helicopters.'

'All right. We'll do all that on the day of your next birthday. And we'll call this masterpiece, *Celebration*.'

'Let's call it *Immortality* or *Eternity*. I have no wish to die, Father.'

'Whatever you say, my son.'

But you don't have to buy yachts and airplanes if your interests and enjoyments lie elsewhere. You may fall in love with claret and spend your days and nights in its company without ever getting drunk, which is usually frowned upon by hedonists. Or you just get lost in your Rolls (just another *Winterreise*) and someone gets you off the hook, her index finger pointing at the spot where you are – on a map. And you can send a million dollars to this person, eager to create yet another masterpiece. But suppose you have no money for luxury or charity, which does not prevent you from getting lost here and there and probably everywhere: if you have no sense of direction. Someone comes along and says, 'You're right here,' pointing his index finger (or a knife) at some square that your map or whatever passes as such displays for your sake; and for the sake of your rescuer. You say, 'Thank you very much indeed,' but you give him nothing, being as poor as church mice. (They also say that in Russian, but not in French. In French you are as poor as Job.) So you are jobless and consequently cannot give or send anything to your rescuer who lost five minutes, doing his best to extricate you from the aforementioned situation. And this person, whoever he is or might be, complains about your insensitivity and uncivil behaviour, 'I gave him my card, hoping he would reward me for my munificence. No cheque, no transfer. Is he Christian, the person I'm talking to you about? I wonder, I wonder.' That is what usually happens if you have no money either in Singapore or in the United States of America. Nowhere, nowhere; or nevermore, according to Edgar Allen Poe. Incidentally, you should not forget that it is *his index finger* your rescuer used when showing you your whereabouts. And even if he used his *knife* on this occasion, he used it differently from Jack the Ripper, which deserves another billion dollars.

DIE SCHÖNE MÜLLERIN AND MILLER (OR MAHLER)

I had this advantage, at least in my mode of life, over those who were obliged to look abroad for amusement, to society and the theatre, that my life itself was become my amusement and never ceased to be novel. It was a drama of many scenes and without an end. If we were always indeed getting our living, and regulating our lives according to the last and best mode we had learned, we should never be troubled with ennui. Follow your genius closely enough, and it will not fail to show you a fresh prospect every hour.

Thoreau, *Walden*

If you have a lot of money you spend it, following your genius to the letter. (Or your *schöne Müllerin*.) Your genius says to you, ‘Enjoy yourself. Spend your money which is not tantamount to bliss, especially if you are aiming at what is defined as “divine bliss» or “spiritual enjoyment”. And yet you set off on a round-the-world cruise; in a first-class cabin. On your way to Indonesia you may encounter God; you may also encounter Him in one of the temples you are sure to visit – at Borobudur, for instance.’ It is true that God you may encounter in the course of your cruise may turn out to be slightly different from *our* God, abundantly vaunted by our priests and their acolytes. But as we all know (we don’t have to reread Ramakrishna’s talks and maxims) God is the same everywhere because we happen to live in a monotheistic world unless my brain and psyche fail to take into consideration a few local details, a blur, a fog that escapes my attention, my inquisitiveness and doctrine.

If you feel like following Thoreau’s instructions to the letter – instead of following your hunch or genius (or some miller’s daughter) – you do your utmost to become your own amusement. At first you content yourself with your awkwardness, your ham-fisted efforts to assist your brain during your sojourns in the kitchen. Of course you drop a few plates, and the mustard you cherish on account of its honey overtones has already covered the floor as if you were supposed to lick it, while crawling all around your kitchen and dining room. You still wonder how the mustard you mishandled at some point in the kitchen usurped the space allotted to your dinners and lunches, properly speaking, but you drop the inquiry before realising that your slippers can also convey some bits of it to the living room and even to the garden – to the spot where your swing salutes you invitingly as if bent on talking to you about your childhood; or your second childhood, as the saying goes. So you do not have to look abroad for amusement: the discovery that awaits you in your garden can amuse you even more than the mustard you have already enjoyed while walking around your kitchen. This time the mustard we are talking about does not affect your taste buds, but it is far more enjoyable to find it repose all over the kitchen floor and the bushes. And you say to yourself that the amusement you avail yourself of can be enlarged; its scope can be widened: your fridge contains other ingredients of what might be called ‘my floor dinner’. Actually your house is a human being: it was created in your image after all. You spent a lot of time decorating it, hanging pictures and engravings on the walls you like so much: they date back to the 19th century. Of course they need no dinners, no meals as such; besides, you do not think that food – mustard, eggs, caviar – could improve upon your painting’s colours and distinguished features. So you refrain from smearing them either with mustard or with butter, be it salted or otherwise. But you do amuse yourself by tampering with these pictures, photographs and medals that you got somewhere, for some of your exploits.

You recall these exploits that offer you another series of amusements. You used to jump and, notwithstanding the fact that you do not recall either the length or height of these jumps, you smile to yourself and your mirror as you remember the applause you heard on those occasions. People were gathered all around your jumps, and they clapped, clapped and clapped until their hands began to ache, preventing them from any further manifestations of their admiration. What else did you do? One thing is certain: your life itself has already become your amusement. And it is a novel, it is like a successful novel – there is no denying it. It is a drama (or comedy) of many scenes without end. As for the drama mentioned in Thoreau’s writings, you can fall back on the memories you were inclined to bury at your private psychic cemetery traditionally called the unconscious. But now you feel like exhuming them (along with your bank accounts) for the sake of your forthcoming amusement: life is funny and you live it for the fun of it. As George Santayana put it, ‘I enjoy the presence of what I call “comic faith”’.

Others speak of crucifixions and Golgotha. I believe in God, there's no denying it. And I'm reluctant to deny it anyway. But I know the sentiment of love because God and His angels and son seem to have triumphed in the long run. And what counts is the long run, not the short one, contrary to what many of us think.'

So you recall some adventures related to your youth when you were regularly spurned by boys and girls alike, which accounts for your hesitancy: for years and years you were unable to decide whether you were homosexual, bisexual or lesbian. Actually you did not even know for sure whether you were a boy or a girl. Sometimes you acted like a boy, an unruly boy prepared to wreak havoc on any gathering, on any festivity. Sometimes you were a coy girl, someone's coy mistress. The point is you had no idea whose mistress you were. Your torments were spectacular, although no one could enjoy this spectacle; no one, nothing except your soul, psyche and astral body. But now you laugh whenever this ceremony – a representation of the past – unfolds before your mental eye, your mental ears. You look at yourself and say to yourself, 'This boy must be my youthful self. How clumsy I was, how ridiculous. My legs were ridiculous, so were my gestures. And what about the present tense or rather this day and age, today, tomorrow?' You head for the nearest mirror, look at your head, arms, shoulders and belly and roar with laughter. You make a few gestures and double up with laughter. Sometimes you go so far as to *triple* up with laughter. In this case you need no yachts, no round-the-world cruises to have fun, as they say and often do. (Writers and poets need some round-the-*word* cruises.) You head for your chest of drawers, remove a photograph from it and see a face whose owner slips both your memory and mind. You laugh, laugh, laugh your head off. You pick up your head and go on laughing, and one gets the feeling you are unable to stop. Nothing can stop you, no drama, no tragedy. Even your own death would not put an end to your laughter, if it could come at this very moment. So it does not – death has no time to waste – and you continue to laugh your head off.

Then you pass on to books, to Thoreau's masterpiece that belongs to the same realm – to the realm of laughter and overall amusement. You open the book – not at random (you are not St Augustine, until further notice) – and begin to read, provided the laughter enables you to do so without toil, without additional contortions, without being short of breath.

And O, the housekeeping! to keep bright the devil's doorknobs, and scour his tubs this bright day! (Outside of your study there is a stone patio with tubs of flowering plants. Is that what this ecological pioneer meant? You have to scour out these tubs before using them for another series of flowering plants; or for the same series. Once in a while you should scour all tubs, all pots, otherwise you will walk through dirt and mud – even in your own house, let alone in your garden. But what about the devil's doorknobs? Where are they? Why should they be bright? To hurt your eyes, day in day out? Why should your eyes be hurt on a regular basis?) Better not keep a house. (In Thoreau's house there were no knobs, I suppose. And if there were some, they were as black as the Queen of the Night who often blackens the pages of my books. And Thoreau needed no flowering plants, considering that he lived in the woods. Not in Burnham Wood, though. Incidentally in that proverbial wood, the trees grew in tubs, which allowed the Macbeth-opposed army to carry them as far as the castle. At least they had to make their appearance within the field of vision of that precursor of Stalin.) Say, some hollow tree; and then for morning calls and dinner parties. (One does not have to while away one's lifetime in the woods in order to avoid

dinner parties and dinner jackets. I, for one, never wear one or two because I am not in the habit of going to dinner parties, whatever they are and however their participants look and behave; or misbehave. Some hollow tree. Oh, my Louis XV chest of drawers. Oh, its varnish. Oh, its curves.) Only a woodpecker tapping. (I shall go to the woods and record some woodpecker's tapping or knocking. Knocking, knocking, knocking, as they usually say. Oh, my recording. Oh, my recordings. Oh, *Don Giovanni* conducted by Bruno Walter. Oh, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* conducted by Toscanini.) Oh, they swarm; the sun is too warm there. (About whom does Thoreau talk? Who does he have in mind? Not bees: they were not born *too far*. What is more, there is a beehive in his hut or whatever passes for his dwelling place. Does he speak about insects in general? Or about a bear? There must have been some bears in the proximity to his abode: not all bears live in Siberia.) The sun is too warm there. (It is too warm for *my* body: I am not fond of sunny beaches and the sunny disposition of those who bask in the warm sunshine. Does he speak of billionaires and their holidays?) I have water from the spring, and a loaf of brown bread on the shelf. (Yesterday I bought 18 bottles of Volvic.) Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves. (There are many leaves in my garden. Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves. Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves. Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves. Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves.)

HAND(S)

To attribute to pure evident chance a purpose or intention is an idea of unparalleled audacity. Yet I believe that everyone has had at least once in his life a vivid conception of it. It is found among all races and in all faiths, although it is most marked among the Mohammedans. It is an idea that can be the absurdist or profoundest according as it is understood. Nevertheless, striking as the instances may at times be whereby it could be supported, there is always the standing objection to them that it would be the greatest marvel if chance never watched over our affairs as well as, or even better than, our understanding and insight could have done.

Schopenhauer, *Transcendent Speculation*

Once again one does not know what to think about one's life and the occurrences one is submitted to as if there were such things as submissions and occurrences. (And life.) You just watch something that comes and goes, and you are not tempted to call it an event, a submission of nature to your eyes and other senses. All this is senseless and meaningless; and yet you hanker after meanings, symbols and human mythologies; and also after archetypes, in Carl Jung's footsteps. (Oh, another series of footsteps. My God! My God! Here is a map of footsteps, a multitude of them, of footsteps and maps. I buy as many footsteps as I can and follow whatever comes my way or someone else's ways and days.) I have often felt the presence of the hand I am talking about, and this hand seems to come from the outside, from beyond the frame of the picture where I am ensconced. This picture and my predicament remind me of a painting I saw somewhere, perhaps in one of my books. This picture represents a human being lost in the middle of nowhere, as usual, as usual; and yet you know neither this middle nor the nowhere you touch upon. So the mystery you have come across in the course of your wanderings deepens instead of shedding light on your predicament, on the Creation of the world which remains as dark as everything else; except the cup of tea you see in front of you. You try to ascertain your or someone else's whereabouts, putting yourself and other people

in the middle of something, of some world or other. And you cannot even know what you are talking about. Not very helpful, is it?

Anyway, the hand is still there (HAND III) – both outside and inside the picture where you stay as if awaiting the Second Coming or at least a recitation of W. B. Yeats' famous poem. And this hand is motionless, although it is supposed to push you, punish you, get you off the hook. As a matter of fact, the picture I am talking about is a sort of hook on which you resolved to hang yourself; some time ago. You remember neither the time you mention in passing, nor the rope you must have found somewhere before walking into this picture. Anyway, you are still alive and you thank the fingers that must have removed you from the hook or even from the other world; it depends on how far you had got in your endeavour to leave *this* world forever. But this hand (HAND IV) also helps you in a different set of circumstances – in *peaceful* circumstances, as it were: one should not always focus one's attention and concentration (one's private, conscious and unconscious concentration camps) on Jasper's critical or borderline situations. So you walk away from this psychological or psychic border and find yourself in a peaceful land where there are only swings, cups of tea and other distractions you need so as not to repeat the hook-experience, as you call it. And the hand I am talking about (HAND V) put you on this swing and you began to shuttle between heaven and earth, between Paradise and Hell – superficially, without getting into the crux of the matter. That is what some teachers advise us to do. They make us repeat the following sentence (or instruction): 'When I was little I used to like sliding on the polished floor in my socks.' 'That's how you should live,' they say. 'Sliding, sliding, sliding, gliding, sliding. You're in your second childhood – don't forget that! Take off your shoes and slide on the polished floor.'

'I'm afraid the floor isn't polished,' you answer.

'Well, you should polish the floor first and foremost. And then you'll devote your time to sliding.'

'And what about my wife?'

'She should remember the following episode from her life, "I came gliding gracefully into the ballroom in a long flowing gown."'

The hand grabs your neck – by the scruff of the neck, as they point out – and you glide, glide, slide, glide along – along the path of your life, along a multitude of borderline situations. Now and then you feel the hand whose assistance – whose helping hand, I am tempted to point out – seems to govern your life, gently, softly, marvellously. The hand might suggest the following truth: you should not make love to the world; you should just caress it as if it were a cat, not a human being to whom you are bound to make love; otherwise you will be condemned not only by Don Giovanni, but also by all those who think that life has no meaning without children and their seeing the light of day. As usual – at least it happens rather often – you are on the horns of a dilemma: to make love or not to make it. If you make love at the wrong moment, having at your disposal the wrong body, the wrong gender, you are likely to land up in prison. If, on the other hand – there are *other* hands, in spite of our inborn monotheism – you do not make love to your spouse or even to your mistress of *The Taming of the Shrew* fame, you will be despised by all and sundry, not only by the ladies concerned and hurt. So you had better glide and slide, caressing the body you have within your reach. Don't penetrate, don't penetrate, and don't penetrate! This also goes for your knowledge of the world and its intricacies; and also for the mystery that surrounds the name of God, His persona, His shadow and so on. (So God, as St Augustine puts it.)

On closer observation, we shall find that in the lives of most people there is to be found a certain plan which, through the peculiar nature or circumstances that direct it, is so to speak sketched out for them. The states of their lives may be ever so variable and changeable, yet in the end there appears a totality that enables us to observe thereunder a certain harmony and consistency.-----However concealed its action may be, the hand (HAND IV) of a definite fate is also strictly in evidence; it may be moved by external influence or inner impulse; indeed contradictory grounds may operate in its direction. However disorganised the course of life, motive and tendency, ground and direction, always make their appearance.

Knebel *Litterarischer Nachlass*

Your life is disorganised – there is no denying it. So is *my* life, and the loose ends I see all around me make me think of icicles hanging from Siberian roofs. (There are no *other* winters in the world.) I wonder why these icicles hang from the roof. Is there no other way for them to leave this world forever? Please note that in Siberia they never melt by mid-March. So they go on hanging and saying, ‘Please, help us. We’re yearning for a quick and merciful death. Please, tip your boiler. We hanker after boiling water.’ So you head for the kitchen, put a boiler on the electric cooker and wait, wait, wait. While waiting for boiling water, you realise to what extent your life is disorganised, meaningless and ridiculous. You burst into tears, but your spouse comes in and says, ‘There’s an order in the universe. Let us pray.’

‘Why? Why?’ you ask.

‘In order to put this order into a superior order, into the Absolute.’

‘Subatomic particles are usually scattered to the four winds, at birth. Even if there isn’t enough wind to fly a kite.’

BULB

You see a few lines in front of you, and you think the meaning of these lines and their ultimate itinerary – you had better use the word ‘ultimate’ as often as possible – pertains to your destiny, behaviour and everyday life. You follow these lines, one of them. You cannot follow all of them at the same time: they bifurcate and overlap each other. You overlap yourself, when following one of them rather scrupulously, and then you realise you are lost and so need enlightenment. And enlightenment of sorts comes to you thanks to a bulb you took no notice of at the outset of your journey leading uphill and down dale. This bulb tells you your body is now at the very bottom of a dale or an abyss, and you are supposed to remove your body from the result of your downfall at the earliest opportunity. You consult your watch to find out if this opportunity is already on your agenda. But where is your so-called agenda? You look for a notebook, a computer, and find a sort of rucksack where two sandwiches await you as if you were physically (not spiritually) hungry, as if you were in need of *bodily* enlightenment. What kind of enlightenment can one experience when munching on a sandwich? You can have this light-related experience at any time, provided your soul or psyche is attuned to it. So you first have to tune your psyche, otherwise you might spend years and years at the bottom of your abyss without being offered an opportunity to climb and see

divinities at close range. But do you have to see them at close range? Isn't one bulb enough to endow your life with sense and beauty?

But where is the order you are looking for so obstinately? These lines have already disappeared in the sand for which many deserts are renowned all over the world. So you are in a desert, not at the bottom of the abyss you began to cherish, thinking it is your eternal abode that you came to on the spur of the moment or rather on the spur of eternity. Taking (or mistaking) every moment for eternity is a trick of the light I am enlarging upon, and consequently this light grows larger and larger. What I see now almost everywhere is not confined to one bulb only: there are thousands, millions of bulbs around me, and so I am no longer at the heart of darkness, contrary to what Conrad's admirers might picture to themselves. Yes, every instant is 'yes', not 'no', because it asserts itself day in day out so that, with the passing of the years, you realise there are no longer days out either around you or up there. Everything is in, in, in, in, in. And if something stays outside – exceptionally, exceptionally – you say to this something: 'Please come in. You're most welcome.'

'I'm in, I'm in,' says something.

'What did you feel upon entering my light, my bulbs and my abode?'

'I felt your enlightenment, the one you've been taking advantage of for some time.'

'For some centuries, you mean.'

'Yes, for some millennia.'

HAND (II), BULB (II), SKIN AND BONES

The hand I am still talking about just takes you by the scruff of the neck and brings you closer and closer to the bulb in question and in answer. (This bulb is the answer to everything, not only to the something I touched upon a few minutes ago.) The hand asks you rather softly, gently, magnanimously, 'Do you see the light we might define as divine?'

'Yes, I can see it.'

'Is it more intense than the light you saw two hours ago?'

'Of course it is, of course it is.'

'All right, all right.' And the hand puts you on the surface of the bulb, and you are burnt to a cinder. 'Are you thinking of Giordano Bruno?' asks the hand.

'I am,' you answer.

'Are you both on the same light wave, on the same light particle?'

'We are, we are.'

'All right, all right.'

Ultimately the universe and our place within it are perfect – so holds the enlightenment narrative. It tells us we *can* have everything worth having, to a superlative degree, and be everything worth being; our nature already is congenial to that. The doctrine of enlightenment therefore denies the ultimate reality of tragedy, and the necessity sometimes of really sacrificing or permanently losing some most important good in order to avoid an evil. Does that doctrine thereby contain the deepest wisdom, or is it the very highest and most beautiful foolishness?

Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life*

Let us first find out if the enlightenment discussed in this chapter is the most beautiful foolishness. And what about the foolishness exhibited by a young or a middle-aged woman? If the woman I am speaking of is beautiful, whatever she does is beautiful; and I am even inclined to think that her foolishness is much more charming than her wit or wisdom. She puts on a hat – on her head or on her breasts, her shoulders, and smiles, which brings you closer and closer to the bulb I depicted somewhere else, in one of the previous sections or paragraphs. This bulb is a sort of ecstasy you seek, whenever you feel like it, weary as you are of doctrines and doctors who keep on saying your cholesterol should be taken care of. There are vulgar people who use atrocious words and expressions, especially when in need to express their sentiments, their love, excitement and erection (of whatever can be erected within their being). They might say to the woman they love, ‘Let me touch your bulbs, my dearest nymph.’ And they touch her breasts, whoever she is, this poor girl.

Well, let us pass on to our place in the universe where we struggle for life or for death: this depends on our moods and on the bulbs we count on in our daily existence. Of course one might say – and Robert Nozick does say exactly that – that, according to the enlightenment narrative, our place within the universe is perfect to the point of making us forget its fundamental imperfection. For instance, we hear a voice confiding to us the following truth or axiom, ‘By My grace, through My divine power, O Arjuna, was shown to thee this supreme form, luminous, universal, infinite and primal which none but thee has seen before.’ Well and good. But what about *me*? Until further notice, I am not Arjuna, and I am not likely to become one – how many Arjunas are there in the world? – unless the same voice says, ‘You are Arjuna now and I’m about to show you Myself, whoever I am and can be in your eyes and minds.’

Of course this luminous being is without limits, without forms, without contents and so on: we are quite used to this foolishness or beauty. But even Arjuna was not always exposed to this One’s presentation or representation – I am talking about the One he contemplates in The Bhagavad-Gita – and so one cannot help wondering how he could live without this limitlessness for so many years; how could he be ‘less’ without this ‘ness’. The point is light does not reach us *directly* unless the god of light – the one who actually emits the rays we are talking about – says to these rays, ‘You should reach Arjuna in no time at all. I know that your speed is the greatest speed attainable within the limits of the world, but this time you should go even quicker, overcoming your own speed, as it were.’ Thus spoke Krishna or Vishnu: I am always at a loss to identify the gods I meet in the books of Hindus. Anyway, on this particular occasion light does not behave as it usually does when physicists submit it to all sorts of experiments. There are holes through which our light is supposed to go, but it disobeys our orders, wreaks havoc on our great expectations (expectations are always great, whatever Dickens might have said on the subject) and we realise that some particles were led astray by quantum mechanics and other discoveries of ours – or just by Richard Feynman. That is what has often happened in my life. I was expecting light or rather what they call ‘shedding light on such and such mystery’. I was surrounded by mysteries, and my brain as well as my soul were yearning for light, for its powerful and all-elucidating interference in my private affairs. Usually only one particle would reach my heart, arousing an unparalleled emotion in my whole being. But that was not enough: the solutions I was waiting for would not come, for all my expectation and concentration. All other

particles went to Hell, as I used to say, anxious to divert my attention from the disaster, from the gloom ensuing my defeat.

Anyway, we *cannot* have everything worth having either to a superlative degree or just to any degree: the degrees to which our great expectations have already accustomed us are so great we do not measure the meagre results of our daily experiences by the words such as degree, stages or hierarchy. What we do get in the end is much more similar to the expression (is it an expression?) ‘nothing at all’. Or to the word ‘particle’. Yesterday I got a particle of happiness: that is what we should say instead of smiling, laughing, tapping our friends on their shoulders in the hope of making them understand how blissful our pastime is and will always be, thanks to the omnipresence of light. Well, our nature is *not* congenial to that. To what? To light, among other things, beings and particles. Our happiness is constantly led astray as if deflected by a panel of glass, a partition of some unkind kind. It is true that we are not hanging on a hook; at least until further notice. But there are other tortures in store for us, and most of these tortures are so slow, so lazy and crazy that we are unable to detect them in the midst of the misfortunes we traverse on a regular basis. And this basis is so regular we say to ourselves, ‘My life is a pleasant routine. Nothing really happens and no news is good news. That’s right: we are used to tortures, and more often than not we don’t notice them, when they come; unless they literally stab us in the stomach.’ We just say to our well-meaning, loyal friends, ‘Something always tickles my fancy.’

‘Your *fancy*?’

‘My body, if you see what I mean.’

‘I don’t.’

‘Well, it’s not really a pain I experience. At least I hope I don’t suffer from cirrhosis of the liver.’

‘You don’t feel anything, when suffering from this cirrhosis.’

‘So perhaps I do suffer from it.’

We traditionally pay homage to two tendencies that are quite common in our human midst. The first tendency incites us to play down our disasters, cancers and other diseases lying in wait for us as if they had nothing else to do; as if there were no other creatures in the world where we live and lie to ourselves and others. For instance, we say to the same friends, ‘I’m not dying, you know. It is true I can’t eat grapes – they upset my stomach and the rest of my constitution. But I *don’t like* grapes – I prefer wine, you know.’ And then you die without further ado as you repeat the following sentence, ‘Much ado about nothing.’ The second tendency can be defined as follows, ‘Over the top, over the top, over the top.’ You make a mountain out of a molehill, and the latter has nothing to do with cancer; not even with a benign tumour. You just feel a sort of obstruction in your throat and you say to your mistress, ‘I think I’ve got a bone in my throat and this bone is likely to cause a revolution in my entrails as soon as I swallow it. So I’m asking myself the following question, “Should I swallow this bone?”’

‘Let it dissolve in your throat,’ says your mistress.

‘What if it doesn’t?’

‘Then you’ll swallow it.’

‘But if I do, it will obstruct my digestive tract. Or my alimentary canal, if you prefer. So no aliment will be able to get through.’

‘You won’t go to the toilet any more. Or to the lavatory, if you prefer. Or to the bathroom.’

‘All right, all right. But what if I can’t eat any more? Won’t I die from starvation?’

‘I’ll give you injections.’

‘And what if your injections don’t work? They don’t *always* work, you know.’

According to Nozick, there are three stances in the history of humankind, and we had better be aware of them, otherwise we might waste our time and life, letting them go down the drain. (It is quite unpleasant to see one’s life go down the drain. On the other hand, I would not mind seeing time on the same spot, in a right fix.) The first stance is egoistic, and for once we do not have to search for examples: they are everywhere with the exception of the area where Mother Teresa and Jean-Paul II lived their lives. Let us take the same bone; this choice is all the more understandable since the bone in question is still in the same throat. (And its owner is already in the throes of incurable angst.) The man continues to focus his attention on this bone despite the fact that thousands of people emigrated during the Irish potato famine of 1845-46. What is more, they (other people) go on dying from starvation so they would be delighted to have a few bones in their throats. After all, dogs do not die; and yet their only food boils down to unboiled bones. Or boiled bones, as the case may be. The man with the bone, as we should call him, still talks to his wife who suggests she should remove the bone from her husband’s throat and also from his life. (She comes to *think* of it.) Meanwhile, another group of people – there are children among them – is on the point of dying from hunger. Once this point crossed, they do die of hunger, and even Bill Gates (just another billionaire) is unable to save their lives. Of course we know that the doctrine of enlightenment denies the ultimate reality of tragedy. But the people I am writing about have no strength left to study all these doctrines, whatever their scope and efficiency. They beg for food and sometimes for bones: their modesty is exemplary and can serve as a model in the world where only egoists and self-obsessed individuals prosper and get everything, even if they go nowhere. What is more, they lose nothing, nothing at all; nor do they sacrifice anything in order to avoid evil because no evil has ever threatened their lives and resources. (Their goldmines, among other treasures.)

There are various kinds of egoism, selfishness and whatever synonyms we can find to describe our indifference towards other representatives of the human species. ‘They’re not special, these representatives,’ we say to ourselves as we look at a multitude of absent-minded faces, absent-souled, soiled bodies and eyes. Why should we sacrifice our pleasures, knowledge and achievements for their sake? There are people you can replace in the twinkling of an eye and even faster: sometimes your eyes are so absorbed in the contemplation of yet another beautiful landscape or cityscape that you just cannot tear yourself from it. Moreover, you cannot wink at whoever might be standing by your side or in front of your chest. You just forget the world and even your eyes’ inveterate habit. And when you come to your senses, you realise once again that the world is stupid to the point of making you consider its utter annihilation – by means of yoga-inspired effort, concentration and meditation; or by means of a mandala, for want of anything better. (What could be better than a mandala? asks a Hindu.) Of course it would be pointless to speak of the hand – in these ordinary people’s company. They would just look at their own hands, saying, ‘They’re here, my hands. What do you want? Do you want me to lend you money, my country house? Another orgy? Is that what you intend to stage in my country house, in my park?’

So they have no idea what the hand I am alluding to represents in the framework of human life which looks helpless and hopeless, if the lack of this hand is certified, acknowledged and stated in documents devoted to the spiritual elevation of our psyche. These people see only fists – in the course of numerous demonstrations in which they take part, shouting, ‘August has seen a large rise in the number of unemployed! September has seen a large rise in the number of unemployed! There has been an alarming rise in the rate of inflation! The rise in

unemployment is just a further manifestation of the government's incompetence!' 'Have you never experienced the touch of your Father's hand?' you ask.

'Of course I have. He beats me every day, from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. My bruises lend credence to my statement that I've been beaten throughout my life – by my father and also by my mother. Would you care to see my bruises? Just have a look, have a look. Cast a glance at my pain.'

'Your Father with a capital F. Your celestial Father, you know.'

'My father is quite terrestrial. His feet are firmly planted on the ground.'

'I'm speaking to you about God.'

'What?'

'God. Have you ever heard the name of Feynman?'

'What?'

HOLES AND SPOTS

There are several possible theories that you could make up to account for the partial reflection of light by glass. One of them is that 96% of the surface of the glass is 'holes' that let the light through, while the other 4% of the surface is covered by small 'spots' of reflective material. Newton realised that this is not a possible explanation. In just a moment we will encounter a strange feature of partial reflection that will drive you crazy if you try to stick to a theory of 'holes and spots' – or to any other reasonable theory!

Richard P. Feynman, *FED*

Such things might happen from time to time. You are sitting in a room where your gaze, eyes and unconscious recognise not only the pieces of furniture – you could even shed light on some cabinet makers, if need be – but also a few human faces that you endeavour to discard to the best of your abilities. Suddenly the light refuses to cooperate with your eyesight – not with your psychic sight, though – and you are left in the dark; and in this dark you seem to have been left to your own devices. But where are these devices? What are you supposed to do? That is what you are likely to feel upon reading the above excerpt from Feynman's book. And yet some light *was* shed on this book and its meaning some time ago when I spoke of the particles going through panels or layers of glass. Let us suppose the particles we're talking about are human beings – ourselves, if you please. Actually very few people would agree to play the role of a particle: they are mountains, these people, not molehills, let alone subatomic particles which have been dealt with abundantly by contemporary physicists. Suppose you belong to the group of those particles which exist only as particles – until further notice. And then a hand comes out of the blue and you feel a push that propels you into the realm of your life about which you might have dreamt for centuries, if not for millennia. So you fly towards a layer of glass: for some reason, the universe you are thrown into resembles a crystal vase deprived of flowers, I'm sorry to say. You are not flowers, stars are no flowers: there are no flowers in the universe – such is the conclusion you are driven to in the course of your journey towards real life. (A tautology?) The point is you cannot penetrate this life unless you come into contact with the layer touched upon in Feynman's text. What about the spots and holes you find in the text? A spot might send you to Hell or at least it is bound to deflect you so you bounce, jump to unnecessary conclusions, whereas the others (your fellow-

particles, in other words) carry on and avail themselves of the journey's delights. Incidentally, they can be compared to Chinese sages, to the wisdom conveyed to ordinary minds by Tao and its heritage, legacy and books. When engrossed in these books, you picture to yourself a human being lying on his back, looking at the stars, doing nothing and repeating, 'Nothing doing, nothing doing.' He glides, slides and lets the current of life carry him towards the spot called 'No goals'. (Am I confusing this Taoist with the Hindus and their gurus?) And you? You bump into a spot and are often sent back empty-handed; but not empty-*minded*, mind you. After the collision with the aforementioned spot, your mind turned into a playground where your instincts and intentions fight – not until further notice, as might be presumed. They have neither the desire nor the time to wait for this questionable, unreliable notice. They fight like cats and dogs, like prudence and recklessness, until a trumpet announces the end of the competition. As for your newborn thoughts, they run in zigzags around the playground until they are exhausted and fall asleep – like the rest of your substance.

There are human beings you can replace rather easily, for they are not unique, contrary to what our ordinary, common-sense wisdom teaches us, anxious to maintain the democratic structure into which we are browbeaten day in day out by the media and our presidents, prime ministers and their secretaries. But there are exceptions to the rule that turns us into run-of-the-mill citizens, into petit bourgeois or small workmen; or small mothers, small fathers; into small children running about a playground, clutching rattles in their hands. In short, there are particles that look for holes, saying to each other, 'Have you seen a hole in the glass they put on our path?'

'No, I haven't.'

'You're an arsehole, then.'

'I'm looking for a spot, for a way of disporting myself.'

'So you're not a Taoist, are you?'

'I'm not. I'm a great poet of the future.'

'What kind of future do you have in mind, when talking about your poems?'

'The 23rd century.'

These particles squeeze through the holes, become go-getters, get whatever they can. But this does not amount to much, according to their multiplication tables and neighbours and colleagues; according to their own hopes and dreams. They continue to go, fly towards other holes, pass through them, squeeze through themselves and finish their lives on a dunghill from which they are removed by St Francis' disciples. These carry them to other dunghills or dumping grounds; such a journey is called '*their* pilgrim's progress'.

I fell in love with the glass, with its surface, at first glance; and I said to myself, 'I shouldn't pass through – there are many songs to be sung in the vicinity of its surface.' So I was looking at the world through the glass, seeing it darkly, nightly, stardustly. The cosmos. Staying on the other side of the glass. Sometimes I saw *myself* in this glass which, when seen from a certain angle, could turn into an ordinary or extraordinary mirror – all depended on my attitude towards it and my own reflection. The world was not accessible to me in those days, and I made the most of this inaccessibility. I pictured it to myself, I did my utmost to decipher its patterns which I could neither touch nor smell nor taste. The world was a figment of my imagination: all the books you can lay your hands on are to be found on *this* side of the glass, contrary to what Alice thought, opting for the other side, for Lewis Carroll's mind. The side she explored so minutely was too realistic, too simplistic and straightforward: it displayed no features connected to quantum mechanics. And even if you are wrong about these mechanics and Alice, you

should stick to your theory because a great writer always reinvents the wheel. Great writers say to their readers, 'Look, here's a wheel. We can roll on it as far as the end of the world.'

'Humanity has known this wheel for millennia,' they answer.

'My wheel is different,' you affirm.

'They've never been able to reach the end of the world because the Earth is round.'

'It isn't. It is fair and square.'

'And it circles around the sun.'

'It doesn't. It circles around my body and soul.'

If you cross the layer of glass, you may lose a lot of your particles, of your specks of dust, as often happens in the cosmos. 'He spreads himself too thin,' they say as they try to catch some of your particles, your grains of sand where no world is reflected, contained and thrives; whereas the universes flock to the other side of the glass where you keep them at bay so as not to betray Plato, Plotinus and St Augustine. And the Gnostics, come to think of it, of them.

Another possible theory is that the photons have some kind of internal mechanism – 'wheels' and 'gears' inside that are turning in some way – so that when a photon is 'aimed' just right, it goes through the glass, and when it's not aimed right, it reflects. We can check this theory by trying to filter out the photons that are not aimed right by putting a few extra layers of glass between the source and the first layer of glass. After going through the filters, the photons reaching the glass should all be aimed right, and none of them should reflect. The trouble with that theory is, it doesn't agree with experiment: even after going through many layers of glass, 4% of the photons reaching a given surface reflect off it.

Richard P. Feynman, *FED*

HAND (III), THE HANDY TRINITY, THE HOLEY TRINITY

Let us not forget the hand I introduced into my writings last week. First you rely on this hand and you even worship it because its might is unquestionable and you wish to remain with this might and within yourself as long as all those glasses and holes will keep away from your undertaking. You realise that this hand is also *your* hand, *your* body, psyche and whatever you could add to this list, when meditating upon your nature, substance and meaning. You raise your own hand and it accomplishes whatever has so far been done by the *other hand*. In a way, metaphorically or theoretically speaking, you install wheels and gears in your heart of hearts, in your tendons and sinews. You set these wheels in motion and fly towards the glass you have heard so much about ever since your birthday. And once you are close enough to its surface, you begin to play with reflections and meditations, composing poems, painting self-portraits and performing Beethoven's sonatas with your own hands, through their internal energy and mass.

But let us not forget the global pictures where you find not only God, yourself and a lot of hands coming from everywhere and nowhere (out of the red, of the black and white) but also the society where you crawl on all fours, fives and sixes. Suppose you live in the midst of a dictatorial regime and so you spend your life trying to find holes or rather loopholes in its structure. You collaborate with the regime, become an informer and the hole

appears in the wall you are facing day and night; even in your sleep, contrary to what your dreams might say to your psyche and unconscious. But there are electrons, photons and just humans, ordinary humans who prefer to bounce back, which may and actually must bring about their self-knowledge, the appearance of what is rightly called ‘my awareness of myself’. You know ‘thysself’ instead of coming to terms with the American way of life, the Soviet way of life – any way of life except your own life and way. Yes, at the beginning there are electrons, photons and other subatomic particles whose life, destiny and achievements depend on how they fly through space and time, on what they might pay attention to during this flight, initiation, enlightenment or endarkenment. Yes, this experience makes you realise to what extent our partial reflection counts in our lives. Those small spots of reflective material on which Richard Feynman enlarges in one of his books (in all of them perhaps) played a tremendous role in my life. One might conclude I am constantly *looking for them* instead of doing my best to avoid them altogether. And if there are no small spots of reflective material in front of me, behind me, all around my life, existence and karma, I create a dozen spots and write in my diary, ‘I bounced off the glass and back, into myself, if you please.’ ‘Know thysself’ is even older than the hills and only Old Father Time continues to use this injunction or recommendation. Nowadays you are supposed to say, ‘Bounce back, jump into yourself. You go and see a heap of gold. By no means should you get it, remove it from the spot where it must have spent an eternity of sorts and put it in your safe. You should run or fly towards it, bounce off its surface and fly back, prepared to jump into yourself with the intention of reaching your bottom. A bottom-up approach to building a powerful self, as they say in their sutras.’

My mother often broached the subject of ‘open doors’ as she usually put it, when trying to convince me that there is nothing wrong with going straight, adopting the simplest procedures aimed at what she called ‘adaptation to our circumstances’. She would open a door – her meanings were mostly literal – and say, ‘Well, you can walk through it, if you wish.’

‘No, thank you,’ I would answer.

‘Aren’t you eager to play a few games with your coevals?’ My mother was keen on old-fashioned words, deeds and sentiments.

‘Not particularly.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I prefer to *bounce off* human beings, whoever they are. You’re an exception, maman. You and papa and Anastasia. (My beautiful, very beautiful aunt.) You confirm the rule, all of you – rather brilliantly, I must admit.’

It might appear odd, this attitude of mine, considering that I ostentatiously displayed it for many years, although in the late Seventies I could squeeze into spaces graciously offered to all those who indulge in so-called ‘democratic freedom’. But on many occasions I did not even wish to know what those spaces could offer me and other representatives of the human species because, for some reason or other (in those remote days I could neither describe nor define these reasons) I did not feel my being as human. On the other hand, I was loath to spend my time in my master’s company – on a leash, to put it mildly and mercifully. (So many masters beat their dogs at least once a week that one is understandably reluctant to turn into a dog without kicking up a tremendous fuss.) Be that as it may, creating spots of reflective material became my favourite pastime – even my vocation, my profession. ‘Try as we might to invent a reasonable theory that can explain how a photon “makes up its mind”

whether to go through glass or bounce back,’ wrote Richard Feynman, ‘it is impossible to predict which way a given photon will go.’ In those days – in the Eighties, in the Nineties – I was not yet a cat or a leopard man. I might have been a given photon, for all I know; anyway this would not have been the worst solution to my identity predicament. But many people (human beings) said about me, when talking about my persona, ‘He’s unpredictable. No one seems to know how he makes up his mind, takes decisions and judges our common everyday situations, our routine.’

We are used to declaring that God’s ways are unfathomable, but whenever such a declaration resounds in our living room, we should remember that any human of genius – this phenomenon is mostly a thing of the past and one wonders what past we are talking about – is also unfathomable. No wonder that we habitually refer to a genius in terms prepared for the Almighty and His consort. The point is that the point which may be identified because of its shape and velocity – just a point moving in the midst of other points of no importance – is not a mere point, although it is for the moment just a part of the crowd. And then it is diverted from its common trajectory into a singular flight that has very little in common with other points or particles or humans. We follow its flight and realise we cannot really follow it: both the flight and its source are so idiosyncratic we get lost, whenever we concentrate on these elements and their aspects. We get lost in the labyrinth of the brain which is on the verge of an explosion, of a small bang; and small bangs are usually associated with humans of genius, for no creation is valid unless it sounds and looks like a bang. Democritus also spoke about these unruly points or particles that did not align themselves with others, with their run-of-the-mill fellow-creatures who, in point of fact, are neither fellows nor creatures. They are just dust, cosmic or otherwise; or human, for that matter. They are just parts of matter in which they belong. Some scientists believe that there is about ten times as much matter in the universe as astronomers have observed. That accounts for the growth of overpopulation which is already over the top. But it continues to grow and they say, shaking their heads, shoulders and also other parts of their bodies: ‘How are we supposed to live in the midst of all these photons, protons and what not?’

There are many parties in the world and they all bear some name or other so as not to be confused with their fellow parties or creatures. We append to them a lot of names such as: ‘communist’, ‘socialist’, ‘labour’, ‘the Tories’. (By the way, the Tories have dropped in the opinion poll ratings.) Humanity, of which we seem to be a part, is also a party in its own right or, as the former communists used to put it, in its own wrong. They just used antonyms to denote their attitude towards liberalism, monarchs and capitalists in general. If a capitalist said, ‘This is ideal for our prosperity,’ they would retort as follows, ‘You’re just a moron and all our bosses are asses. What you’re talking about is the workers’ common grave, the cemetery of humankind.’ And yet they had no alternative but to recognise their participation in the history of our species. And our species is part and parcel of the same political, social and mental party called ‘humanity’ – *l’humanité*, according to French communists. And any deviation from the party’s faith is seen as betrayal. So if you are deflected from the stream – by the aforementioned hand – and go against it (not against the hand – against the stream) you are despised and kept in the background, out of things. You are much more in things than your enemy-creatures; one might even say you are in things in themselves. You are in those things and also in yourself. In other words, you are in, in, in, in. Well and good. Your ins, however, do not prevent them from keeping you out of *their* things so you have no villas and own no skyscrapers, no companies – no future, in a way, in *their* way. And they say, ‘All right, all right, you’re a genius.

You're also a human being whose life unfolds in the 21st century. So why don't you participate in our charity balls?'

'I don't dance.'

'Didn't they teach you how to dance? At school? Or were you a dunce in this sphere of human existence?'

'I was.'

'Well, you can just put a million dollars on our table and leave the ballroom for a while.'

And if you put nothing on their table they kick you out, thereby keeping you out of things. Most of the time you work in your study and visualise things and depict them in accordance with your fancy, gift and moods. Yet sometimes you just need the things out of which they keep on keeping you. At some point – one of these points, you know – Robert Musil wrote the following letter to the Swiss authorities, 'I have no money for fuel or whatever it is. I am a sort of heat-seeking missile at the moment. I cannot write if my fingers are frozen. And so are my thoughts, believe it or not. Do you believe in God? Can't you detect the Siberian winter in the style of the letter I'm about to send you by post? There are no computers in my room and I'm not connected to the Internet, believe it or not. Do you believe in it or are your brains frozen too?' Of course there are writers whose only vocation is centred upon the things I have talked about so many times. And I continue to talk about them, especially when I feel like touching upon yachts and the champagne they always drink on deck, below deck and above deck – in seventh heaven. (Not on cloud nine, mind you: they are not particularly fond of clouds.) Those writers go to the things I mention in my writings, and on their way towards happiness and enjoyment of all kinds they compose a piece devoted to whatever happens to be in the news. They drink a bottle of champagne, devour a multitude of *petits-fours* and dance with bathing beauties either on the deck or in some bed or other. And I write in my novels and essays, 'There exists nowadays a yawning gap between fashion and style.' And I continue to widen this gap.

ARE CANCERS INTELLIGIBLE? INTELLIGENT? ARE EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS CANCERS? OR ARE THEY JUST CARCINOGENIC?

The intelligibility of the world is no accident. Mind, in this view, is doubly related to the natural order. Nature is such as to give rise to conscious beings with minds; and it is such as to be comprehensible to such beings. Ultimately, therefore, such beings should be comprehensible to themselves. And these are fundamental features of the universe, not by-products of contingent developments whose true explanation is given in terms that do not make reference to mind.

Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*

I, for one (and I am usually one, in all senses of this word) do not think our world is intelligible unless we limit our forays into its enigmas and structures to a cup of tea or coffee. And to the milk we might add to either tea or coffee, which is not always necessary. What else do we know about the world? We eat and some of our dishes and sandwiches are carcinogenic, and we do not know the first thing about cancer. Of course we know we are sure to die from some form of cancer in spite of the treatments they suggest and carry out, on condition that we agree to their manipulations, to their chemotherapy. All right, we agree to it and our hair begins to leave us without so much as by-your-leave. It is true that we could not care less about our hair's politeness, but we have no idea how

many hairs we have lost in the course of the last month. At least we should be entitled to know our losses, their numbers, costs and what they define as irreparability.

What *do* we know about the world? We seem to have heard a few pieces of music which speak volumes about the world's unfathomable ways, awesome mysteries and the harmonies we find only in the domain of music. I wish I could listen to Haydn or Brahms, when talking to some of my fellow-citizens: I might go mad and die, if deprived of musical support. So we know we might go mad if forsaken by a woman, a man, a piece of music, a painting (not necessarily the Mona Lisa's smile), a cat, a poem we learnt in our childhood or youth; or by a poem we have not recited yet. Actually it is enough to listen to a Brahms intermezzo for piano to realise that the world is unintelligible. The same goes for a Rilke or a Hölderlin poem. We understand the structure and texture of the intermezzo we have just listened to; or played on the piano or hummed, when lying on a divan, under a couple of blankets. We know the piece by heart, yet we know nothing about it. The same goes or does not go about the world. The world does not go, being mysteriously rooted to the spot from where we contemplate its intricacies and networks; its spider webs, to be precise. (According to the Gnostics, our God or Demiurge is a gigantic, monstrous spider. Svidrigaylov thought so too.) And our comprehension of what goes on does not budge from where it stopped at our birth. All right, we know that what we see when turning our head heavenward is called the sky. We also know something about the moon, the sun and the Milky Way where we drink our Darjeeling with milk. But what do we know about life, about those planets' inhabitants, their habits, their aspirations, inspirations and poems? Of course they are not duty bound to write poems and compose symphonies; yet they must do *something* in addition to whatever is produced by their vital functions, by their lungs, intestines, tendons and arteries. There is no denying that we create them in our own image, although they are certainly different from us; at least this is the hope nourished and majestically sustained by misogynists; otherwise we had better commit suicide without further ado, they add after much soul-searching.

Of course we can visualise our extraterrestrial counterparts by appealing to our *negative* senses such as disgust, aversion, repugnance and so on. For instance, we can decide that these counterparts of ours spit out whatever they eat or do not eat. Even if they put nothing in their mouths, they spit all the time as if disgusted with themselves, with their own lives; or with the earthlings they might have heard or read about. So they just walk around their landscapes, spitting and swearing in their incomprehensible language or dialect. Or they get rid of whatever happens to lodge in their internal organs – even if they partake of no meals, no delicacies. In some parts of our world, sheep's eyes are considered a great delicacy, but they never gorge themselves either on sheep's eyes or on eyes in general. So I repeat my previous thought: they spit whatever they do *not* eat because they are not in the habit of eating anything. They just spit, spit, spit and spit as if they had nothing else to do. Sure enough, they have nothing else to do, end of story. They just spit, urinate and release a lot of solid waste from their bowels or whatever looks after their solid waste, keeping it solid.

Third, the conclusion is established from the mind of the Philosopher in the *Metaphysics* where he argues that 'many heavens cannot exist because there cannot be many first movers'. He proves this as follows: 'Those which are many in number but one in species have matter; the first mover has no matter since it is pure act; therefore, the first mover and immobile being is one in kind and number.' From this he infers: 'There is but one heaven.'

John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*

As usual I make mistakes because error is human and the only proof of my humanity is the number of errors I leave and let prosper in my writings and elsewhere; for instance, in the kitchen where I do my best to cook something or other. For instance I write, 'From this he infers, "There is but one heaven," but I am not sure that is what I am inclined to investigate – the number of heavens that someone hung over my head on one of the days they qualify as "of yore"; not yogin, for once. Days of yore, days of yore, days of yore, and you see a lot of Napoleons arrayed in front of your desk as if prepared or unprepared to attack you during your work on a book that does not mean anything; in the world that must mean nothing. 'There is but one heaven' or 'there is but on heaven,' which does not mean the same thing; but heaven remains the same. You just look up, upwards and see something on which something was put, installed: stars, archangels and other angels. And if you say, 'There is but on heaven,' you might mean that whatever happens or is can be found in heaven, in the vicinity of Paradise where everyone drinks Coke gratis. (If that is the way they call this liquid; coca-cola, cola, soona.)

We have many conclusions and theories to deal with on our way to perfection, to the knowledge that does not admit of error, deviations and terror. Giordano Bruno and Stephan Hawking talked to us about infinities, and they seldom if ever used the word 'universe' in the singular. When talking about infinities, they would turn this way and that as if in search of proofs, of innumerable stars, galaxies and nebulae. But what of the first mover about which or whom Aristotle speaks at length, judging from the number of works he wrote in his lifetime? And we should take into consideration the lack and loss of many works in which he continued to speak about the first and only mover who cannot travel from one galaxy to another in no time at all, considering the number of light years we need to cross our galaxy and touch other, alien stars. The point is Aristotle was not acquainted with the Buddhist lore which demonstrates the omnipotence of the Buddha and his followers. They have many arms, and these arms are able to set the wheels in motion almost everywhere; or just everywhere because the number of these hands can be multiplied eternally and infinitely. The Buddha raises one of his arms, touches a wheel and a galaxy moves off as a multitude of creatures – some of them extra-terrestrial – begin to wave their handkerchiefs and scarves. Sometimes the Buddha juggles with planets, stars, comets and asteroids, and idle observers note in their diaries, 'We all watched in amazement as he juggled with three flaming Milky Ways.'

So there might be many first movers, even if you attribute only a handful of numbers to them so as not to confuse their identities and specialities. One of them moves the Andromeda, Number Two takes care of the Medea. Number Three says to Number Four, 'Could you please push your heaven out of the way?'

'What way? The Milky Way?'

'Not the Milky Way, you fool. Have you ever been weaned? Just push your heaven up so I might install my galaxy in this celestial room.'

'The ceiling seems to have got stuck. There are too many galaxies in here, I'm afraid.'

'So we have no alternative but to annihilate some of them. A couple of *your* galaxies, for instance.'

'Your galaxies are far more sinful than mine. Your creatures are full of aversion embedded in their wills and your galaxies' wheels. Wills and wheels are the only vehicles capable of turning towards or turning away from

the end. The same should be said of inordinate desire which St Augustine sometimes calls cupidity and defines it properly as “the venom of charity”. It’s little wonder that your galaxies take no part in our charity balls.’

In what sense is the world intelligible, according to St Augustine? Of course we cannot know anything intricate – the inner structure of the universe or of whatever we come across as we examine our goals, itineraries and desires. Well, according to St Augustine we should at least be aware of what constitutes the *sinful* material of the universe; otherwise we shall go either to Hell or Purgatory where fire burns sinful skin, teeth, tissues, bones and legs that mostly walk in the direction of sins; and hands that mostly grasp whatever is born in the kingdom of sin. You walk across a square and say to yourself, ‘There were a lot of gallows all around this square in days of yore. (I am thinking about Red Square, among other places of sin.) If I cross this square, I might take part in those executions – consciously or unconsciously. We are contaminated not only through Adam, but also through Peter the Great and other great or small criminals.’ St Augustine solemnly declares, ‘If you walk around the Place de la Concorde, you should allow them to set the guillotine’s blade in motion, enabling it to cut your head off. Then your head will roll towards the obélisque de Luxor, but you should not budge from where you stand, headless and helpless. You should wait for the signal or rather for the sign given or not given by God. If God says to you, “You can pick your head up now,” you should head for your head and pick it up. But you should not pass on to another, higher stage of this ritual unless God says to you, “Now you can put your head on your neck.” So you just follow God’s instruction without overstepping its bounds: you should not screw your head on; otherwise you are likely to lose it forever. So you wait for another instruction, another injunction. And if the Almighty says to you, “Now you can screw your head on,” you can screw your head on. But if you don’t screw your head on properly and consequently lose it a few days afterwards, you should on no account pin the blame of your discomfiture on God, writing in your diary, “It was only after I’d had my head for a few days that I realised I’d been screwed by God.”’

The problem is you have to atone for all the crimes and sinful actions of which your ancestors are guilty. And you should start with Adam because everything – guilts, death, decays and defilements – began with him, his voracity and greediness. Why couldn’t he refrain from eating this apple or whatever it was? Now you are not allowed to eat apples – so much the worse for your vigour – and even pears, for St Augustine tore a pear from his neighbours’ tree. Usually we do our best to imitate both saints and Jesus Christ so that if, two centuries ago, a saint touched a branch or a twig, we find this object of our desire and kiss it excitedly, joyfully, repeating a few prayers. I have already described at length the ritual to which St Francis’ followers paid a polyphonic tribute: carrying gold and banknotes in their teeth. They also carried their chequebooks thus along with numerous credit cards. Even now some of them do it – all the more sincerely and gleefully since there is no limit to the amount of money they can transport in this fashion. Sometimes an idle observer (why are most observers idle?) spots a billionaire whose mouth can hardly hold the money destined for laundering. American officials are often accused of laundering stolen funds overseas before returning them to the US – unless they return them in their mouths. In this case, everybody says, ‘Look at this official. He honours St Francis’ precepts and rituals. And you can be sure that at home he’s already thrown a lot of banknotes into his water closet. And also into the drains.’

‘He invited me to dinner last Saturday. From the smell it was evident that the drains had been blocked for several weeks.’

‘Yesterday he asked me if he could use my lavatory.’

‘Such beings should be comprehensible to themselves,’ says the philosopher. If so, how could we explain the ritual which allows us to buy whatever we long for at Sotheby’s, on condition that we carry our credit cards in our mouths?

St Augustine says: ‘The Father begot the Word, equal in all things to himself, for he would not have uttered himself completely and perfectly, if there were anything less or more in his Word than in himself.’ This leads to the following argument. The most perfect communication must involve the most perfect term communicable and with the highest possible magnitude, so that the produced is the complete equal of the producer. Therefore, if the communication in the divine generation is of necessity most perfect in reality or extramentally (excrementally), since a most perfect term is communicated in its fullest magnitude, by which – as Christ says – something greater than all things is given to the Son, then he has been given in reality and extramentally equality with the Father, who has the same essence and in the same measure.

John Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures*

NOT OF THE BODY

It would be pointless to count the number of comments devoted to the problem under scrutiny: Are we all God’s sons and daughters? Didn’t Turgenev focus his famous novel on this problem? Of course the protagonist does not regard his father as the Father of the Universe because we do not hear him say, ‘I know you’re the Almighty, Daddy. Nevertheless I have my ideas and they are revolutionary, you know. Soon our Russia and also the rest of the world will sanctify my ideas and deeds, whereas you will be relegated to what my colleagues, my fellow-revolutionaries call “their dunghill”. You’re so small, Father. You’re small to the point of disappearing amidst the stars, but I always find you because you don’t look like a star. You look like a dunghill, as I said earlier. Are you following? I’m not very fond of your glances, Daddy. They testify to your indifference towards my goals, achievements and theories that are about to shake the world. Let me show you how the world will be shaken,’ whereupon the protagonist removes a chair from its favourite spot and begins to brandish it in the air as if it were his fist or something along these lines. And then the protagonist throws the chair out of the window, draws a few lines on the floor, heads for his father, and draws a few lines on his jacket and forehead. ‘That’s what our energy or rather our *élan vital* looks like,’ he says. He pushes his father towards the nearest mirror and the latter (his father, not the mirror) shudders at the thought of kissing his own reflection. ‘Yes, you heard me, didn’t you? Kiss your reflection, Father. Or kiss me, if you’re reluctant to kiss my lines on your forehead. We’re interchangeable, Father. Instead of playing with your body, as you habitually do in your bed, you can play with *my* body, you know.’

Humans often go too far without reaching their destination, contrary to what they suppose and conclude upon seeing themselves in a mirror. ‘I am created in His image,’ they say out loud, and their voices resound, reverberate almost everywhere to prove they are omniscient, omnipotent and identical with Spinoza’s *natura*. They do not think they are the cat’s whiskers; they maintain that there are cats or God, which amount to the same God. Cat *sive* God, human *sive* God. All around us there are only God’s images so it is small wonder we spot so many warning signs as we walk across our parks and woods, ‘Don’t walk on the grass,’ ‘Don’t step on the grass,’ ‘Don’t eat on the grass,’ ‘No lunches on the grass,’ ‘No lovemaking on the grass,’ ‘No quarrels on the grass’, and so on.

What do these warnings mean? ‘Don’t eat on God,’ ‘Don’t put your dishes on God’s belly,’ ‘Don’t jump on God’s belly,’ ‘Don’t ask Him to taste your food – He is not your dog,’ ‘Have no fear – in God’s presence you will never get poisoned’.

The intelligibility of the world is no accident because our minds are identical to God’s mind. Mind you, mind you, mind you. Mind, in this view, is doubly related to the natural order. It is related to Spinoza’s (and our) *natura* and also to God’s mind, God’s mind, God’s mind. Please keep in mind that God has no body, whatever Michelangelo thought and did. Why should we waste so much ink on the problem of the world’s intelligibility? At some point God summoned all humans to His palace and said, ‘I need you for the construction of the universe. Do you see this object?’

‘We do,’ answer the humans.

‘Let me show you its contents – or intestines, if you prefer.’

‘We prefer the intestines,’ say the humans.

‘So it’s not a thing in itself, is it?’

‘Of course it’s not.’

‘The same goes for whatever you see around you. Do you see this tree?’

‘Yes, we do.’

‘You can open it, if you feel like it.’

‘We do feel like it,’ say the humans as they open the tree.

One might surmise that our knowledge of the world is complete: we were taught at the highest school – rather early in our earthly existence. Of course we had to open not only trees but also animals and humans to find out what their entrails look like and to what extent we can fiddle with them. But in this day and age, after centuries of forays, investigations and accomplishments we might permit ourselves a holiday or at least a coffee break. (After all, our ancestors worked for hours and hours without respite.) Oddly enough, we continue to open whatever we come across – out of scientific and human curiosity. And our curiosity killed a lot of humans, let alone cats, dogs, rats and bats. We know exactly what we shall find inside a leopard’s heart; yet we open both the leopard and his heart. And what do we find inside them, pray? Inside them we find the leopard’s insides and his heart of hearts. (I must have cracked this joke many times – to my heart’s content, I suppose.) Whenever we go to our office, we find a lot of corpses on our writing desks, but if officially blamed for our outrageous, lethal conduct, we say, ‘You’re mistaken, officer. The corpses you’re staring at are open humans. They’re open-minded, open-hearted – thanks to our knives and efforts.’

‘Why did you cut them open?’ the officer might ask you – out of scientific curiosity.

‘Because they were close-hearted and narrow-minded. Can’t you see they’re *wide*-minded at present?’ While uttering these words, you picked up a morsel of the brain you had opened a few hours before and put it in another room to demonstrate its wide-ranging interests.

It is true that science laid bare the truth behind myths and hypotheses. But what we are left with resembles an anatomy lesson and so you can say to officers or the curious, ‘It’s the anatomy of love you can see in this room, in our museum. We love the world so much we just have to kill it, otherwise we wouldn’t enjoy it to the utmost.’ Knowledge is pernicious and our enjoyment of the world boils down to a few equations, formulas and definitions which have nothing in common with beauty, either common or uncommon. Myths are far more consistent with

the truth we are aiming at, if only for the sake of pride and a multitude of prejudices. But we squander myths and legends for the sake of sterile knowledge that induces us to speak of distant galaxies instead of talking to our Earth and sparing her the gruesome details of her and our decay.

We all know St Paul's holistic proclamation that deprives our body of its members or rather of their independence as if they could never act on their own, disregarding their fellow members or creatures. It goes like this, and anyway all theologians and laywomen know it by heart:

For the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

Not only do I feel like contradicting St Paul's statement. Sometimes – very often, as a matter of fact – I use only one member of my body; to the detriment of all other members of the club habitually defined as the human body. Of course my foot, one of my feet – I am not a one-legged human yet – never says, 'I am not of the body;' and yet it can act in this unfashionable way, disobeying my will, its kinetic commands. As the Russians put it, 'One speaks only about what pains him or her – about his or her pains, in other words.' I wish I could use these proverbial other words far more often so as not to get bogged down in my pains, torments and tortures that more often than not I inflict on others – to *avenge* myself, among other things; and other words. But my ear often says, 'I am not the eye, I am not of the body.' When I listen to Brahms' or Dvorak's quartets or quintets, I close my eyes: they would interfere with the flow of music. My eyes offer me only a number of stumbling blocks over which the pieces I listen to stumble; and they fall on one of my carpets, on the carpet situated near the record player. At such moments my body is divorced from my hearing, from the process that enables me to capture the intricacies of nuances, the spider web of polyphonic echoes. I flout the convention they impose upon the earthlings who sincerely believe that eyes are more important than ears and noses. They veneer their sight to the point of preventing God from removing their sinful eye – the one which lusts after such and such a lady – from their head and body. They shout, 'My dear Almighty! Please leave my eye in peace. Take my ears instead, both of them.'

'But you didn't sin with your ears,' answers the Almighty.

'I did, I did. She walked in a rustle of silk and I listened to both the silk and the rustle. And suddenly my desire grew uncontrollable.'

If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would* the hearing be? Well, I had better put my ears in one of my chests of drawers to ward off this danger. Thanks to my eyes I shall be able to find this chest of drawers, even if they hide it at the other end of the Earth, driven by their revengeful impulses. I shall be covered with eyes from head to foot so that one might say, when eyeing me warily, 'And where's his penis? Could you make love without it? Could you resort to your eyes in this domain?' I am no longer interested in this kingdom where the Queen of the Night still holds sway over her subjects' threesomes and foursomes. Let me hear the world from beginning to end, and I would not mind listening to whatever comes after the end of the world, after Brahms' *Piano Quintet*. I am even prepared to play it for the sake of eternity, immortality and my future incarnations.

NOT OF THE BRAIN

Given the vast amount of information available to your senses, how does your decoding apparatus sort it out? Clearly – or almost clearly – the brain does not own any direct copies of stuff in the world. There is no library of forms and ideas against which to compare the images of perception. Information is stored in a plastic way, allowing fantastic juxtapositions and leaps of imagination. Some chaos exists out there, and the brain seems to have more flexibility than classical physics in finding the order in it.

James Gleick, *Chaos*

There are empty brains in the world whose contents are vital for recognition, orientation. If someone says, 'I've no sense of direction,' this means that part of the brain of the human in question is as empty as an empty bottle of wine. Someone has drunk the last drop and so the bottle should be thrown away to enable the drunkard to put another bottle in its place. How do I recognise the world I must have accepted at some point, greeted at the same point instead of rejecting it lock, stock and barrel? All right, there is something in my brain, some figures, signs, leaves and bushes; and also a lake with its surface on which a boat can glide, offering a holidaymaker a nice, fruitful, health- and spirit-restoring vacation. What else do I see in my brain if I turn my eyes towards my inner world? I find a few poems I have not composed yet, for the simple reason that I no longer compose poetry as if satisfied with my prosaic efforts. Actually I do see a poem in my brain or in my imagination that can be situated elsewhere – in some part of my soul or in my hands. Here it is:

A flow that continues to flow
As if an image were unsure.
Yet it is sure of itself.

I was reading a book on chaos from which I drew the above quotation to demonstrate our brain's intrinsic power and incredible adaptability. I still do not believe in what I see and think and analyse, when looking at whatever happens before my very eyes. What can one analyse without cutting everything open, without resorting to cuts, to what they call 'reductionism'? Should I dissect my hand to find out why it can play the piano or type my poems and novels? In the book I quoted there are poems and other uncertainties which demonstrate the omnipresence and omnipotence of chaos of which no light, no big bang, no god can rid us forever. We cast a glance at a landscape, and we have the feeling it does not budge, even if it part and parcel of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. (How often did my brain refer to this moving, emotional scene? Eternal recurrence, eternal recurrence.) And then we begin to follow the itinerary of a leaf, of an independent leaf: it is no longer attached or glued to a branch or a twig or whatever, whatever. It is no longer part and parcel of the cosmos, I am tempted to point out. And yet it is inside the cosmos, for nothing can survive outside it; not even outsiders.

Well, we are both sure and unsure of ourselves. If you are chronically unsure of yourself, every step of yours is a leap in the dark. (Not a leap in profits, mind you.) So you leap, leap, leap and the dark widens its scope as if following in your leaps' footsteps. So now you are surrounded by the dark; and now you are doubly or triply surrounded by the dark. What forms can you see in it, inside it, in its wilderness? The form of wilderness, the form

of the dark, the form of your leaps. That is how your do-it-yourself creation starts from scratch. So you write a poem about it, while you are at it.

The flecked river
Which kept flowing and never the same way twice, flowing
Through many places, as if it stood still in one.
Wallace Stevens

In my poem I propose a short version of Wallace Stevens' poetic effort which is remarkable on account of the many places he touches upon, which means that his river does not merely bifurcate: it flies off or jumps, going somewhere else, to another space, time and world-soul. It may become a soul, a psyche in the process, for nothing prevents her from playing with metempsychosis and transmigrations. And yet it stubbornly remains faithful to itself, to its personality, whereabouts and feelings – as if there were nothing else in the universe. Isn't this the right feeling, the right attitude towards everything and everybody? You look around you, as usual, as usual, and realise there is nothing else, not even yourself because you continue to dissolve in your thoughts, even if you think about solutions, constructions, new Towers of Babel. The point is you are both a point and everything, and that can be explained and described through a holistic version of Wallace Stevens' poem:

The flecked river is often monotonous,
Often painted in black and white
Or only in white as if you felt like
Drinking a glass of milk, on the spot.
But this spot is everywhere:
You drink in the midst of the Himalayas,
The same glass, another glass,
A glass of wine: the river has turned red.
Is it someone's blood you drink?

It never flows the same way twice.
Now this blood thoroughly explores
Your intestines and veins.
Now it flows down the hillside
Or into the Pacific Ocean.

There's a lovely stream
That flows through your garden.
Do you recognise its flow,
Its features? Your own features?
You flow from one life to another,

From one another to other, to X. Y.

You've always stood in your garden,
Even before your birth. Today
You let the stream wash your feet
As if it were a woman you love.

Such images are figments of our imagination, and I feel manifold – not only today, contrary to what laywomen usually think. 'Why are you in such a foul mood this morning?' they say as they study your wrinkles and glances. 'Do you know that the Prime Minister was in defiant mood in the House of Commons? Yesterday? Are you in defiant mood? Of course you're not the Prime Minister, as far as we know, but moods can coincide, can't they? You can even find yourself in your domestic animal's mood. Anyway, your moods are very changeable.'

'I am just manifold,' you answer.

'How do you mean?' they ask.

'Many creatures fold within my soul. One creature is fond of leaps in the dark and so it hardly appears elsewhere, spending its time in the dark, in its corners and fields. I disagree with Newton and agree with Goethe who declared, "With light poise and counterpoise, Nature oscillates within her prescribed limits; yet thus arise all the varieties and conditions of the phenomena which are presented to us in space and time." Nature oscillates, so do I. And yet we both remain where we are, in the dark or in the light – in the light of what we're talking about, for instance.'

'But you're yourself, aren't you?' they ask.

'If you take me in your arms, I'll be the same for at least five minutes.'

'What will happen next?'

"Colour is a degree of darkness allied to shadow," Goethe argued. I've got so many shadows I could share some with you. And light, you'll get plenty of it on some beach or other. My poems come from boundary conditions and singularities.'

'What you are talking about? Anyway, we've never understood your poetry.'

'A few leaps in the dark and you'll understand everything.'

Where Newton was reductionist, Goethe was holistic. Newton broke light apart and found the most basic physical explanation for colour. Goethe walked through flower gardens and studied paintings, looking for a grand, all-encompassing explanation.

James Gleick, *Chaos*

MORE LUMINOUS

It is enough to walk around, in circles, in squares, around the squares you see in front of you, provided you have not yet got rid of your eyes and are resolved to sanctify the use of your ears. It is no longer necessary to *leap* in the dark. I walk along boundaries and conclude there are only them, these boundaries, wherever I happen to find

myself; or lose myself, as the case may be. You are often between faith and its opposite, between light and shadow, as Goethe put it. Where there is light, there are also shadows and more often than not they are far more luminous than light. 'Have you got a light, please?' asks a smoker, and you just look around as if to intimate the omnipresence of light. What is more, he can light his cigarette by touching a shadow.

Colour is a degree of darkness; light is a degree of darkness; happiness is a degree of darkness. If someone says to you, 'I'm happy, you know,' you can ask him, her or their baby, 'Why do you think you're happy? Can you show me your darkness? A patch of darkness would be enough.' Of course they will do their best to assure you they shelter or have in mind only light, nothing else. You dismiss their answer and also their brains as nothing more than a piece of uninformed speculation, and the ignoramus leaves the room, despondent and wrathful. He says to his buddy, 'I think he'd dismissed me as an idiot within five minutes of meeting me.'

'Probably this is his representation of your substance,' says the buddy.

'What are you talking about? My persona, my shadow?'

It's an experience like no other experience I can describe, the best thing that can happen to a scientist, realising that something that's happened in his or her mind exactly corresponds to something that happens in nature. It's startling every time it occurs. One is surprised that a construct of one's own mind can actually be realised in the honest-to-goodness world out there. A great shock, and a great, great joy.

Leo Kadanoff

What I have in my mind does not tie in with nature demolished, almost abolished by earthlings who trample upon everything, including their own rights. The only things they do not trample upon are their wrongs, and that is why their wrongs are everywhere. So you walk along a path or around a clump of trees and see several notice boards saying, almost shouting, 'Don't walk on your wrongs.' Your rights are not only under your feet – they are also under your lives as if your weight was mighty enough to bury them alive, to make them penetrate the kingdom of Hades. My mind is neither above nor beneath the dust; I am neither amidst the clouds nor in the mouths of worms. The sounds I hear can (and should) be discovered in the world where even scrap metal resounds like a Bruckner symphony. But they are not discovered, not yet, as if my inner ear were buried on a distant planet about which Stephen Hawking talked at length before his demise; and probably after it, in the Hereafter built in accordance with his equations and projections. Suppose I say in one of my poems:

If there is a flower no one can enjoy

Let it appear somewhere,

Far from this meadow, from this glass of milk.

And the flower obeys my call as if to prove beyond any shadow of doubt that my flowers exist in nature; they are *dans la nature des choses*, not only in the nature of *minds*. Far from the Milky Way, as they say to make everyone realise at last what they are talking about, those poets bent on explaining, dissecting their own verses. Why should

I say that? Why should I say anything? You always oscillate between poles, between silence and a long, abstruse, almost abstract speech that no one understands either fully or partially. No wonder your audience goes further and further from where you continue to talk as if nothing had happened, as if the audience were still in front of your mouth. And your mouth continues to move up and down, shaping some words you do not understand yourself. Words are meaningless if you talk too fast or too slow, and you often lose the rhythm, the right tempo of the words you try to convey to brains and even to bodies. What does it all matter? Matter does what it wants, what it is capable of doing in the presence of what they call spirit, and the latter oscillates between the recognition of particles whirling around it and even in its heart of hearts – one of my favourite expressions and notions – and its utter rejection. There is no such thing as matter, says our spirit as it departs from our body, leaving us dispirited, in the clutches of despair, fear and a pair of opera glasses. We resort to their long-sightedness to see if we still belong in the cosmos about which they talk in their books where black holes have pride of place. But even a pair of binoculars does not yield anything encouraging: whatever the direction of our glances, we see only humans or the creatures that resemble them closely, for the laws we encounter all over the universe are the same, as Stephen Hawking put it. We hankered after labyrinths and the complexity associated with standard physics, but what we see boils down to a simple calculation performed and re-performed over and over again. The output is just a string of numbers, and it does not always converge to a steady final state. It ends up oscillating back and forth between two values. What are these values? Democrats, republicans; republicans, socialists; believers in God, atheists. We are often told the world consists of trinities, but what trinities can you see, apart from the Holy Trinity? A lot of unholy trinities? Or just poles, poles, poles. You go down on your knees and say to your God, ‘Please, give me everything and bestow your immortality and eternity upon my puny, sickly body.’ Or you turn your back on God and write a four-letter word on the nearest icon. Then you distance yourself from humanity as well unless you are bored to death and so remain on the spot to which you have grown used in the course of your life and watch the human race change chaotically as long as anyone cares to watch. What do you have in common with all those people?

And yet relation appears,
A small relation expanding like the shade
Of a cloud on sand, a shape on the side of a hill.
Wallace Stevens

You go to the nearest hill, to one of its sides and wait for a cloud, for any cloud, however small and shapeless, unHamlet-like. And what about a beach, the sand you can find on any beach, provided it is not irremediably covered with pebbles? And then humanity comes to you, joins you and you expand, violating your previous, unshakeable laws. And you call this occurrence ‘expansion’ or ‘relation’ or ‘revelation’. The world we are always talking about is alternatively revealed and veiled. You remove the veil from its face and see a beautiful goddess; and you ask yourself if she is Athena or Aphrodite or Patroclus.

Relation, manifestation. There are so many mistakes
You cannot make up your mind. So your mind
Makes you up and you see the same string of numbers or chords

And hear the same unfinished symphony.

And you pray for the third movement, the fourth movement.

How did all this begin? As I stated three years ago, five years ago, nine years ago, I can hardly remember my childhood as if I had none, as if one could live an adult life and die without wandering in one's second childhood. You just say to them, whoever they are (angels, humans): 'I'm not in my second childhood for the simple reason that I had no childhood in my childhood and consequently can't imitate my own childish behaviour.' But there were people around me, and some of them enjoined my brain to say a few words to them so as not to induce them to drop heavy resounding objects behind my back to find out if I was not deaf into the bargain. Mute I was, but what about my deafness? I heard many sounds related to the fall of those objects, and many years later, when I asked my father what the fall of the Roman Empire had looked like, he said, 'Just look at the ruins of our churches destroyed by Soviet atheists. And if you wish to know how this decline and fall sounded, you should recall the objects we dropped behind your back nine years ago.' There were objects, humans; in other words, I was not alone. During some early period of your life you cannot help hearing your fellow-creatures, their voices and thoughts as if you could not live and die without them; in peace. Apparently you cannot, whatever your interior monologues might hope for.

CONFUSION MARKETING

Any liquid or gas is a collection of individual bits, so many that they may as well be infinite. If each piece moved independently, then the fluid would have infinitely many possibilities, infinitely many 'degrees of freedom' in the jargon, and the equations describing the motion would have to deal with infinitely many variables. But each particle does not move independently – its motion depends very much on the motion of its neighbours – and in a smooth flow, the degrees of freedom can be few. Potentially complex movements remain coupled together. Nearby bits remain nearby or drift apart in a smooth, linear way that produces neat lines in wind-tunnel pictures. The particles in a column of cigarette smoke rise as one, for a while.

James Gleick, *Chaos*

If you sit back in your armchair and take the trouble to look at the human race and its history – for once I cannot add 'if any' – you might realise there are very few 'degrees of freedom' (jargon or no jargon) available to the representatives of our species; even if they 'own' a few domestic animals such as cats or foxes. These could give us a multitude of lessons related to freedom and its derivatives. Actually they do give us such lessons, but we are unable to learn anything except multiplication tables and the Highway Code. At the very beginning of our lives, we are given lessons by our mothers, aunts and uncles who touch our legs and say, 'This leg of yours is awry. Do you understand the word "awry"?'

'I don't,' you answer sincerely and truthfully. Neither your sincerity nor your truthfulness is rewarded by your dogmatic parents: whenever they pontificate in your company, they forget your intelligence and genius, if any.

'Suppose I ruffle your hair with my hand,' says your uncle. 'Now your hair is awry, you see.'

‘I can’t see anything,’ you say in your turn.

‘All right. Let us make our way to the nearest mirror. Voilà. Can you see anything *now*?’

‘I can see your reflection, your head’s reflection, my dear uncle.’

‘What about *your* head, my dear nephew?’

‘I can see it too.’

‘Can you see your hair?’

‘I can.’

‘How would you define the state your hair is in?’

‘It’s unkempt, my dear uncle.’

‘It’s unkempt, awry and greasy, my dear nephew. When did you wash your hair last?’

Then your uncle switches the current of his thoughts (their trains and currents) to another subject, namely your legs where the whole discussion began, being triggered off by the position of your right foot. Your right foot was not right, and I cannot say it was wrong *for once* because it has been wrong for several months, which resulted in quite a few spectacular falls. Of course your relatives are over the moon, whenever given an opportunity to lift your body from the floor and hold it high in the air as if showing it off, as if the hosts of angels did not know all its curves by heart. Actually they (our angels) talk about your baby rather often, saying among other things, ‘What if he breaks his legs and arms? Will he be as beautiful as his brother and sister?’ Well, your uncle thinks you should not fall too often: it is all the more unnecessary as he can remove you from any carpet and raise your body above his head at any time unless you are engrossed in your sausage or porridge oats, while sitting at the dinner table. Anyway, now both of you (you and your uncle) are on the floor, and your uncle is at pains to demonstrate the right position of your right or left foot: both of them are deficient in these matters, in the matters related to walking around and jumping for joy. So your uncle grasps your foot, your guilty, clumsy foot and twists it, determined to find the right position for its big and little toes. Then he loosens his grip and you begin to hobble around, although your legs, toes and calves are not injured yet. All this is done for the sake of linguistics, of the right usage of words which may remind one of the statuses enjoyed by words in the days of Ancient Greeks and Adam’s sojourn in Paradise. ‘This is a tree,’ he said once or once upon a time; and everybody including God and Eve saw the Tree of Knowledge. ‘And this is knowledge,’ said Adam (once upon the same time) and the knowledge in question – any piece of knowledge is brimful with questions – became detached from the stem, twigs and branches: in those days knowledge was detachable. So your uncle tells you this breathtaking story and you realise that your breath is also detachable – to some extent at least. Then your breath returns to you – there are so many prodigal sons in the world! – and you say about your uncle afterwards, several years later, ‘My life was greatly enriched by knowing him and knowing what he knew.’

To cut a long story short – to cut short or down the Tree of Knowledge, to some extent, in other words – most parents steer a middle course between strict discipline and letting their kids run wild. But even when you ran wild, you were watched by your parents, uncles and aunts, and so now and then you heard, ‘You’re too wild, Michael. You shouldn’t run so wild. You can *walk* so wild, if you wish. But running wild to this extent may land you in serious trouble with the rest of the human race. You might knock someone off his or her pedestal, and human beings like spending their lives on pedestals. You might also knock your head against the wall on one of your numerous falls. And this time your fall will stem from your inability to reduce the speed of your movement.’

Well and good. You live in a sort of straitjacket and there is nothing you can do about it, even if from time to time you erupt into fury. Let us recall the following sentence, 'The particles in a column of cigarette smoke rise as one, for a while.' Suppose you are part of this smoke rising gently into the air. As you look around you your eyes fall on your uncles, aunts and even on your nephews. You are all in the same boat or rather smoke; yes, you are in the same cigarette smoke, and one begins to wonder whether you were in the same cigarette during the period prior to your elevation or rather to your unhealthy journey through the air.

Many specialists describe the Big Bang thus, 'God leaned back thoughtfully and blew a puff of smoke into the air.' That accounts for the pollution we suffer from, putting the blame for our cancers on chimneys and other instruments of doom. Well, after the Fall the Almighty grew addicted to cigarettes, cigars, pipes and suchlike; He is a compulsive smoker now. On the day of our birth we find ourselves in the column of smoke minutely depicted by John Gleick in his epoch-making book. But He is *not* a compulsive liar/thief/eater, contrary to what many atheists and blasphemers maintain day in day out. Of course what counts during your ascension – actually it is a descent we are concerned with – happens to be your exemplary behaviour: you are not supposed to deviate from your path, your trajectory which should keep you in touch with your fellow creatures; otherwise the column would no longer be a column. So your aunt is likely to say to you, whispering into one of your ears, 'I know you wish to fly like a bird going from the North to the South, and vice versa, but if you do grow a pair of wings, you'll be far from our common purpose, from the harmony to which the human race directs its steps – not its *wings*, mind you.' Of course you point out that the birds you often see in the sky during their intercontinental journeys flock together, forming triangles and other geometric figures. 'You're not a bird,' your aunt might say to you rather angrily: your remarks have eventually got under her skin. 'We're a family – we have to stick together.' Once again you disagree with your aunt who took you under her wing last month, after your mother's fatal disease. What happens is beautifully described in James Gleick's book:

Then confusion appears, a menagerie of mysterious wild motions. Sometimes these motions received names: the oscillatory, the skewed varicose, the cross-roll, the knot, the zigzag. In Landau's view, these unstable new motions simply accumulated, one on top of another, creating rhythms with overlapping speeds and sizes. Conceptually, this orthodox idea of turbulence seemed to fit the facts, and if the theory was mathematically useless – which it was – well, so be it.

A controversy arose at the very outset of these investigations and of the phenomenon as such. We might call it 'the unfolding of the Big Bang', but that would be rather presumptuous, considering the intricacies of other Big Bang theories implicating sub-atomic particles, waves and expansions of all kinds. Let us just say that the legends I am enlarging (or expanding) upon allow us to get the inside or psychological picture of the process about which so many people wrote their theses, dissertations and high-brow books. Well, this controversy is related to the direction taken by the column issued from someone's (not necessarily God's) mouth, lungs and cancers. Should we call this phenomenon or adventure 'ascension'? If the identity of the smoker remains as mysterious as it has been so far, we might affirm that the column rises not only towards the clouds, but also in the direction of angels and other God-begotten creatures. (Let us leave aside human beings and their God-like images, bodies and souls.) It is true and the truth of this statement seems corroborated by the growing estrangement from the vice traditionally

designated through the caveat ‘smoking is bound to kill you’. You are flying further and further from the smoker, from his or her addiction, from his or her mortal sin, from his or her inability to remove the pernicious habit from his or her precarious life quite literally going up in smoke. And let us not overlook the literal sense of our statement: the smoke does go upward in spite of the zigzags, circles and other products of its doodling. Some beauty-stricken observers say to their colleagues, ‘Look at that ellipse. Doesn’t it remind you of Venus?’

‘Are you talking about the planet?’

‘I’m talking about beauty.’

There are smokers of genius – there is no denying it. Smoking does not prevent you from creating masterpieces on a regular basis; not day in day out, though. Besides, in addition to all these masterpieces and brilliant thoughts, you construct a column and you can say to sceptics and dimwits, ‘It’s just an architectural element of the castle I’m about to build for the benefit of humanity. I’ll install a hospital in this castle for the needy and all the underdogs you see in the streets of our city and in our suburbs. Of course I could live in this castle myself – I’m very fond of castles, pillars and Le Nôtre-inspired parks. But this time I think we should give a thought to the underprivileged and invalids who can’t even walk along our streets, in the midst (or rather in the mists) of our polluted air – because they can’t walk at all. So we’ll convey them to this castle and they’ll take advantage of the swimming pool I’ll install in the middle of the garden, not far from its most beautiful bushes, flowers and butterflies. So they’ll plunge their poor bodies into the pool and enjoy the view I’ll offer them without asking for any contribution to my wealth.’ But we should not forget that, among the smokers I am talking about, there are several specialists whose interests and passion lie in the distant past, in ancient Greece where columns, pillars and palaces were as common as one-room mud huts with grass roofs – a prominent feature of our landscapes and cityscapes. So you invite a score of smokers to your living room and ask them to build a castle in the air: you long to give a history lesson to your children who are unaware of how our common ancestors lived before the Christian era. They might think they did not live at all, considering that their standards of living were not up to our standards; or to any living, to put it mildly. In short, they did not live at all, and Julius Caesar exists only in books meant for children and for our human, modern vocabulary. Instead of searching for pompous, inadequate idioms, we can just say, ‘The die is cast. You’re to die.’ You can also say as you point with your walking stick to a brook, ‘This is my Rubicon. Once I’m on the other side, I’ll get a Nobel Prize for physics.’

But what we are really concerned with has nothing to do with ancient or modern Greece; or with other countries scattered around our globe, around our global village, around our dotage. I’m afraid the previous sentence is a fake-sentence: it conveys to my computer a piece of information that corresponds neither to the truth I have been searching for since my coming to terms with my consciousness nor to objective facts. (But our dotage is real, I’m afraid.) What are these objective facts, one may ask? If one does ask this question I can re-quote the aforementioned excerpt from James Gleick’s book, which starts on a pessimistic note: ‘Then confusion appears, a menagerie of mysterious wild motions. Sometimes these motions received names: the oscillatory, the skewed varicose, the cross-roll, the knot, the zigzag.’ Sure enough, as soon as I open my eyes I see either a cross-roll or a variety of the Gordian knot or a meaningless zigzag. (I wonder if there remain momentous, consequential zigzags in our contemporary world.) The Gordian knot I contemplate in the opposite corner of my room does not incite me to pick up a sword and cut it into pieces. So I say to myself, ‘Let it hang in that corner as long as it feels like it. I just don’t care either about this knot or about that zigzag. Live and let live. Let them live their ridiculous,

vacuous lives. What are they, I wonder? Are they empty symbols or ominous omens? Are they men, women or androgynous children? Are they bits of matter? Are they lost and found souls?’

One of these figures is called Donald Trump. This figure speaks as if bent on proving the following axiom, ‘Everything begins and ends in the domain of language. Words use our mouths and notebooks as a spawning ground.’ So this president of the United States opens his mouth, switches on his computers, and his words begin to glitter (as his partisans maintain): ‘I was dreadfully ill a few days ago. I was so weak I couldn’t speak as a real president of our country should speak and act. I could raise my arm, but I was unable to salute the crowd gathered under my balcony, in front of the White House that should be redecorated, in my opinion. It’s not white enough, you know. So many democrats have blackened its walls that I often ask myself if I don’t deliver my speeches in a camera *obscura*, of all places. Well, I was ill but I’m back on my feet again. And if you question my words’ veracity and trustworthiness, just look at my feet, at their beauty and energy. You could also cast a glance at my back, while you’re at it. And don’t forget my eyes that speak to you about American prosperity of which I’m taking care by swallowing the medicine prescribed by American doctors. But I no longer am submitted to the treatment my doctor must have described in one of his interviews because I’m cured and consequently have no need of medication, of restoration of any kind. I’m restored and on top form as you can see while looking at my radiant features, at my prophetic, testifying eyes.’

Some say we cannot improve upon the ingredients of humanity: it is up to God to embark upon this restoration or another creation. Of course we could (if necessary) restore Julius Caesar, but that would not be enough: many Juliuses and Caesars have already turned into Stalins, Maos and so ons. (And Napoleons turned into Raskolnikovs.) The context we use for our deeds and misdeeds is quite different, and the setting of the play we are performing counts a lot, according to Marx, Engels and Foucault. All right, Julius Caesar is already in our midst, as I usually say when talking about mists and crowds, but the ingredients of his reign – the inhabitants of Rome, in other words – are not the same. Now we have at our disposal either the Americans or the Europeans or the Australians. And they are all alike: they are humans, so to speak, and no one can speak differently unless one prefers to speak of animals, disregarding humans and their customs altogether. (This is my case, until further notice.) So these humans of ours – the ones walking around us in the streets – keep shouting, ‘Hi, Hitler,’ or ‘Five cheers for Stalin. Be of good cheer, our dictator!’ And it is pointless (try as you may) to remind them we are in ancient Rome and the dictator we see in front of us, his arm symbolically raised as if in imitation of Hitler’s ‘hello’, happens to bear another name, another patronymic. No, no – there is no patronymic to speak of: he is not Julius *Pavlovich* Caesar. He is just Julius Caesar disliked and disapproved of by his adoptive or foster child. (And *du, du, Brutus*?) No, nothing doing. We say to these numerous pedestrians that there is no point in shouting ‘Hey, Hitler!’ because this Hitler of yours lost many battles and also the Second World War, if you please, if you displease. As for Stalin, he killed so many people – he had quite a collection of Kalashnikovs – that we had better scream blue murder upon seeing his figure at close range or at any range whatsoever: ‘It’s your own murder we’re shouting, you know. Die, die as Tito Gobi did as he listened to Maria Callas’ voice.’

‘All right, I’m prepared to obey your orders,’ says Stalin. ‘And I’ll swear I’ll drop dead on the spot if you ring La Callas up to say I’d like to hear her interpretation of Tosca composed by Puccini.’

‘But Maria Callas is dead.’

‘So what? I’m also dead if you must know.’

‘We know, we know. But you should die many deaths, as Shakespeare put it – in *Othello*, I suppose. You should expiate your crimes by dying as often as necessary for such expiation.’

‘Do you want me to die every blessed minute? Every blessed second?’

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘All right, I’m dead. I’m dead again. Again, again. Dead, dead, dead. Buried, buried, buried.’

It is noteworthy that for almost 10 years Stalin shouted, ‘Not buried, not buried,’ for his corpse was lying at the Mausoleum, from 1953 to 1962.

BETTER DEAD

Feigenbaum found himself asking what sort of mathematical formalisms might correspond to human perception, particularly a perception that sifted the messy multiplicity of experience and found universal qualities. (I also ask myself what could correspond to human perception, assuming that humans perceive anything apart from a red piece of cloth. Are we different from bulls? We are in a sort of arena – there is no denying it. And if someone feels like doing it, like denying it, then we can say to this someone, ‘Well, you’re in the arena, whether you wish it or not. Of course if you feel like denying your whereabouts and their definitions – an area, a lunatic asylum – you are entitled to do it because we’re not in a hurry. We have a sort of eternity ahead of us. And please don’t ask us what sort of eternity we are prepared to avail ourselves of. All right, we’re listening, we’re listening.’ And someone says, ‘You know, the world is a palace, a castle. What’s more, it is *my* castle. And there are no matadors either in front of my body or behind it.’ And you can say to someone, ‘You’re your own matador, my dear sir.’) Redness is not necessarily a particular bandwidth of light, as the Newtonians would have it. (The Newtonians are not the only people whose consciousness directs our understanding of nature and the cosmos in this direction. Actually, I have no idea what this direction is about – no idea about its whereabouts, you know. The point is this redness – there are many of them, points – is a sort of symbol, and whenever one or someone sees it, they begin to run or rush in the direction of this symbol or rather towards whatever it symbolises. This time – and for many times which are things of the past – this signifies communism and its benefits. ‘Communism fits the bill,’ as they used to shout in the streets and elsewhere. ‘Why?’ they were asked now and then by innocent-looking pedestrians. ‘Because the bill fits communism,’ they would answer. ‘Why?’ they were asked again and again. ‘Because redness is necessarily a particular bandwidth of light,’ they would answer. ‘And light is just the opposite of darkness. Plato didn’t like darkness, according to our sources. And our sources are always right because they’re “left sources”. So Plato, Marx and Lenin grasped our bodies and minds, determined to convey them to the domain universally known as “the domain of light, progress and prosperity”. Incidentally we disagree with the Newtonians because redness has nothing to do with this bandwidth of light. It is a *world* of light or paradise on Earth, if you please.’ ‘We’re not pleased,’ someone might say, shaking someone’s head. ‘This communism of yours assassinated too many people, some of whom were as red as you are. Red in the face, you know.’) It is the territory of a chaotic universe, and the boundaries of that territory are not so easy to describe – yet our minds find redness with regular and verifiable consistency. (Yes, some of us think that even the Americans are communists, for all the hatred they manifest with regard to this downward movement. Mass culture is a piece of red cloth which is given as an example of American communism. Every Hollywood movie is a piece of red cloth towards which they rush headlong so as not to miss it because of some hurricane or other. They say to each other, ‘Let us watch this movie tonight – Katrina is

scheduled for the end of the week. But they're always wrong, those meteorologists. So let us run towards the nearest cinema.' And they do run towards several cinemas which are often overcrowded on account of Katrina whose ineluctable march is a funeral march in disguise. One cannot help wondering, however, whether communist countries may teach us something – something to someone – about our chaotic universe. It is true that the boundaries of communism are not easy to define, given our addictions to Stalins, Trumps and other leaders. Trump talks to his followers gathered in front of the White House, but there are other followers and other Trumps in California. And not all of them look like Trump or Hillary Clinton. Sometimes they do not look like anyone at all. But they carry placards with slogans and shout, 'Hey, hi, hail, heil!' And they brandish something or someone for hours on end. And when these hours come to an end, they begin to brandish someone else. Sometimes they do not even know the identity of the him, her or it that they brandish. But what counts for them and history is the verb 'to brandish', not the subject to which this verb is applied.)

James Gleick, *Chaos*

I don't think that to explain what happens in the world and how our (or rather their) consciousness acts, functions and judges we need to bring up their quantum mechanics and their controversies, their gods and dice; and deities in general. We just say, 'He signed the death warrant,' and someone collapses in some courtyard or other after hearing or not hearing a dozen shots. There is at least one firing squad in every civilised country, and someone is bound to stand in front of this squad, of this human squalor – now and then or every other hour. Nor do we need to resort to cats of all kinds, knowing that if we surround and convey to a laboratory a thousand cats, one of them will certainly be called 'Schrödinger's cat'. And of course we remember what this is all about because we are cats, at least to some extent, even if we have no idea what Schrödinger did and why we should talk about him at all. But if we happen to belong to the category linked to this physicist and his theory, our bottom lip might begin to tremble; and tears could well up in our eyes. In our cage there is a bottle bearing the following inscription: 'Poison.' There is also a tiny quantity of air, and this quantity is divided in two. One half is entitled 'Fresh Air' and the other 'Polluted Air'; or 'poison', to give it its true name. Someone looks at us and we either collapse or jump for joy – because we did not collapse a few moments ago. 'At some point,' as Schrödinger pointed out, 'things must become definite. But physics itself does not tell us when.' Of course both messiahs and prophets say when all this is sure to happen: they are so sure of their own predictions they consult neither fortune-tellers nor astrologists. They say, 'Tomorrow,' and their arms make significant, tale-telling gestures. And every feature of their faces speaks volumes about what lies in store for us, what story will be recounted about our unhappy ending. But our numerous deaths should be perceived by a conscious observer; otherwise we shall never die either naturally or unnaturally, either organically or artificially, pestilentially.

This observer is right here, and he says to everybody present, 'I'm conscious of his and her deaths.' And everyone collapses at the same moment, in unison, as if in imitation of an orchestra directed by an American conductor; not by Furtwängler, mind you. This observer is Stalin of course: at one point he signed as many as 3,000 death warrants in the course of one night. One wonders if this night was wholly (unholy) sleepless or not: he might have slept three hours, according to my calculations. The other day I read about an American physicist who goes by the name of Henry Stapp. He continues to argue that quantum waves collapse when intelligent brains

select one among the alternative quantum possibilities as a basis for future action. This assertion might mean that Stalin, Mao and Poll Pot were more intelligent than most other humans whose brains contain neither firing squads nor Kalashnikovs. All right, all right. Anyway, this interpretation of quantum mechanics is simultaneously a theory of consciousness. Of whose consciousness, may I ask? It is specifically the parts of the brain that are involved in quantum collapses that constitute consciousness.

Well and good. I write a sentence and if nothing quantum collapses, I remove this sentence from my computer screen. Then I open a file and look around to find out if anything is about to collapse, demonstrating the excellence of my work. Nothing collapses, contrary to my great expectations, great hopes and inborn optimism. So I rise and kick a chair; it collapses and I applaud my unquestionable achievement. I also listen to the only recording of Brezhnev's speeches I ceremoniously keep in my library. I listen to the standing ovation recorded for the sake of posterity and democratic opponents. And I bow to the audience, twice, three times. But one cannot be satisfied with such a self-congratulatory performance, and sooner or later one is sure to switch to more productive gestures directly related to masterpieces written under the influence of the stars, muses and one's moods. So you pick up your computer and let it drop or collapse to exhibit its importance: if a quantum wave does not collapse, it continues to roll and cross its own puddle of which we know next to nothing. We cannot even bathe in this puddle, let alone explore its depths, bottom and fishes. Quantum mechanics are uncertain and the word 'fuzzy' often crops up in its neighbourhood, on a scientist's writing desk, and you are discouraged, disheartened, and your hopes die out as if unable to resist the second law of thermodynamics. But if your computer meets your gaze as it lies on the floor of your study, silent and inimical to creative expression, you might say to yourself, 'Something did happen in my life. I wish I could know exactly how many collapses are strewn all over my days and nights. I harbour an uncanny feeling that I haven't lived for nothing. To paraphrase a widespread Russian saying, one might say, "Show me your collapses and I'll tell you who you are."' And then you yield to Wildean temptation and collapse yourself. But before indulging in your own falls and traumas, you should prepare a few versions of the performance entitled 'My Affinities with Quantum Mechanics' or just 'Our Brotherhood'. Here are a few examples of what I have in mind.

Your friend says to you, 'I should think you're about ready to collapse after all that walking.'

'You're right, my friend. I've been walking for two hours at least, and my legs are killing me. So are my back and spine. To tell the truth, I have the feeling that whatever part of my body we might select for our discussion, we can call it a "contract killer".'

'But you have a very strong constitution, don't you?'

'I don't, I don't. That's why I'm about ready to collapse right now, on this particular spot.'

'You never complain of your unsound constitution and so one's driven to the following conclusion: "Your constitution is sound."'

'What sound are you speaking of? I remind myself of a badly tuned piano. A few days ago I decided to race down the street to catch up with a bus. At the end of the race my legs gave out and I collapsed on the ground. This is my last masterpiece, you know.'

You and your computer, your manuscripts collapse every morning, every night, as if in accordance with William Blake's prediction. And the resistance of the surface on which you land as you continue to create your masterpieces reminds you of the sub-atomic particles that bounce off this and that, resolved to distance themselves

from the crowd, from the stream, from demonstrations and revolutions. And you recall Dante's tercets, his words that bounce off their fellow creatures as they create (consciously and unconsciously) a Hereafter that is tailor-made for Dante and his worshippers. And you had better picture to yourself something along the same lines (Dante's lines and verses). Isn't it the only way to come to terms with your fellow-creatures? Of course they do not understand a word of what you habitually say as you do your utmost to make them realise to what extent the representatives of human species have been led astray by their unsuitable desires and goals. There are only two ways of dealing with your colleagues: either you bow and scrape to them and your bosses or you bow out, saying, 'My quantum wave has just collapsed. I hope you get two Nobel Prizes in the near future. Of course you don't know the first thing about life, science, poetry and music, but never mind, never mind. You're a bunch of unconscious beings, bent on earning money and brutalising your colleagues. Well, you've succeeded splendidly and your brutality unquestionably deserves a Nobel Prize for brutality.'

'Do you think we belong to a race of bacteria?' they ask.

'I wouldn't go that far –'

'Please go as far as you can. How far can you go? Who are we, in your opinion? A colony of bacteria?'

'Whatever you say, whatever you say.'

'Many sorts of bacteria are resistant to penicillin. Do you think we're resistant to penicillin? In our opinion, we *are* resistant to it, otherwise you would already have killed us. A long time ago. However, let us tell you that bacteria have a limited form of consciousness. Do you know why? Because they embody informational states.'

And then someone steps forward and says, 'I am a child of reason and as such pure, perfect and without flaw.'

Actually, they utter these words on their deathbeds, judging from what one sees in the film inspired by Henry James' *The Bostonians*. At least they seem to carry out this ritual in Boston, and it is probably still on their agenda, for everybody wishes to assure the Almighty that everything is all right, as they say somewhere – in the United States of America, I suppose. I am sure I heard this particular version of 'all right' either several years ago or at the end of the 20th century. Doesn't matter, doesn't matter. I am not yet on my deathbed and so I wonder if I can say to everybody, facing the camera they always face in studios and even in the streets, 'I am a child of reason and so on.' Am I a child or reason? What is reason? Is it identical to mind, brain or logic? And once again we are getting bogged down in human nature, substance, thoughts and what they call 'fuzzy logic'. Is the nature of this last variety of logic vague, imprecise, unreliable, and untrustworthy? It is just fuzzy, the fuzzy partisans reply. Let us take two sentences: 'Is the picture always fuzzy on your TV?' 'You can pick up a lot of stations on the car radio but the sound is usually a bit fuzzy.' You can also enquire about the human capacity to go deeper and deeper into the problems that arise within the context of life. And if you do enquire as to the whereabouts of their (human) answers, you may hear the following words, 'Very true', 'fairly true', 'reasonably false', 'unreasonably false', 'completely false' and so on and so forth (false). So, whenever you hear the aforementioned remark 'I am a child of reason and as such pure, perfect and without flaw', you can point out that the child upon whom the dying man or woman has just touched has only unreasonable reason – 'within your reach', you might add if you happen to talk to the woman shown in James Ivory's film. And if no one – neither the film director nor the cameraman – prevents you from making a speech, you can go on thus, 'My dear lady, I'm pretty sure you're not acquainted with the Sorites paradox. What this paradox endeavours to teach us comes down to the following statement, 'We do not

really know what our words mean, since it is accepted that knowing what a word means involves knowing how to apply it correctly. But the solution explicitly denies that we have this sort of knowledge.'

DUNGHILL

'What solution are you talking about?' asks the lady, fearing the question might contain her last words.

'Do you think you have enough time for my explanation?' you ask. 'After all you're on your deathbed and – in my opinion at least – you'd better give a thought to your immortal soul and its ultimate salvation.'

'I'd like to know the solution,' says the lady. 'This is my last will.'

'All right, all right. If you could wait a minute, I'll show you the ins and outs of how this paradox works. I'll also show you the way out of the situation we found ourselves in on account of your unwholesome curiosity.' At this point the professor turns towards his assistant and says, 'Please, take care of the heap of sand I left in the entrance hall.' A few minutes later the assistant comes in with a bucket. He empties the bucket on the floor and everyone sees a heap of sand. 'Can you see this heap of sand, my dear woman?' asks the academic.

'What do you take me for?' asks the lady. 'If everyone can see it, I can see it too.'

'Sorry, sorry. I'm not taking you for a corpse yet. So let's tackle the Sorites paradox, if you don't mind. And then we'll pass on to your mind and its functions, solutions and its relationship with your brain. But first you'd better ask your mind to concentrate on this heap of sand.'

'Is it my mind I should talk to?'

'What else, my dear lady? Who else? Your brain?'

'I might talk to my eyes. If they don't see the heap, I won't be able to concentrate on it.'

'All right. Talk to your eyes first.'

'My eyes say they're dead tired.'

'Are they dead or just tired?'

'Both.'

'All right, all right. Suppose you do see the heap of sand I'm talking about.'

'I can hear your words, you know. And yet I haven't talked to my ears, not yet.'

'Don't talk to them, my dear woman. Time is short. Just think about them once in a while. Suppose I remove one grain of sand from the heap.'

'I can't see the grain.'

'Never mind, never mind. You can trust my words that you're listening to. I've just removed one grain from the heap we're talking about. Do you think it's the heap we're talking about? Or is it something else?'

'What are *you* talking about?'

'It's the heap I'm talking about.'

'So it's the heap we're talking about.'

I have already talked about this experiment in relation to the human body and brain from which you can remove as many particles as you wish – in your eagerness to arrive at the truth. And what is this truth about, pray? as they usually say. We are hankering after the solution to the problem centred upon our personal 'to be or not to be' – the question embedded in our minds or brains or psychologies. What if we remove one-tenth of our life from our body? 'All right,' they say. 'You can remove my thumbs – I don't really need them. Of course if you're not

duty bound to remove *anything* from my body or mind, just leave me alone. Will you? But if God paid you a visit last night and said, “John won’t go to Paradise if you don’t remove anything from his body,” I’ll allow you to remove my thumbs. And a few thoughts – this thought, for instance. You can remove something from my body. I can sacrifice this thought, you know, for the sake of my salvation or anti-damnation, as I put it. All right, now I’m thumbless, as you can see and feel. Aren’t we shaking hands? Can’t you feel my thumbs’ absence? Aren’t they conspicuous by their absence? But I’m still a human being, as Mr Sorites might have put it, had he been alive and kicking. If he’s alive but not kicking, it might mean he allowed you to remove his legs from his body – for the sake of his paradisiacal eternity and bliss. I know that the Sorites paradox trades on the fact that there are no rules to determine the number of grains of sand in a heap. And the same paradox trades on the fact that there are no rules to determine the number of thoughts in a human brain. Human being. How many thoughts do we need to be allowed to use this expression or appellation? *Appellation contrôlée*, as the French put it, when referring to a bottle of wine. We ask a supposedly human being to talk to us for a while. While listening to this human, we do not fail to count the thoughts he or she emits as she or he continues to talk – for hours on end; otherwise the number of thoughts we are to input into our computer will never reach the desirable level or amount. If the human we are talking to happens to stop in the middle of a human remark, the computer will inform us that the being we are talking to is not human. And the dear lady I talked about around 5 a.m. is dead to the world or rather to the word – to the logos, if you please.’

Microbes and humans might be thought to represent the opposite poles of life – even in the distant parts of the cosmos, given our basic uniformity; or similarity, as some phraseologists say and think. The laws (natural and unnatural) are the same everywhere, even if you succeed in reaching the other end of all galaxies thanks to some holes or threads you find under microscopes or above telescopes. Since the laws are identical everywhere, down to nowhere, an inhuman human can say with a self-assertive smile, ‘All right, you call me Michael Microbe. Don’t you know that all physical systems have consciousness? Why, do you ask? Because Chalmers’ definition of “information” is satisfied by pretty much any causal process. Panpsychism, if you please. Consciousness pervades the natural world.’

But another question arises in relation to whatever has been said on the subject, and this question can be answered only if we accept controls and their interventions. If we have no control over a phenomenon, if this phenomenon spins out of control (I am free, it declares), we have no alternative but to conclude that our consciousness went on a spree – yesterday or the day before. In other words, if our representation plays no role in ‘controlling behaviour’, as they often put it, we are deprived of consciousness and its boons, its atoms. Perhaps we have never been conscious of anything. When, in what circumstances are we able to make the most of our judgement, powers and privileges associated with the status of humans? If, during our stroll along a street, we hear a dog – not only its footsteps, but also its barks – we can shout, hoping to reach his master’s ears, ‘Are you asleep, the master of this dog? It is you I’m talking to, you know. If you can’t control your dog, put it on a lead! Do you know that your dog is about to bite my ankle? Are you going to do anything about it? You should stop this aggression, this interference in my private life!’ Shouting or rather being able to shout is habitually associated with humans’ powers and privileges. Of course the dog in question shouts too, and it does not really matter what we call its (or her) shouts. Sometimes humans wish they could bark, when in need of help. *Primo*, barks are much louder than human cries, shouts and screams, however piercing and alarming. *Secundo*, many humans are prepared

to save their dogs from brutal hands and kicks – even at the cost of their lives. They would never do anything of the kind for a representative of their own race.

Well, shouting will lead you nowhere unless a policeman you catch sight of feels like lodging a few bullets in the dog's vulnerable belly. There is no denying that in this case your judgement played an important role in your rescue. 'The dog growled and bared its fangs,' you said to yourself, whereupon you caught sight of the policeman's gun. So you cried, 'Officer! Could you please draw your gun or unsheathe your sword? This dog is about to put me to death!' And a few seconds later you realised that for once you had been able to control a policeman's acts, heroic deeds. But now you wish to know which part of your substance accomplished this incomparable feat. ('What a feast!' you said to the policeman, availing yourself of the dog's blood – of its sight, not of its taste, alas.) The brain or the mind. Which one did it? And then you recalled a piece of information you had hastily classified as minor or superfluous. 'Ephiphenomenalism differs from pre-established harmony in allowing causal influences "upwards" from brain to mind while denying any "downwards" causation from conscious mind to brain.' So first we should deal with this harmony. This harmony is mentioned many times in old texts to which we still have access in spite of the fire ravaging the library of Alexandria and other libraries of ancient and modern worlds. In these books they talk about the harmony conceived by the Almighty whose might (in those days) was directly focused upon an overall harmony. Even today we often miss out on melodies, being drawn towards harmonious solutions to our problems. What do we call a 'harmonious solution'? The people who happen to suffer from such and such an illness are called either 'sufferers' or 'the incurably damaged' or 'the weak' or 'the expendable'. On the other side, on the side of health and prosperity we have 'the rich', 'the rolling-in-it', 'the obese' who do not suffer yet, members of the 'Health-and-Wealth' club that functions 24 hours a day. The harmony alluded to by Leibniz enables us to keep these groups intact; otherwise they might get in touch with each other and mix almost irremediably. If the rich mix with the poor, if we are all in the same boat, then the boat is likely to collapse in the course of its encounter with any wave, however insignificant or unwavy, as they say nowadays. Neither Leibniz nor God opted for disorder in those days, in the days when pre-established harmony was finally established. Then Leibniz died and God got distracted from His studies, work and thoughts; and we began to go down the drain where only disorder awaited us and other representatives of the human race.

So now we often ask ourselves and others, 'Why this cacophony?' Our question grows more and more unquestionable and unsolvable – with the passing of time. Let me tell you that time never passes over pre-established or any other form of harmony, being out-of-tune, so to speak. If time listens to the string theory about which our scientists have boasted for almost 40 years, if I am not bitterly mistaken, it comes to the inevitable conclusion, 'The strings I'm listening to are out of tune and their products are dissonances, not C Major triumphs and consolations.' Anyway both God and time (and our species) have drifted away from pre-established harmony, heading for what they justly call 'established cacophony'. But their opponents define the same phenomena as 'newborn harmony'. Why did this controversy arise in the first and second place? Well, you mix the poor in spirit and the rich in spirit. The former are bound to enter Paradise, the latter will be late. They will bump into a closed door and collapse in front of this door. The opponents, however, say that the rich will never make their way to Paradise – in the first place. They are forbidden to walk in the direction of what is called 'eternal bliss'. So they have no alternative but to go in the opposite direction – towards Hell, in other words. Of course they pray intensely before setting off for Hell – for the simple reason that they have no intention of landing up in Hell's prisons and

gulags. They take a few steps and then retrace these steps, resolved to walk towards the golden apples of the Hesperides associated in their minds with Paradise and its ecstasies. They say to their colleagues and friends, 'I'll be eternally happy if I see those four sister nymphs called the Hesperides on my way.'

'And what about the apples you expatiated on for almost an hour?'

'I'll enjoy them after making love to the sisters.'

'Will you sleep with them on the same night?'

'On the same day. I intend to arrive in their kingdom by noon.'

'Will you be able to sustain the effort needed for such a sexual exploit?'

'You can count on my athletic constitution. Besides, I'll wear a T-shirt featuring the Superman.'

'Which Superman? The one depicted by Nietzsche or the one one can admire in Hollywood's movies?'

'Both, both. Apparently the sisters I'm talking about are both mature and childish. Their philosophical upbringing doesn't prevent them from enjoying childish games.'

'Do they still play with dolls?'

'No, they play with Heracles.'

'Is he still available?'

'His doll is on the market and that fits the bill.'

But let us leave the affluent to their childish games and turn our attention to the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. If asked, 'What the difference we touch upon?' we can answer thus, 'The Old Testament is more orderly, more organised, more harmonised because the rich and the poor are separated, which does not necessarily mean the rich hold the poor at bay. No, it is not true because sometimes the rich traverse the space lying in between them and the poor and give the latter a bar of chocolate instead of always giving them a piece of bread. And then the rich return home situated on the right; and the poor stay on the left where they live and do not prosper despite the chocolate they get from the rich, especially on Sundays and at Christmastime. Let us now consider what really happens within the bounds of the New Testament related to our Resurrection and all sorts of mixtures or disorders. The poor begin to budge from where they rot. Why? Because Jesus said to them, 'We must try to stop the rot before the whole community is corrupted.'

'How to stop the rot?' they asked.

'You should get moving.'

'How?'

'By taking steps, by putting one foot ahead of the other.'

'And what if we fall?'

'I've already atoned for the biggest fall in our history. So there are no other falls lying in store for you on your way to Paradise.'

'You're a name to conjure with,' they said to Jesus. 'Other people say, "How am I expected to conjure up a meal for six of his friends with almost nothing in the fridge?" But you conjured up three thousand fishes, if we're not mistaken. Out of nothing.'

'Out of the sea,' said Jesus.

'All right, all right. Can't you conjure up Paradise from your hat? In an instant?'

'As you can see, I have no hat.'

‘Conjure it up from your pullover.’

But Jesus repeated his injunction and they began to walk or rather hobble (you cannot really *walk* on an empty stomach) in the direction of Paradise. After a while – after a few centuries – they eventually saw the rich, looking at them from their balconies that continue to embellish their castles. What is the difference between the castles of the rich and those of the poor? The former’s castles are not built in the air, even if they thrust up into the sky. So the poor nodded their heads and decided to mix – if only for a while –with a wide variety of well-heeled ladies and gentlemen. The well-heeled specimens of our species are astonished to see so many tramps in their midst, but they are reassured by the thought that what they are watching is part of a charity event which will not last beyond three hours at most. So they ask their barefoot fellow creatures, ‘Did you enjoy the event we’d prepared for your future opulence?’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Didn’t you see our dancers, our crooners, our pianists? Did you listen to them?’

‘We only listen to our stomachs. They’re rumbling, you know. Can’t you hear them?’

‘We hear them all right. What a beautiful piece of music. You’re virtuosi, all of you. Do you want a piece of cake?’

‘We want nothing less than Paradise. It is to Paradise, to its copses and coppices that we steadily direct our steps and thoughts. Let us pass.’

THAT’S ALL WE NEED TO KNOW

Returning again to quantum mechanics and fundamental physics, we cannot go into details of the quantum-mechanical principles at this time, of course, because these are rather difficult to understand. We shall assume that they are there, and go on to describe what some of the consequences are. One of the consequences is that things which we used to consider as waves also behave like particles, and particles behave like waves; in fact everything behaves the same way. There is no distinction between a wave and a particle. So quantum mechanics unifies the idea of the field and its waves, and the particles, all into one.

Richard Feynman, *Six Easy Pieces*

We might have *returned* to quantum mechanics, had we been elsewhere – in the domain of conservative, Newton-dictated physics, for example. On the other hand, we are always shackled by a number of physicists going down to Archimedes and reaching out to Feynman, Gödel (was he a physicist?) and Dirac. And I, for one, do not understand anything – not even the first thing, not even half of it – about subatomic particles, atomic particles, atomic waves or just the waves one can see when looking at the sea, as in a Robert Frost poem. You just sit or stand on a beach and look at some sea or other, saying to yourself, ‘Incomprehensible isn’t it? Huge and incomprehensible.’ And then you say something else to yourself or others, your arms executing a movement you know nothing about. Its trajectory suggests a spiral or a geometrical figure you might have seen in your childhood, in the course of a lesson devoted to geometry. But you recall neither the curves you saw during this lesson, nor even your teacher’s smile; and yet you seem to have liked this teacher to the point of wishing to go to bed with her at the earliest opportunity. Your angel did shower you with opportunities of all kinds, but you mistrusted both your

angel and those opportunities. (You thought you were dealing with the Devil in person.) And every opportunity you failed to seize did not seem to belong in the group of earliest opportunities. So you continued to miss all those opportunities, and you ended up calling them ‘inopportunities’ or even ‘pitfalls’. That is how human life goes on, and that is why we often think it is nothing but a show (or a shadow) performed by amateurs, clowns and junior demons; or by Chinese puppets.

But let us assume that subatomic particles jiggle in front of our body as if to demonstrate their relevance to our destiny and its intricacies. ‘If the door won’t open, try jiggling the key in the lock,’ our mother told us at some point. And we remember both this point and our mother’s face, smile and tears. All right, we do jiggle the key she gave us before taking her leave, but the door does not open, contrary to all the predictions and assurances we have accumulated in our mind over many years – ever since we were born, to be precise. All right, all right, whatever happens we should *not* worry because not *all* open doors reveal a huge amount of happiness and only pleasant surprises. But the subatomic particles we go on analysing and dissecting also suggest our kinship with them: we might belong to their kingdom and legislation. What if we *are* subatomic particles? Isn’t this the solution we have been looking for ever since our birth; or rather ever since the birth of our consciousness? At the very outset of this earthly adventure we grew conscious of our disagreements with our fellow creatures, with the representative of the race to which we seemed to belong, *corps et âme*. (Flesh and spiritual tissues.) They (Marx and others) kept talking to us and others about our basic equality. (Actually French revolutionists also talked about it, when operating their guillotine.) But we used to answer our detractors thus, ‘We’re not equal, far from it. Can’t you see we belong in the kingdom of waves, whereas our *dissemblables* are just particles?’

‘Your *dissemblables*?’

‘Our dissimilars, if you wish. Those country bumpkins don’t even speak French and German.’

‘Yet they’re your equals, those ninnies.’

‘Really?’

‘Do you know why? Because there’s no distinction between a particle and a wave.’

That is how it all started. For a while you kept boasting about your intellectual superiority, your overall smartness, but at some point someone pointed out that quantum mechanics should be taken into consideration; otherwise you might be demoted to a lower position or rank within the structure of what is defined as ‘human society’. ‘Those ninnies are experts in this field and you just listen to Beethoven’s quartets.’ Of course you can say that the quartets they reproach you with likewise belong to the realm of quantum mechanics. Anyway, among the highbrows there have always been the brows that wished to descend, to join the common denominator or common sense. And the latter as well as the former do not accept the complexity and evasiveness of Beethoven’s last quartets. Well, the remark ‘She mixes very well – perhaps that’s why she’s so popular’ is so popular that some sophisticated millionaires adopt simplistic ways and become tramps or workmen, anxious to please everybody down to Gorki’s lowest common denominator that even Kurosawa liked so much he made a film about those anti-heroes. So the representative of our elite take off their shoes and go barefoot in the direction indicated by simpletons, for they firmly believe that the latter know how to reach the Gates of Paradise; whereas Bill Gates knows nothing about it. Actually, they (our highbrows and billionaires) do not always think in terms of Paradise and its corpses, for they are acquainted with the French Revolution and its ideals – if only through their own American or Chinese experiences. ‘Yes, we are committed to the ideal of equality,’ they say, shaking their fists.

‘Why?’ ask their uncles and other members of their well-to-do families.

‘Civil rights include freedom, equality in law and in employment, and the right to vote.’

‘All right, we admit and even admire your attachment to the right of vote. But equality doesn’t seem to reflect the situation in which we get involved as soon as we are born and open our eyes. We look at inner-city slums and skyscrapers inhabited by Trumps of all sorts. By trump cards, so to speak. What does equality mean in this context?’

‘Gandhi was loved and revered for his unceasing struggle for freedom and equality,’ they answer. And if it is a woman they have in mind, when speaking about equality and abortion, they suddenly blurt out, ‘Sexual equality will not be achieved until there is more provision for childcare.’

A person, typically young, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, who believed in peace, was opposed to many of the accepted ideas about how to live, had long hair, and often lived in groups and took drugs. A well-known characterisation of the word and subject ‘hippie’. In those days – and those days are probably not over yet – you looked at the crowd and kept saying to yourself, ‘I wonder why they don’t burst into the song widely known as *L’Internationale*. I think the song goes like this, ‘We burst, we burst, we burst / And everything else does as well.’ But after talking to one of the members of the crowd, you were likely to realise they are not really poor, all these people. They belong to the borsch or the soup usually associated with New York, a sort of mishmash of nationalities and styles which reminds you of the chaos you read about in the Bible. So you kneel down and say to God, ‘Please put an end to this chaos because we’re longing for our holidays, beaches and sausages served on these beaches. Or what do you call them? Hamburgers, Big Macs?’ And then we all attend the creation of the world, and the hippies say to us, ‘We create the world every second. We’re all human beings, and human beings are equal to each other as if they were equations, you know. We are all three plus three, we are all six, seven and eight, and all things being equal, we’ll go on living in this Paradise until next Tuesday. And then we’ll go to another Paradise – just for the sake of being on the road.’

And if, out of scientific curiosity, you ask them to which category of objects or subjects they belong – Are you particles or waves? – they answer, ‘We’re both.’ Some of them begin to quote Nils Bohr; others stick to some quotations from Richard Feynman’s books. What counts are their states of mind, their swing states of mind: they are happy, happy, happy. They go with a swing – that is why their states of mind are called swing states, even if there are no American elections under way, in the neighbourhood. So you ask one of them, ‘Tell me frankly – are you a particle or a wave?’

‘When I make a declaration of love to either my spouse or my boyfriend, I use a multitude of waves. First I wave my hands to attract his or her attention, and once their attractions are within my field of vision or rather *their* fields of visions, I turn into a particle. They love my body very much, you know, and no other particle in the world could replace this body of mine in their private universes.’

‘What do you do as a particle?’

‘I embrace them first.’

‘Both of them?’

‘Both. They don’t mind being in each other’s company on beds, on the grass. Sometimes they don’t even remember who they are: men, women. We’re all equals. We all wear the same T-shirts and the same sex organs.

And the same lips, the same kisses. Sometimes I have the feeling that all my kisses are hanging on my T-shirt, if you please. When in need of a juicy kiss or a big bear hug, I just unhook them –’

‘As if they were fish?’

‘That’s right. And then I put them into my partners’ mouths. And they put them into their stomachs, in their turn. We compose one huge body, you know. We live our digestions and indigestions thoroughly and fully. If need be, we vomit on the grass or just on pavements. And a lot of pedestrians slip, when walking on our former lives, when crossing them during their walks and talks, and land right on their bottoms. And yet we told them in English, not in French or German, “Careful you don’t slip – there’s my vegetarian meal on the pavement.”’

‘But what about your equality? They slip and land right on their bottoms. And you go on enjoying your *promenade*.’

‘When I see my comrades on beaches and not on pavements, alongside *those* bodies, it makes me think again about having a large family, a huge cultural melting pot. Don’t we belong to the same species, to the same creatures, objects and subjects? Don’t we breathe the same air? Don’t you think the air is the same throughout our globe?’

‘What about Chinese pollution?’

‘Bullshit. The same air, the same aria from *Faust* or *Don Giovanni*.’

At this point, the hippie usually bursts into song or rather into an aria that he does not sing out of tune, contrary to what might have been expected at the outset of our talk. Only a few minutes ago did we think that everything would be out of tune, as long as we talk to this individual. And suddenly we realise that everything and everybody are in tune, whatever the tune we are listening to might mean, whatever its origin and the result of its sojourn in the polluted or unpolluted air.

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Let us consider, therefore, a simple mental ability that could give evolutionary advantage: the recognition of individual features or kinship recognition:

- If it were impossible to recognise individuals, then everyone might be a friend or an enemy, a threat or a source of help. (It *is* impossible to recognise individuals. You have no problems with the crowd because you know for sure that it cannot be made up of intellectual individuals and that most of the people you see in front of you are dimwits and no spotlight, no searchlight, no floodlight will ever eliminate this dimness from their natures. The crowd is dim by definition ((dim, dim, no wit – that is how you define or describe the crowd)) and nothing will ever make all these people act in a friendly way towards another individual – the one who does not belong in the crowd or to the crowd. Do with this or to that what you wish. Of course, while walking towards this or any other crowd you say to yourself, ‘I should ask every representative of this crowd the same question, namely, “Are you a particle or a wave?”’ So you do ask this question and the nearest, the closest individual – in terms of space – answers thus, ‘I am a particle. Can’t you see? I’m always a particle, with the exception of the moments when I

ride on a wave of glory. To tell the truth, I'm always riding on it and consequently I should be a wave, after all.' Then you address another individual and he says, 'I like swimming in the Adriatic Sea and in other seas as well. As soon as I see a wave I say to myself, "This must be one of the seas I've dreamt about for many years." So I strip off and plunge headlong into this or any other sea – I've seen many of them in my dreams and nightmares. You might point out that, while swimming in those waters, I must feel like a particle, otherwise I'm in danger of becoming a drop in the ocean, if you see what I mean. And I am the ocean, the ocean, not a drop.' So you had better see the world in terms of crowds where individuals dissolve and are consequently deprived of their tendency to bother you with their dreams and identity problems.) In a situation of some danger, it is therefore essential to be able to recognise those who belong to your own tribe or family in order to be able to combine resources in the struggle for existence. (Suppose you come across an individual who says, 'I'm not an individual because I belong to my tribe, to its very core, not to its corners.' And if you say to this individual, 'We have a lot in common, you know. I can't stand corners either.' 'So you're situated at the core of something. What is this something, may I ask?' 'I stand and sometimes lie at the core of myself.' 'And how do you defend yourself against intruders? Against other tribes, against their armies? By throwing this core at their bodies? Is it a hard core, may I ask? Or is it a hard drive, a hard disc?')

Mel Thompson, *Philosophy of Mind*

How could you combine your resources, if any, with the resources stored in the bodies of the individuals you see in the course of your stroll in the forest where, apparently, according to rumour, there are many dinosaurs? If you say to an individual that you have a lot in common with them, they may ask you, 'Who are you? To which party do you belong? Do you like chocolate?' And if you say you try to avoid sugar on account of the diabetes from which your mother suffered and died, this individual says, 'I can see what lies in store for me if you become the president of our country. Under the pretext of protecting us from diseases and our own wishes, you'll banish sugar from our shops, sugar and whatever contains its traces: cakes, carrots, bananas and so on. And I can't live without bananas.' It is not necessary to speak of music or Shakespeare. You just talk about your diet and someone says that the foodstuff you elected for your consumption suits neither your interlocutor nor his or her family. 'And if I have no time to kill you, my children will discharge this duty almost automatically, without consulting Kant, social contracts and French moralists. And if you advise them to wear a lot of masks "to keep doctors and viruses at bay", they will say, "What do you understand about kisses and other games of ours? What do you know about bodily and astral communications? How could we speak of Plato when wearing a mask? Do you think his ideas would make their way through all these impenetrable tissues and reach our friends' and mistresses' minds? Didn't you say in your last speech that even our minds should wear masks? "Otherwise you're likely to lose your memory," you added. And you also said we should put your masks on our ears so as not to imitate Beethoven. You said we were duty bound to imitate Christ, not Beethoven. And we resolved to put masks on crosses because the number of crucifixions has increased tremendously in the course of the last year. They call this infection "Covid 21".'

'So you don't believe in God, do you?' another interlocutor asks.

'I believe in the Buddha,' she answers.

'Do you believe in the immortality of the soul?'

‘I believe in the mortality of the body. And the soul doesn’t so much as exist except in Gogol’s famous book.’

‘Are you a dualist or a monist?’

‘I am a monist, for I believe in the Mona Lisa and the arts in general.’

‘If you’re a monist, there’s no room for *both of us* on this Earth, as Lermontov put it somewhere.’

And you kill your interlocutor, adversary, rival – or just the other. How could you use the other’s resources? You see a body if you take the trouble to lower your gaze for the sake of your feet that are reluctant to probe the mysteries of the holes one is likely to encounter on Russian roads, paths and streets, all around their boulevards. You lower your gaze and see a corpse, and the first thought that crosses your mind refers to this corpse’s resources. This corpse is the other you have been reading about for many years – ever since you began to be bothered by busybodies and busyminds. (And busysouls, believe it or not.) All right, you have just managed to disregard all alien, superfluous considerations and concentrate solely and exclusively upon the resources you need so badly to cope with life, its predicaments and unpredictabilities. So you address the corpse thus, ‘Could you help me please? I’m not sure I’ll be able to hold out on my own.’ And the corpse says to you in English: ‘I think you’re a murderer. I think you killed my body last night. But my soul resisted your bullets because my soul as well as my astral body have always worn masks, even during Donald Trump’s rallies.’

‘Whose rallies?’

‘Donald Trump’s. Are you an alien? What star have you come from?’

‘I’ve come from the star they call the Earth. Or is it the sun we’re talking about?’

‘How come you don’t know Donald Trump? How trump you don’t know Donald Come?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You should say, “I don’t Trump. I am one of the Never Trumps. I’m one of the Never Ever. So you don’t exist.’

This dialogue explains the number of corpses you can see in the hall where the dialogue took place some time ago. There are two corpses now in this hall, in this day and age. And now there are three corpses in it, although we are still dealing and tampering with the same age. What is more, we are also fiddling with the same day. And what about our resources? How come we can fiddle with this and that without relying on anyone’s resources, stamina and moral support? Are our theories wrong or right?

RHYME AND REASON

Eventually the attempt to understand oneself in evolutionary naturalistic terms must bottom out in something that is grasped as valid in itself – something without which evolutionary understanding would not be possible. Thought moves us beyond appearance to something that we cannot regard merely as a biologically based disposition, whose reliability we can determine on other grounds. It is not enough to be able to think that if there are logical truths, natural selection might very well have given me the capacity to recognise them. That cannot be my ground for trusting my reason, because even that thought implicitly relies on reason in a prior way.

Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*

Why should you try and understand your vital élan and path in evolutionary naturalistic terms? Because you were a worm in some day and age, and then your muscles and tendons put your body on your feet, and you began to walk around, on condition that you had two legs and not just one. If you had only one leg within your reach – you did your utmost to reach for another, second leg, but you failed most miserably – you looked around in search of a brother or a sister and cried ‘Hooray!’ upon seeing one of them, either a brother or a sister. And you cried again, ‘Hello! Could you come closer please? You happen to own some resources I need rather badly.’ So either your brother or your sister headed for your body and you said to his or her body, ‘I’m afraid you’ve caught me on the hop – I wasn’t expecting you till next week.’

‘But you required my closeness, my presence, didn’t you?’

‘I did. Do you know why? Because I need a second leg. I used to hop on my good foot while holding onto Jim, but Jim died last week. So now I’m in search of a leg. There are characters who search for an author. I’m searching for a leg – the author of my future walks around the world.’

Shortly afterwards, the same character is sure to lose an arm, in some accident or other. Some people say there are only *other* accidents in store for us because we can always predict these accidents, the ones which are close to us, to our sixth sense. Frankly speaking, they are lying on our writing desks or even on our dinner tables and we might eat them, after saying to ourselves, ‘Let’s taste this morsel to find out if it’s dangerous or not.’ You taste it, munch on it, swallow it and conclude that the danger you were warned against in your childhood (by a local fortune-teller) is just round the corner. So you walk straight ahead – past this corner and many other corners around which there are only dangers and none of your fortunes. (And a lot of fortune-tellers are prepared to announce your death to the world.) Well, sooner or later you are bound to lose one of your arms and so you will go in search of a character whose magnanimity might endow you with the physical support you need; to play the piano, for instance. The point is you cannot even play Ravel’s and Prokofiev’s concerti for one hand because the hand they had in mind happened to be the left hand. And you lost it while crossing one of the streets of your native city which shamelessly, incomprehensibly, let you down on this particular occasion. So you see a two-armed individual and say to him (you need a *male hand*), ‘You’ve got two arms, haven’t you?’

‘I have. So what?’

‘Could you please lend me one of your arms? I’d like to play Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier Sonata for Piano*.’

‘How long am I supposed to remain a one-armed individual?’

‘Well, I have to study this sonata first. This process might take three months, in accordance with my calculations and schedule. And then I’ll record it in Germany. The recording session will take three days and probably three nights as well.’

‘I can’t live without my left hand for such a long time.’

‘What do you need it for? Are you a left-hander?’

‘No.’

‘I am, if you must know. I am a left-hander par excellence.’

‘I’m not sure my left hand will live up to your expectations nourished by your own lefthand’s skilfulness and nimbleness.’

A few gorillas come forward and say, 'We're at the very bottom of the human race. It's from us that the source of human life and the brain flows in the first place.' You are longing to know where the human-related second place is situated, and they say proudly and self-confidently, 'Monkey.' They show you several monkeys and as they do so in some zoo or other, they ask you all sorts of irrelevant questions, 'Do you detect any similitude between these animals and the humans you're surrounded with? For instance, does your uncle look like this chimpanzee?' And if you answer, 'He doesn't,' they insist on your making repetitive surveys of your uncle's behaviour, for not only is he supposed to *look* like chimpanzees – he is said to behave like one too, jumping from one tree to another. You say your uncle's legs will never enable him to jump, even if he has to cope with the presence of a puddle over which he wishes to step, anxious to reach his final destination, thereby coming to terms with one of the items he spots on his agenda's screen. They say, 'There are chimpanzees that don't jump at all. We call them, "Meditation-oriented chimpanzees" or just 'Oriental chimpanzees' – in honour of the sages whose wisdom comes to us from India, Japan and South Korea.' Of course you remind your persecutors – they really harass you with their questions – that you have already told them your uncle could not care less about wisdom as such. He likes good food and spends most of his leisure hours in the kitchen, cooking pizzas and macaroni and what not, including tagliatelli. Then they revert to gorillas, declaring that the species is fond of Italian cuisine – to the point of forgetting trees and fruit. 'They devour pasta day and night,' they say.

But let us move to another, higher stage where we can see other animals and also humans called 'our beginners'. These humans do their best to forsake their horizontal posture in favour of a vertical attitude – of a domineering attitude towards the world. They seem to be trying to stamp their authority on every aspect of life unfolding on our planet and also in the air. Sure enough, they are also trying to stamp their authority on birds, although they cannot reach their wings either by jumping or by climbing the trees they spot around their makeshift huts. They shout day in day out, 'Hey, you, up there, birds or whatever, what's your name! Can you hear me? Why don't you obey my call? Stop flying above my head. I can't bear it any longer. Your flights distract me from my meditation centred upon the social contract I began to compose last night. I'm worried about human quarrels, our incessant bickering and even about our so ons. They say God delivers a lot of clothes and sandwiches to your nests. How come? Do you meditate, for God's sake? Yes, we meditate for God's sake because we believe in Him, in His inborn, intrinsic bounty. What do *you* believe in? Do you believe only in your flights and the excrement my head is exposed to?'

At some point our humans thought they should acquire a pair of wings – every human thought in terms of a pair of wings – in order to fly from one place to another without getting blisters which they got on a regular basis. For quite a while, they tried to accommodate themselves to the soil on which they put their feet, one after the other, but the aforementioned blisters made their appearance at a very early stage of their walking exercises. So they came up with the new idea known and acclaimed worldwide as 'a pair of shoes'. But even these pairs and shoes did not prevent their feet from getting their blisters which actually became *theirs* in the course of this so-called evolution. 'New shoes always give me blisters.' 'New shoes always give me blisters.' For quite a while you could hear nothing but this sentence – all over the Earth, all over the air floating above our heads. 'You could try and wear an *old* pair of shoes,' said a sage. But other humans rejected his proposal almost unanimously.

We must admit that most humans do not realise to what extent they are complex, intricate and even enigmatic: no easy solution can be provided for their do-it-yourself constructions, for their attempts to construct

themselves ab ovo. Evolution is a long, often unpredictable process that depends on millennia and other animals, on their gestures of goodwill and good words; good works. Light-heartedly we might say to ourselves, 'At some point I just walked along my path and stumbled upon an object I had never seen before either in my dreams or in my realities. I bent forward as I always do, when itching to touch my toes – a sort of gymnastic display – and picked it up. I knew my body had not been completed, but I didn't bother about its unfinished state because I was aware that sooner or later I would chance upon the missing screw or another spare part. So I picked up that part and began to apply it to various parts of my body. After a while, I realise I was handling my right knee without which I couldn't bend my leg in accordance with my mechanical or physical requirements. Once my knee was operational, I walked and jumped to my heart's content for almost an hour. That's how things were done within the framework of human evolution.'

Hey, just a minute! What are you talking about? Have you ever read an account of how messy and incomprehensible our human structure looks, when analysed from a scientific, chaotic point of view?

CLOTHES, NAKEDNESS AND INVISIBILITY

Not immediately, but a decade after Mandelbrot published his physiological speculations, some theoretical biologists began to find fractal organisation controlling structures all through the body. (Of course we have no idea who Mandelbrot was and why he speculated *psychologically* on the cause of life on Earth, assuming that our guess is right. ((He might have speculated on a variety of other subjects and objects.)) Well, he must have come to a solution or a conclusion to which he could not have jumped, otherwise he would have done so in order not to waste his time on nonsense. But what about fractal organisation? Have we heard about this aspect of human life? To tell the truth, I ordered a book devoted to this enigma, but it has not yet been delivered to my letterbox. No wonder I am all at sea with the fractions and frictions for which all human organisations are justly renowned in the cosmos. What annoys me beyond measure is the state of affairs implied by the above-quoted remark because it contains the following words: 'Controlling structures all through the body.' If there is no control within our body we are unable to control anything – not our spiritual aspirations, not our ideals and not even our ordinary thoughts. They usually divide our substances, saying we belong to the world of dualism: even if our body is not in working order, our spirits are very high – so high, as a matter of fact, that we cannot see them, let alone take advantage of them. Our bodies and souls remain a bundle of mysteries as long as we do not understand the first thing about their chemical formulas and subatomic particles that behave wildly, unpredictably. Try as we may, we cannot predict either their next move or their immobility because their immobility is unpredictable too. We can say to them, 'Please don't move, otherwise I'll never decipher your nature.' And they obey us, surprisingly enough as if in dread of *our* moves, decisions and punishments. But despite their motionless stance, we fail to dissect any particle of theirs, any perspective that opens up in front of our eyes, depriving us of our best argument, 'We can't see anything because they're close. And they'll never open up, for all our prayers and implorations, for all our laboratories and differential calculus.') The standard 'exponential' description of bronchial branching proved to be quite wrong; a fractal description turned out to fit the data. (I have no idea – how many times did I repeat this sentence or rather its beginning? – what 'exponential' description means, but that does not really matter. Anyway, it is quite wrong and fit no bills, as far as our bills remain what they are. And they are 'exponential', until further notice. But further notices are not as far as we often imagine and say to ourselves and others because we misjudge

and underrate whatever escapes our notice and knowledge. Well, we admit that we are not acquainted with fractal description, let alone with fractal formulas that do not resemble 2×2 . Be that as it may, a fractal description does fit the data and probably a number of bills I have just talked about. Does that mean I am as fit as a fiddle? Let us not overreach ourselves: one victory in this defeatist world is quite enough to put you in an amiable mood.) The urinary collecting system proved fractal. (Yet another victory. If we carry on so brilliantly, so unquestionably, we shall become immortal in no time; or in the twinkling of an eye, if you prefer. You say to yourself, 'I'll just twinkle my eye and at the end of this twinkling of mine I'll grow immortal. Not little by little, mind you – overnight or rather over this twinkling.' And then an amazing ritual is set into motion or rather into a lack of motion, into the sort of immobility I touched upon recently, perhaps a few minutes ago. I wish to twinkle my eye, but it does not twinkle, for all my wishes and superhuman tensions. My eye remains open to the extent of doing its best to prevent me from enjoying a beautiful sleep with a lot of sweet dreams. Well, no need to go any further. My eye does not go any further. Why should *I* do anything? In this domain? In the domain of my immortality and eyes?) The biliary duct in the liver. (No idea whatsoever. What is a duct? What is biliary? Of course someone might say ((for the fun of it)), 'Do you know why you don't know what biliary means? Because you don't play billiards.' Some think that jokes help us surmount all opposition/objections to our plans and hopes. I don't think so. Sometimes I crack jokes round the clock – quite literally, as a matter of fact. I wake in the middle of the night and crack a joke in the hope of finding solutions to all my problems; upon awakening, if you please. Obviously my destiny is *not* pleased – it does not find my jokes funny – and as soon as I take the trouble to open my eyes I realise that everything is in the wrong place and in the wrong time. The Russians think that songs perform the same miracle ((finding solutions)), on condition that you do not sing out of tune. I have absolute pitch and so can sing for hours and hours without getting on anyone's nerves. But the things I am looking at – and also the things I could come across outside my visual field – are basically wrong. And their timing, their spatiality, are wrong as well. And even further notices are wrong, contrary to what might be expected.) The network of special fibres in the heart that carry pulses of electric current to the contracting muscles. The last structure, known to heart specialists as the His-Purkinje network, inspired a particularly important line of research. Considerable work on healthy and abnormal hearts turned out to hinge on the details of how the muscle cells of the left and right pumping chambers all manage to coordinate their timing.

James Gleick, *Chaos*

We cannot rely on further notices, but there are other notices and all of them are situated in the past. (Can we rely on *past* notices?) And often this past attracts our attention, our glances, and we cast these glances at the heroes about whom we read in epics and also in philosophical books. We also cast looks in the rear view mirror of our former lives which seem so wonderful in comparison with what we are living through now. The grass is always greener in the past, especially if we consider this past in terms of our former lives, the ones we had lived before being born into this vale of tears and tear gas. But after the Big Bang we are not in a position to reverse the arrow of time – for the simple reason that the elements we are dealing with are so numerous they will never become one point, one subatomic particle. Suppose you write a comment on whatever surrounds you as you write this comment: trees, birds, ladybirds. On the spur of the moment lost in the past, you resolved to condense ten pages of your text

into two. This can be done rather easily. Your computer is also quite capable of reducing your thoughts, pages and hopes to nothing; even to nothing at all, eliminating the last hope on which you continued to rely. But the world is different from what you write or think either in your bed, during your bouts of insomnia and pointless vigils, or during your walks in the nearby woods. The world I am talking about is far bigger than your visual field or any other field you can concentrate upon; it is even bigger than the Elysian Fields you read about so many times, in so many hotels.

You cannot retrace your steps because the particles submitted to the evolutionary process continue to multiply as if to prevent you from joining the past and its golden age. There is such a thing as the arrow of time that looks forward, not backward. Suppose you are in a battlefield – somewhere in the past, needless to say. Instead of a series of Kalashnikovs, you have a bow and arrow, and no tanks seem to support or sustain your movement across the battlefield. If you were in that warrior's shoes, you would look around because your enemy is not always to be found in front of you. You are often trapped by your enemies into believing they are in front of you as if making things easier for your arrows and your arms wielding these arrows. But actually, slowly but surely, you are falling into their trap, for they are behind you; and their cannons, Kalashnikovs and tanks are on the point of destroying your army. And ancient warriors were perfectly aware of such traps: they looked *around*, not just in front of them. And more often than not their arrows were flying in all directions – in the direction of the sky, among other directions: they were afraid that the gods might attack them too. As for time and its consequences, we are unable to cope with its arrow in spite of its loneliness: there is only one arrow of time, only one time-arrow. And it is always future-oriented; at least that is what Prigogine said in one of his lectures; in many of his lectures. And whenever his students were too daft to understand what he meant, he would push them forward, saying, 'You should walk until midnight without turning your head to look back. As a matter of fact, you'd better not turn it at all.'

Actually the world is a one-way street, and you can see this structure or phenomenon almost everywhere, even when you content yourself with speaking of the brain-mind relationship. The poor are well-known Christian gatecrashers: they crash the gates of Paradise guarded by St Peter who cannot hold them (the destitute) back for many reasons. One of these reasons reminds him that the poor are entitled to a timeless sojourn in Paradise, and the needle one can see at its entrance is destined only for the rich who are supposed to squeeze through the eye of this needle several times before being admitted to the copses and dancing corpses for which Paradise is so renowned. But what is the brain-mind relationship doing in this boat? Why is it in the same boat with the poor and the rich? These two categories are quite distinct unless the poor spend too much time with the rich on their way to St Peter and his keys. Even when they are together, you can distinguish between the rich and the poor rather easily: their clothes or their absence of clothes are different. The poor often head for Paradise stark naked. They have no money to spend on Chanel or Givenchy and so exhibit their nudeness rather shamelessly as if there were no other choices in the world, in the domain of clothing: either you wear a Givenchy cocktail dress or you walk barefoot, barebody. So you can distinguish them not only when they are together, making up one crowd, but also during their passage through the gates of Paradise. The poor act like steamrollers, using their heads and their feet as they try to demolish these proverbial Gates once and for all. They say to journalists: 'I'm aware that my mother has every right to enter these copses and enjoy their freshness and lemonade. Just in case, you know. Her head is so fragile she won't be able to topple these gates and the statues of the apostles on her way to her personal copse.'

Not only do they crash whatever they come across in the kingdom of Paradise, they also fell a lot of trees, for their mothers might trip over their roots, as they point out in their discussions with the journalists. Swayed by their explanations, some journalists affirm that riches and rags or tatters or nakedness have nothing to do with the so-called admission charge. (We are still talking about Paradise. Hell will be discussed in its turn.) These journalists say, 'All you have to do is love your mother. And even if you go so far as to make love to her literally and physically, you'll be admitted to Paradise where the Oedipus complex is quite unknown: Freud and even Claude Lévi-Strauss are locked or rather double-locked in Hell. So you may be rich, why not? Some of your colleagues envy the enormous wealth that you have amassed over two years in the office. What office? Doesn't matter. What counts is your wealth and also the love you exhibit, whenever in your mother's company. As soon as you see your mother's figure, face and clothes, you rush towards her, strip her clothes off and say to her in endearing tones, 'Mother, mother, mother. I long for your nakedness. I yearn for it. Let us strip our clothes off so St Peter might think we're poor.'

'So you won't drive our Ferrari on this occasion?'

'For once we'll walk. Good for our health, you know.'

'Shall we make love in St Peter's presence? Do they have a bed just in front of Paradise, at its entrance?'

'I suppose so.'

'Why do you suppose so?'

'Because all candidates are required to show how they love each other and also their children, their grandchildren. They don't call it "paedophilia", you know. They say, "Here's the love highly praised by St Paul in one of his letters addressed to one of his buddies."'

'How vulgar, my God! Do they really use such down-to-earth words?'

'There's no such thing as down-to-earth in Paradise and its suburbs.'

I am not sure there is a friendly exchange between Hell and Paradise as pictured in Bernard Shaw *The Superman* or *Don Giovanni*, but it is true there are many goings-on and ups-and-downs inside our bodies and heads. One such exchange concerns the mind-brain relationship (if any) in the course of which some information plummets from conscious mind to brain. No, no, it is the other way round, the other way up and down: destiny, God and his angels forbid any 'downwards' causation from conscious mind to brain, which means that our spiritual ideas and lofty ideals cannot reach our down-to-earth brain. Sure enough, our brain is focused upon big deals, small deals and practical moves, generally speaking. Our brain says to us, 'Forget about God, nirvana and music. Listen to what I'm telling you. You should go to the bank and withdraw \$5,000,000 because you've been spied upon by the Tax Department. They know where you keep your money, the money you've hidden and withheld from their clutches and greediness. What's more, they also have a pair of keys that can open all your safes in no time at all. And if you dare accuse them of breaking and entering, they'll answer, "Thieves broke into/cracked the safe and stole everything in it."'

The mind, on the other hand, does not care about money. 'That is why it is not called moneyd,' as some bad joker put it on his way out of his favourite pub. Be that as it may, the lofty thoughts you pamper and nurse in your head's lofts and penthouses cannot reach your instincts and everyday life on account of the stumbling blocks they encounter on their way to the innermost recesses of your being. Your brain does not admit their interference in your daily rounds which are centred upon your material, brain-conducted prosperity. So there is a discrepancy between your aspirations and the operation called 'making ends meet'. These ends are not

confined to money only: they deal with a huge variety of aspects related to your social and private existences. More often than not, they do not meet, and you devote most of your activities to organising their meetings and moderating them. The majority of people don't aspire to greatness; they just want to be normal. Your brain says to you day in day out, 'You're normal, normal, normal.'

'Why should I be normal?' asks your mind.

'Because only normal persons become multi-millionaires and billionaires and Bill Gates.'

'And what about the Gates of Paradise?'

'Become a billionaire first. And then you'll train yourself for your entry into Paradise by squeezing through the eye of a needle.'

So the brain sends its signals upwards – in its eagerness to disrupt the spiritual mechanism installed in the mind by God or rather by His minister whose duty comes down to 'the establishment of pre-established harmony'. And the mind seems to be powerless to prevent these onslaughts which amount to a real siege. Some commentators write in their respective magazines, 'Real estate and other practical considerations laid siege to the mind.' 'The mind was under siege for a decade.' As usual I don't know what is under siege and what is above anything – everything is blurred and you can say that you yourself are in a state of chaos, and what counts in this state seems to be oriented towards the problem of masses, of weight, of obesity that does not exist in the realm of subatomic particles. What you really long to get rid of is time because only in its presence do you grow older, older and less immortal every hour, even if you spend this hour in a sauna or on a Californian beach. Your mass, however insignificant, slim and innocuous weighs somehow in the framework of the story told about your life, and you listen to one of Roger Penrose's lectures where he talks to you about a massless universe or just the lack of masses, their merciful absence. What does their absence amount to? To nothing, hopefully; at least that is what you are hoping for because masses (or the body, as the Greek put it) are the outstanding enemies of humankind. You eat and eat and eat, without giving a thought to the effect produced (by your eating and drinking) on your tissues that cannot tolerate any abnormal increase of weight that might lead to a disastrous effect, namely death or Kierkegaardian despair. 'Worse than death,' as materialists, realists and optimists put it.

But what would you do without your body? The point is we are talking about mass or masses which interfere with our quantum games and spoil everything, including our fun to which we pay homage on a regular basis. (This regular basis provides us with a *real* basis, whatever it is. But it also provides us with time, and we must think twice before accepting this delivery defined as 'time shackles'.) Anyway, what I am concerned with is certainly bound up with the beginning of time, with the Big Bang, if you like; and you do like the Big Bang because you like your present life and also your former lives, even if you are not aware of them. And the Big Bang allows you to have a sort of body that is often confined to a subatomic particle you know nothing about. You do know there are particles and waves, and you seem to think you can wave a magic wand and everything will be all right. So you wave a magic wand; you also wave a particle wave and for a while almost everything is all right. But 'almost' is a treacherous word; sometimes you question its veracity and reliability. Suppose you are about to mount a platform in order to speak to the assembled crowd – for no reason at all, as you say to yourself. But the crowd is already assembled and so you have no alternative but to speak to this crowd. If there is a crowd under your balcony, you are supposed to talk to this crowd, even if you have no balcony. If there is a platform in front of your body and legs, you are tempted – and for once your temptation is a positive element in your existence – to mount this

platform and speak, speak, speak, even if there is no crowd in front of you. The problem is you have no time either on your hands or on other members of your body and soul. You have no time anywhere. Nowhere, anywhere, nowhere, nothing. You can repeat all these notions and words until you grow weary to the point of asking your niece to take you to the nearest bed. (The only thing you learnt in the course of your existence comes down to the following item of wisdom or news, ‘You should have many beds at your disposal.’)

So you have no body (and nobody either, at your deathbed, on your deathbed), but your soul takes advantage of your body’s conspicuous absence to come to the fore, even if there is no fore to speak of. So first your soul creates a sort of fore – a makeshift fore, to be precise – and then it comes to it to demonstrate its importance, its leading role in your conquest of the world and its suburbs. What can you say about this soul of yours? Does it look like a subatomic particles? Does it look at all, one is tempted to ask?

I, for one, am not tempted to ask anything, any question; at least within this framework, the framework exhibited and constructed by the above paragraphs. I am confused, I am all at sea with what my conscious or unconscious rigged up (a nice piece of mental equipment) some time ago; I think it was in the middle of last night or yesterday, as the case may be. Actually I am about to join the partisans of what they call Tao or Dao or the Chinese point of view or philosophy. They advocate the parting of our consciousness and our bodies – without so much as by-your-leave we are supposed to leave all of them in the lurch. No waving anything, no hands, no handkerchiefs. You just rise and go, leaving behind your self – am I confusing them with Hindus and Buddhists? – and go into the open air where there are no selves, no shelves that must already have caved in under their bookish burden. I remember, however vaguely and uncertainly, a few sentences from those books I can no longer find in the space devoid of shelves and their pernicious knowledge. There was a remark I can quote, unmindful of my own inaccuracies, errors and prejudices: ‘If you think about your mind’s disappearance, you still have it, otherwise you would not think about its disappearance.’ In my case, this could be expressed as follows, ‘If you think in terms of your departure from your mind and its collaboration (corroboration), it – your mind, that is – can still be found inside your cranium or whatever passes for such. And if you think about such as such, you are able to emit a few thoughts, which is a bad sign, given your determination to get rid of every mental sign, be it good or bad. It is always a bad omen, if you must know. And you must know this particular aspect of your life. It is a must, you know.’ ‘If you think in terms of musts and masts, you continue to produce what is quite rightfully defined as “mental energy”. You say it is a must. You can also say, when looking at a luxury yacht, “It is a mast.” Well and good. You’ve made your bed and now you must lie in it. Lie down on the deck of this yacht and suffer, suffer, suffer intolerably and infinitely. There’s only karma and its consequences in store for you, nothing else, nothing else.’

What else do the Chinese or the Indians say? ‘To march without formation.’ What does that mean? I march, but there are no formations either by my side or in my mind. I am on my own, if you see what I mean; whoever you are. Or what they have in mind amounts to my own mind and its unwarranted presence? A solution began to form in his mind. Is that what they mean? Well, I need no solutions because I have no problems. And those who have neither problems nor enigmas to deal with day and night need no minds, no brains, no thoughts of any kind. Even thoughtless thoughts should be banished forever.

‘To stretch one’s arm without showing it.’ That is easy. As I pointed out earlier, somewhere, I am on my own so no one disturbs my inner or outer peace; no one spies on my movements. I have just stretched my arm. Who on earth could see it? Who on Mars could see it? Who on Venus? – and so on and so forth.

‘To confront enemies without seeming to meet them.’ I have no intention of meeting anybody, even if somebody dares to enter my room. Suppose this body does enter my room, but I am entitled *not to meet* this body: nothing or no one coerces me into meeting this body or soul. I don’t even have to explain the whys and wherefores of my decision or stance. I just do *not* meet this nobody – end of story.

NOT A SOUL, NOT A WOMB, A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

Immaterial souls. I wish I could believe in *immaterial* bodies because even if I manage not to touch my own body, there are other bodies heading for my entrance door; and for those bodies it is never an *exit door* they are facing and dealing with. In Fellini’s films there are many priests who ask young people the same question, ‘Do you touch yourself?’ Of course it is not the soul they have in mind or minds; it is the body they blame for the temptations to which we are exposed day and night; especially at night when our parents are asleep and therefore cannot spy on us, on our séances of self-abuse or solitary pleasure. My body is material, there is no denying it. What about my soul? I have no wish to finger it either absent-mindedly or not. And even if I need to open my soul and close my heart, I need not resort to my fingers or other parts of my body. It is enough to inhale a quantity of air and produce a conventional, angelic or ecstatic smile. So I believe in immaterial souls. Why? Because I have no need of material souls. According to Baker, if you do maintain there is such a thing as the soul, you can say whatever crosses your mind – material or immaterial – without the burden of making sense of how there can be immaterial souls in the natural world. Well, there are so many burdens in the world and even outside it, and consequently we have no need to burden our material bodies with yet another burden. The American election has been on the agenda for more than a year and so I am tempted to write, ‘With yet another Biden.’ Or rather, ‘With yet another Trump.’ No other Trumps, I beg of you; with the exception of trump cards. Why can’t we say ‘Biden cards’? There are too many words turning and twisting in our minds. Why should we add another dervish of a thought to this whirlwind? Nothing doing – this is what they call ‘the natural world’. It is natural to be oppressed and even compressed and suppressed by one’s own thoughts, sensations and fears. ‘For example, human beings can survive a change of body; truths about people are not exhausted by truths about bodies.’ What was the starting point of this discussion, dissertation? I expressed my fear which was indissolubly linked to others and their bodies that used to move inside my house whipping up anti-human prejudice. If you don’t see humans for some time you may come to the following pernicious conclusion, ‘Under some circumstances, human beings can be harmless.’ But if a human body moves inside your living room, let alone around your dinner table, you direct your steps towards the opposite pole or tendency or point of view. You say to yourself, ‘Once again I was wrong and this error of judgement will cost me dearly.’ And even if this person does not knock over a precious vase, you focus your thoughts and energies on his or her departure. On his *and* her departure, more often than not. But suppose such a person undergoes the aforementioned metamorphosis and pays you a visit within another body – wrapped up in another skin and muscles, so to speak. You see another body and say to yourself, ‘This body has nothing to do with the busybody whose presence I had to put up with last month.’ But then this body says, ‘Hello’ and you realise that the soul in question is the same; and consequently you are facing the same nuisance. It is the soul that guides us through the

ambushes set up by reality and its cronies. And the soul I am talking about is material, otherwise I would be hard put to explain its palpable, destructive impact operated through the agency of the body, of its tendons. ‘Persons have causal powers that their bodies would not have if they did not constitute persons.’ So these bodies – all of them are busy, busy, busy – constitute both persons and their souls which are immaterial in name only. If you scratch beneath the surface– or name – you will find that the soul you are concerned with is more than material – it is *materialistic*! ‘There is a fact of the matter about which...future person is I...The constitution view allows that a person’s resurrection body may be nonidentical with her earthly body.’ Her earthly or *earlier* body? *Her*? Future person is *I*? What is the constitution they are talking about? I am used to the constitutions whose veracity and reality are highly questionable. ‘Clause 4 of the constitution is thought to be the most important section.’ That is what they say whenever you dare inquire about the constitution under discussion. First they ask you what discussion you are talking about, and then they open one of their drawers – their desks have nothing but drawers – and select a file through which they start leafing, mostly absent-mindedly. Their lips move as if counting pages or clauses or ideas and then they say, ‘One, two, three, five, six – there’s no such thing as Clause 4.’ Anyway, this constitution allows me to renew my life-and-death experience in another body, even if its identity has nothing in common with my present identity, with my ID card. Those who imitate Jesus Christ throughout their earthly lives are bound to get *his* ID card, although this thought might appear blasphemous to some representatives of our church. They might ask you, ‘Where did you get this card?’ ‘I was given this card by my destiny, by my karma.’ And then you write in your diary, ‘My passport was confiscated by the church to prevent me from leaving the country, from airing my heresy abroad, abroad, abroad.’ All this nonsense stems from your consciousness which goes on poisoning your existence, even if it is another existence you exhibit to the world, in the museum of the world. ‘According to the constitution view, it is logically possible that a person have different bodies at different times; whether anyone ever changes bodies or not, the logical possibility is built into the constitution view.’

Baker 2005

Of course we are weary of the constitution and even of logic that does not lead us anywhere with the exception of tautologies, vicious circles and illogical conclusions. Apparently our knowledge of numbers – we call it mathematics or Kabbalath – is at the root of our awareness of the cosmos. But if logic is the only instrument we are allowed to use when dealing with mathematics, we shall always get something along the lines of ‘2 is 2’ or ‘3 is 3’. And what about different bodies and the part they can play in our multifarious existence? ‘A is B is C is D.’ As Chandogya Upaniṣad puts it, ‘Now, people here whose behaviour is pleasant can expect to enter a pleasant womb, like that of a woman of Brahmin, the Ksatriya, or the Vaiśya class. But people of foul behaviour can expect to enter a foul womb, like that of a dog, a pig, or an outcaste woman.’ Well, it is no easy task to find out what kind of womb is pleasant: laymen do not know much about wombs, foul or otherwise. We can say or conclude as we look at a woman standing in our room, ‘This woman is quite pleasant and I wish I could make love to her – not only verbally, mind you.’ But even if we ask this woman to strip off and remain naked for quite a while, we shall be unlikely to determine whether her womb is pleasant or not. Even if we go to bed with this woman and touch her (in terms of sexual games), we cannot be sure her womb corresponds to what we experience during these sexual games, sexual divertissements. And we should on no account discard the possibility which warns us about

the discrepancy between sexual delights and a noble birth – that of a Brahman, for instance. Often this phenomenon proves once more that the world obeys other laws which are tantamount to these linguistic definitions: ‘the other way round’ and ‘upside down’. If you turn a sexual pleasure upside down you might get a pleasant womb, for all I know – on account of sins, dirtiness and moral tenets. For all our moral and sexual liberations, we are still dependent on the notion of sin which seems to maintain that sexual ecstasies are incompatible with moral, Brahmanism-dictated values. In other words, in our search for a pleasant womb we should look for an unsatisfactory sexual act.

On the other hand, I am not sure our decision should depend upon the exterior beauty of the womb in question, for no one knows for sure – with the exception of doctors and X-ray machines – what hides beneath this courteous and even beautiful exterior. This exterior may look invitingly as if saying, ‘You’re welcome, my dear future child. Every birth is an unparalleled event and we should both take advantage of its blissfulness. We should multiply, you know. You should multiply, and so should I, as a matter of fact. I should multiply and become as huge as the Earth, our venerable mother.’ But what if some virus is hiding beneath this biblical, rhetorical exterior, behind this babble and empty promises? The problem we are facing once again – how many births have we crossed and cursed? – is so important we should exclude from its solution not only light-hearted conclusions but also our indifference or our downright aversion to life. We should not say to ourselves, ‘Again?! Again?! So once again I’m supposed to suffer from my rotten teeth and my deficient heart. And a series of falls, of heart attacks, of strokes? Why should I submit my body and soul to this additional experience? Can’t I go straight to what they define as “the chronic lack of karma”?’ The answer to this inquiry is not as rudimentary as might appear at first glance, but this answer might be reduced to the following global statement: ‘If you don’t live at all, if you don’t have a go at it, you’ll never eat caviar, you know.’

‘I don’t care about caviar. Any toothache is far more important. Any, I say “any”, for even an insignificant toothache is liable to throw you off balance, whereas caviar lies for a while on your plate and then disappears into your stomach. How could it ever compensate you for the suffering you endure?’

‘But life is beautiful and nirvana has no looks – nothing, nothing, nothing to write home about. What’s more, we’re not talking about nirvana and its consequences, the role it is said to play in the domain of your wellbeing. It’s your reluctance to be born into this world we’re enlarging upon for some obscure reason.’

‘And death? And death? What could you say about my future deterioration, corrosion, weakening and decline?’

‘You’re not the Roman Empire, are you?’

‘Decline, decline, decline, degeneration, falling off, decay.’

‘You have no idea what you’re talking about.’

‘Do *you*? Do you have any idea, any Platonic idea in your head?’

‘This phenomenon is known as graceful degradation.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘If you deliberately or unconsciously damage, even slightly, ever so slightly, any part of your computer’s main processing unit it will not work anymore. Do you realise that?’

‘What do I have in common with computers?’

‘Everything, everything!’

The first half of the discussion was interesting but the second half dragged on and so we are not duty bound to divulge how it ended, on what note, on what chord or discord. Of course the question of life and death did not disappear from its premises and the graceful degradation – can decay be graceful, beautiful, breathtaking? – stubbornly (I wrote ‘stillbornly’) refused to disappear into the wings, let alone into thin air. As they usually point out, the air was growing thicker and thicker, and nothing could really disappear from the room where one of our tragedies was enacted rather sadistically. Of course we are not computers, not yet and not as such, whatever they write about this metamorphosis in their books on artificial intelligence. What do they write in those books? ‘Conventional computing machinery is not very robust. In contrast, slight brain damage will rarely result in someone dropping dead – it might even have no effect whatsoever’ (Henry Brighton, Howard Selina). Whenever you are displeased with your computer, you are likely to pick it up and drop it and kick it because your *ressentiment* towards machines and machinery as such is so great you cannot rein it in. These machines stand almost everywhere, greeting you at every entrance, in every hall, and you say to yourself, ‘They ask for coins, for our indulgence and attention. They can’t live without our money and minds.’ But then you realise they are solid and you get an urge to kick them to find out if they are really solid. And then you just break them to prove your superiority, if not immortality; and the books I am reading affirm that even a cat could fatally wound a machine – with a flick of its tail. You must admit that for many months, if not many years – during your conscious life, in other words – you envied machines, their imperturbable mood, their unconscious stoicism. You admired them to the point of willing yourself to turn into a machine and spend your life dispassionately, looking from afar at human turmoil and toil. And then you read in a magazine or a book, ‘Small disturbances will have little effect on the operation of the system.’ Whenever you come across the word ‘system’, you say to yourself, ‘They’re talking about machines, those idiots.’ But for once you are mistaken, odd as it may seem: they are talking about you. (‘Shall be you, shall be you,’ you mutter to yourself.) So you change your mind and become a human again; in the twinkling of an eye, as the saying goes. Yes, it is better to be human – in every sense of the word, as another human saying goes. A human can fall in love with another human and even with a machine; a machine, on the other hand, is unable to fall in love – not even with its fellow creature. A machine can play cards and football, but it cannot drink whisky when playing the game under discussion. And even if it *can* drink a glass of wine, it *cannot* enjoy it thoroughly; at least that is what oenologists think and maintain.

‘The important point is that the degree of degradation is in some sense proportional to the degree of damage to the system. Neural networks exhibit precisely this behaviour since each neuron acts as a separate processor.’ Once again we are all at sea with the previous statement’s subject or matter. What’s the matter? What networks are you talking about? Are these neurons human or mechanical? They act as processors, and processors are associated with machines, with the words we get out of our computers. But aren’t many humans compared to machines? Aren’t they identified with mechanical devices, with robots? Don’t we say to each other, from time to time, ‘You’re just a robot? You don’t feel anything. You have no heart, and even if do have something similar to a human heart, something almost identical to it, this heart of yours is wooden.’ ‘But according to your words and conclusions, I’m *incapable* of feeling anything. What if my heart is really made of wood? Don’t you think a beautiful man or woman can set fire to it rather easily?’ This is a more or less rhetorical question: your heart is not made of wood; it is biologically compatible with the rest of your constitution. But even if you *were* allowed to choose in these matters – what material would I opt for, if allowed to choose my own heart? – you would not set

your heart upon wood. Why not choose iron, following the well-known example associated with the former Prime Minister Thatcher? Suppose you do not agree with her achievements and even dare to affirm she got only negative results in the course of her presidency or prime ministry. But many people admired her iron heart – and her iron body, to some extent. Indeed she did look like a piece of iron, and many of us said, when watching her walk across our television screens, ‘I wish I wouldn’t shed so many tears for nothing. My heart and also my soul lapse so often into mawkish sentimentality that I can hardly gain a foothold in this pragmatic, money-absorbed world. Of course she can’t be sincerely regarded as a beauty, either bathing or otherwise, but what counts in this utilitarian existence of ours is metal, iron and gold, not our tears, blood and sweat.’

The problem lies elsewhere and this elsewhere looks like the kind of puppet theatre one may admire in China or Japan; or even in some European countries where puppets were rather popular in past, half-forgotten centuries. You had no money to create a theatrical company cluttered up with props and actors of all kinds, genders and specialities. So you travel with one puppet only, and this puppet turns into queens and kings – in full accordance with your whims that take you here and there and almost everywhere. From time to time, you create or re-create the whole cosmos. And yet, frankly speaking, you do not know much about the universe we are living in for the sake of dying, for the sake of tombstones and their inscriptions. Well, this puppet is far more elegant and gracious than any human actor, even if we are dealing with Sarah Bernhardt and Laurence Olivier, which is not out of the question, considering their eternity, immortality and the number of phantoms they create day and night, night and day, and at twilight, at twilight. It is better to be a puppet anyway, even if you do not care about graciousness as such; or about the dances and flights to which most puppets are addicted. They fly from point A to point R and you are always tempted to walk around the stage, resolved to find out who is manipulating those puppets, their members, bodies and souls; unless you say to yourself that puppets have no souls. After all, they are inferior to animals whose souls are questionable; at least within the scope of days-of-yore philosophical dogmas. Are they? Are they? Aren’t both animals and puppets far superior to humans whose legs are not groundbreaking, so to speak? Puppets need the ground (if at all) only to touch it lightly, politely, paying homage to our Mother Earth. Humans need to rest on it after their exertions and abortive flights above a puny stage – not in the midst of clouds, mind you. But humans can fly like Fleance – in the midst of clouds, out of the reach of villains and their guns; even when lying in their beds, under their canopies. You should become either a puppet or a literary hero (Natasha Rostova flies too), otherwise you will always remain on Earth, in the midst of our Hell. Yes, you think that puppets are antigravitational on account of the void they nurture inside them. No knowledge, no consciousness, no sins, be they original or not. Or are they just pre-historical products whose flights depended neither on our machines nor on atoms, waves or fluids? Were they born before time? Not before space, though. Eternal, aren’t they?

Apparently our survival is far more closely linked to our psychological stance than to the physical, medical state of our organs. There is a famous test which allows you to know for sure what kind of expectations you can pin on your child’s future. If your child still continues to play with dolls, you are advised to use them as your informers: humans are far less prestigious in that child’s psyche. So one of these dolls has a bar of chocolate and the other boasts about a pair of empty hands. She shows them to everybody as if to prove that empty hands are much better off than those where one unexpectedly finds a bar of chocolate or another piece of *gourmandise*. But your child says to the second doll, ‘You don’t know the first thing about sweets, and even the word “*gourmandise*”

doesn't seem to adorn your vocabulary. And your vocabulary is worthless without this essential, key notion.' But the first doll knows a lot about sweets, and she hides them before leaving the room for a short while, for a quarter of an hour at the most. Actually my description does not fit the fact or rather the description of the test I found in one of my books. (I find everything in my books, needless to say. Even chocolate, believe it or not.) She hides them or she does not: she might be in a hurry, for all I know; her very life might depend on the timing attached to this experience or rather experiment. For all I know, this test might be similar to Schrödinger's cat who cannot make up her mind: Shall I die or shall I not? It is noteworthy that Hamlet's dilemma is universal – to the point of bothering cats, of depriving them of deep sleep and nirvana.

The second doll stays in the room and one might conclude the eternal question is now linked to her own destiny, to her own hell or paradise. And yet I am not sure a bar of chocolate is important enough – in metaphysical terms – to tip such scales. But you are not willing to replace this bar with the Chateau de Versailles or something of the kind, assuming there is something of the kind, somewhere. So let it stand; let the bar of chocolate lie where it is – on the floor, of all places. The second doll spots the bar and puts it in her pocket – after much soul-searching, I might add. Actually she does not so much as touch or open her soul; she just checks the availability of the pocket she set her heart upon and slips the bar into it; without further ado, as I often point out. The aforementioned quarter of an hour has just elapsed and the first participant emerges from the half-open door. Everything seems to be wrong in this picture I sketched to put everybody in the picture about this world-famous experiment. Of course our children, our young inexperienced children, say this doll is unable to judge our life in terms of foul play: everything is fair and beautiful in those children's eyes. So they say the second doll is sure about the bar's whereabouts: she is as innocent as they are and consequently thefts, lies, betrayals and evil as such are not on her agenda. Only purity and honesty are on her agenda so that, whenever one is curious enough to cast an eye over this agenda, one sees only blank pages, nothing else.

But there are other children; and they are not necessarily older and smarter than the ones depicted in the preceding paragraph. Such a boy – he belongs to the second category I am about to depict – says to himself, 'If I were in this room, I wouldn't have inserted this bar into my pocket. What a stupid, primitive thing to do! Of course a bar of chocolate isn't as precious as a sports car, but never mind, never mind. You live and learn, and often you learn your lessons by means of chocolate and other sweets. So I would have eaten this bar on the spot, then and there, without waiting for my dear girl, for my beloved. Love is important, whenever we deal with physical manifestations of it such as kisses, fellatio and so on. But if their intensity has nothing to do with a bar of chocolate, we can have a bar of chocolate and eat it. And if my beloved begins to search for it either on the floor or in a chest of drawers, I'll say to her, 'What are you looking for, my darling?'

'I'm looking for the bar of chocolate I brought in here only a few minutes ago.'

'You must have devoured it on the way. Your sweet tooth is renowned in the whole area.'

'I did nothing of the kind. Mummy told me I shouldn't eat too many sweets because they might destroy my health.'

'A bar of chocolate wouldn't do you any harm.'

'It does untold harm, according to my mother.'

'Why did you bring it in here in the first place?'

'Because I was longing to give you a present.'

‘Why didn’t you give it to me straightaway?’

‘Because I wished to hide it.’

‘Why did you wish to hide it?’

‘Because I wished to do the right thing at the right time – on the day of your birthday.’

Of course the gist of the matter is elsewhere, and we are not likely to spend a lot of time searching for this elsewhere because the problem we are dealing with is obvious and denotes a perilous streak in every human character, be it primitive, sophisticated, learned or ignorant. The point is humans are used to lying, hiding, betraying and eating whatever they can eat, even if they are obese; even if their numerous doctors advise them against eating chocolate, bread and butter, potatoes, and so on. So suppose there are two dolls; in other words, let us resume our initial reasoning featuring the same palpable data: two girls, two dolls, two makeshift representatives of the human race. One of these representatives leaves the room, leaving the bar of chocolate on the floor. The other representative looks at the bar – for a while, for a while – and then eats it, or hides it; not in her pocket, though. ‘What do you take me for?’ she may ask you if you are naive enough to ask her why she is loath to stuff this bar into her pocket. ‘The other girl is sure to frisk me upon her return to the room,’ she is bound to say, laughing in your face. All right, all right. She looks around her in search of an appropriate hiding place and then removes two carpets from the floor where they have been taking their holidays for many years. (Why holidays? one may ask. Because carpets work only in shops, within bazaars.) Then she picks up the bar, puts it elsewhere and covers it with one of the carpets, after putting the other carpet on the spot where it has already spent a long, lustful holiday. The other girl comes back, casts an eye over her rival’s face, inspects the floor, her foot thoroughly exploring its texture, and finds the chocolate hidden under one of the aforementioned carpets. After eating the chocolate, after enjoying every bit of it, she slaps her rival’s face and says, ‘You, dirty whore! How dare you steal my chocolate!’

‘I thought you intended to give it to me.’

‘Why on earth should I give anything to you?’

‘Because it’s my birthday today.’

‘What do I care about your birthdays!’

‘Don’t you remember what I gave you on this occasion?’

‘On what occasion?’

‘Your birthday.’

‘It was *my* birthday, not *yours*.’

Two girls come into a room, one of them holding a bar of chocolate. This girl (let us call her the chocolate girl) feels like slapping her comrade’s face, but for some reason she thinks she needs a pretext ‘for military intervention’, as she calls it. She needs a pretext, however flimsy and improbable, ‘to inflict a humiliating defeat on her enemy’s psychology’, as she puts it. ‘He died from multiple stab wounds to the neck and upper body,’ she read in one of her books, and that is what she has been longing to do for several years – in regard to her so-called friend. But to do so effectively one needs a dagger or a kitchen knife. The girl whose character and wishes we are depicting in this paragraph is elegant, stylish – chic to some extent. So she is reluctant to use a kitchen knife for such a lofty purpose. Why is her purpose regarded as lofty, one may ask? Because last week this other girl fell in love with the boy whose body is entirely, almost hysterically worshipped by the chocolate girl. And this girl thinks

that if she wounds or kills the other girl, even if the boy in question is not present on the scene of the crime, she will gain momentum in her relationship with the boy who cannot fail to appreciate the theatrical conduct of the girl he has taken no notice of so far. All this is annoying, boring, but willy-nilly one admits that humans behave like that and harbour these thoughts and dwell on these subjects and projects – almost constantly, to the exclusion of far more productive and intellectual occupations.

WARS, WATERS, WRONG

Earlier I discussed the question whether a physical account of evolutionary history conjoined with a nonhistorical psychophysical theory could really explain the appearance of consciousness, and I concluded that unless there were some further link between the physical history and the psychophysical theory, this would not render the result intelligible, even if it were causally accurate. It would present consciousness as a mysterious side effect of biological evolution – inevitable, perhaps, but inexplicable as such. To explain consciousness, a physical evolutionary history would have to show why it was likely that organisms of the kind that have consciousness would arise.

Thomas Nagel, *Mind & Cosmos*

Evolutionary theory and history seem to insist on the importance of war-advocated behaviour known as ‘human style’ or ‘human ritual’. But for this mysterious force – let us not forget Beethoven and Dante – human beings would spend their time slapping each other, kicking their partners’ and companions’ backs and contradicting every single law of peace and harmony which has not yet disappeared completely from our sacred books. All books depend on how they are read, and we read them differently now; at least the French affirm that Muslims misinterpret the Koran. But what kind of theory does evolutionary theory propound? We are aware of the paradox that renders our life unbearable – almost to breaking point, as some philosophers point out. Every theory gives rise to another theory, and then we are told that no solution will ever dawn on any of us, however hard we work on this solution, on its appearance in our world. ‘Gödel is to blame,’ say our detractors and destroyers, hinting at the theorem that continues to deprive us of Paradise and its Koran-promised enchantments. Or do we misinterpret the Koran? Its misinterpreters or gabblers (not gamblers) speak of holy wars. Russian priests, on the other hand, continuously speak of *holy waters* that are bound to cure you not only from your diseases, but also from your fundamental insignificance. You bathe in those waters and come out in favour of poetry and beauty instead of talking about the economy day in day out.

The happy few begin to talk about God – even before they actually get out and let a number of drops fall on the floor or on the grass. They say that God is omnipotent and can cure anybody, provided this person believes in Him and His omnipotence, miracles and cures. At this point someone is sure to step forward and remind everybody of the stone-theory which questions the omnipotence of any being, be it God or the Devil or just an ordinary human. This adversary of omnipotence says, ‘Do you really think that God can achieve anything?’

‘Yes,’ answer the others.

‘So He can create a stone so heavy that no one can lift it.’

‘He can create a skyscraper. And we defy you to lift a skyscraper. Or to prove your indictments are levelled against God’s omnipotence – in any other way.’

‘Well, let us ask Him to lift a skyscraper.’

‘Why should He?’

‘Suppose He can build a skyscraper that no one can lift.’

‘No one except the Almighty – Himself, in other words.’

‘Why doesn’t He lift it?’

‘Why should He?’

‘To prove to everybody He can create and lift a skyscraper that no one can lift – or create, for that matter.’ And then again you deviate from this pattern, from any pattern so you do not have to prove anything, not even your existence, although you might exist somewhere, probably on this page, on condition that this page exists in its own right or wrong. It is better to exist in any way, even if this way is wrong to the core, and even if the core of this way is also wrong. The dark is the same everywhere, as they say, which might mean that we are all in the same boat; and this boat is called ‘dark’, for some obscure reason. This reason is obviously dark and once again you say to yourself it is better not to appeal to reason that always spoils everything; and yet you think your reason is not a spoilsport, whatever priests or Buddhists might say on the subject.

All the evidence goes to show that what we regard as our mental life is bound up with brain structure and organised bodily energy. Therefore it is rational to suppose that mental life ceases when bodily life ceases, and a good argument for insisting that human beings have only one chance of happiness, in this life.

Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe*

What evidence are you talking about? Of course you can say you are not talking at all and ‘if you hear something’, you might add, ‘it is not my voice you hear. You hear someone else’s voice and this voice doesn’t live in concord with my opinions and standpoints.’ All right, all right, as I usually say and think. So there is no evidence; and if there is some evidence to speak of, we do not speak of it at all as if this subject were forbidden, as well as the object under discussion. All right, this evidence goes somewhere, and we might even affirm that this evidence goes this way and not any other way. In other words it goes to show that what we regard – assuming we regard anything, anywhere – as our mental life (and somebody is bound to contradict us, saying ‘physical’) – is bound up with brain structure, whatever that is, whatever this structure is and will be, even if we undertake to destroy it (a human habit). It is bound up with brain structure, and even Prometheus would never have been unbound, in some sense or another, had he got stuck with brain structure and not with chest or arm and leg structures, whatever they are. It is not enough to look at your chest or arms to be able to describe their structures in minute detail – in any detail at all, come to think of it. (Sometimes it is better not to come to think of it at all; of anything; of any at all, atoll.)

What is the bodily energy one can speak of? (And one does, does, does. One even *writes home* about it.) But it is not enough to *speak* of it, *touching* upon it ever so slightly. This energy you are so keen on is *organised*

and that means you have to organise it, otherwise it will remain *disorganised* – for ever and ever, whatever they might say on the subject. So one might ask how you propose to organise it. After all, you strongly disapprove of whatever many books suggest as to your handling of this perennial crisis. Often they compare your energy or rather its components to a military parade, to soldiers marching somewhere, sometimes in the direction of nowhere, nothing, no result, no effect, a series of defeats. These soldiers are arrayed and their array may be called ‘splendid’ if you are inclined to use superlatives with regards to wars, bloodshed, cannonballs and bullets in general. And generals in general. So your energy is prepared for a battle, and your life is nothing but a battle instead of being just nothing, nothing at all. Understandably you prefer battles, life, the blood circulating around your body, your vital force, your instincts for self-preservation (there are many of them) and your inborn optimism that faces death and misery: holding your head up high, as they say. And what if they don’t say anything at all? Of course you can say to yourself, as often as you please, ‘Holding my head up high, holding my high up head,’ or something along these lines; or rather *up* these lines. You are a go-getter par excellence and so your energy pushes you forwards, even if it happens to be in disarray. Sure enough, ever since the oil crisis, your energy has been in a state of disarray; generally speaking, any piece of bad news is liable to throw your plans, whatever their contents, into disarray. There are many disarrays in store for you; now and then you inspect them to make sure you will never be short of them, of the opposite pole of your gargantuan ‘Plus’. Yes, you need this minute ‘minus’ for the sake of your equilibrium, of the Empedocles-praised harmony. Every professional musician knows that major keys get immediately lost without the support abundantly furnished by minor keys; unless you compose an atonal piece of music, a twelve-tone piece of music or just a one-tone piece of music. You just repeat the same tone ad infinitum, and if they ask you what your music is called upon to express, you say, ‘Boredom, boredom, eternal recurrence, karma, the injunction “go to hell”, living in hell.’

SCREW, UNSCREW: MUSS (MOUSSE, MASS) AND SEIN. LIFE IS A PRELUDE TO THE FUGUE OF DEATH

But once again the well-known problem arises, and you are powerless to stop its progress from a mere hitch to an insurmountable obstacle. Are you a machine or an individual being bent on fulfilling your tasks and intentions? What *are* your intentions, may I ask? Of course the parallel one may draw between an army and a bundle of nerves called ‘energy’ reminds us of orders, parades, disciplines and mechanisms. A general gives an order while he continues to shout himself hoarse and his subjects respond by moving forward or backward, as the case may be. Does this pattern have anything to do with determinism? Destiny or God shouts itself hoarse and you move here and there, obeying the commands you seldom understand; seldom if ever, seldom if ever. Why should I march in this direction, jumping over puddles, rivers and black holes? And they (the books you go on reading) say to you, ‘In order for anything to be a moral issue, the person concerned has to be exactly that – a “person”, not a “machine”.’ You have nothing against the word, the notion ‘machine’, but whenever it happens to be applied to your own behaviour, your whole existence, you rebel and become almost uncontrollable. ‘I am a person, a person, a person!’ you vociferate as long as they feign to ignore your affirmation, your self-assertion. ‘I am a self, a self, a self!’ you shout.

‘Machines are also selves,’ they say to you. ‘And sometimes they have *themselves*, you know,’ they go on for some obscure reason; without any reason.

‘Morality has always counted in my existence. Immanuel Kant is my favourite philosopher. Machines aren’t morally responsible.’

‘Your thoughts are too mechanical. We can’t help believing your essence swarms with screws and nuts.’

‘With tendons and tenderness.’

‘Nuts and bolts are used to hold pieces of machinery together. Are you sure your constitution will hold together without them?’

‘You can unscrew me, if you wish.’

Shortly afterwards someone says, ‘I can’t unscrew the top of this machine – it’s really tight.’

Once the intention of the person becomes significant and the army is no longer eyeing birds and stars instead of moving in the direction of victory, morality comes to the fore; so do evil and good. Morality induces the person to hold principles and follow them to their logical conclusion, and if their logic jars on the rules observed in the society where the person prospers, a clash is inevitable. That is what we hear all the time, and one gets the feeling that if time made up its mind and disappeared from the surface of the Earth – let it remain elsewhere, in the cosmos – we would hear ‘clash, clash, clash’ and ‘covid, covid, covid,’ all the *time*. Actually I am not sure it is time that counts in these matters, in this phrase, within this thought and idea. Perhaps we should watch the word ‘all’ which is weird enough to get us involved in all sorts of catastrophes, known or unknown, predicted or unpredictable, *imprévisibles*. But what do these clashes result from? You think you need a vaccine to be on the safe side, even when exposed to the most destructive virus in the history of humankind. Someone (this virus carrier) comes up to you and says, ‘Are you vaccinated?’ You answer rather proudly, with a lot of self-conviction, ‘Yes, I’ve been vaccinated twice.’ And so this individual permits himself to cough in your face or at least in the direction of your nose, while standing at close quarters, flouting all the protective distances you read about before leaving your room, garden and the rest of your estate. Two weeks later the same individual calls you to ask if you are still alive. You say, ‘I’m alive, but I’m fatally ill. I don’t think you need to wish me good night.’

‘Could I wish you “sweet dreams”?’ he asks.

‘Do you think I’ll dream on the other side of the world? On the dark side, on the dark side?’

‘Why not? I consulted your biography. In this life of yours, you don’t seem to have sinned profusely.’

‘Have you read anything about my former lives?’

‘Listen, I don’t have time on my hands, whatever you might conclude when perusing *my* biography. But this life of yours is blameless, as far as my understanding of human morals is concerned.’

Well, the only conclusion to be drawn from this conversation is related to the virus, to the disease you contracted at some point, as they say. They don’t know that the point they are talking about is situated in your living room where the individual in question coughed in your face, aiming at your nostrils and mouth. (Exceptionally you were not wearing a mask.) What conclusion am I enlarging upon? The conclusion is rather large, I must admit, for it concerns all those who continue to live on the surface of the Earth where viruses disport themselves more and more shamelessly as if forgetting their manners rather irrevocably. What *is* this conclusion about, for God’s sake? You hastily conclude that neither a mask nor a vaccine will ever protect you from the virus – from Covid 19, *en l’occurrence*. Or from Covid 20 or 21, as the case may be. Should it be? as Beethoven asked himself at the end of his life, when about to finish his last quartet. *Muss es sein?* So what about this case? Should it be? Should it be compared to Beethoven’s death? Anyway, you are not protected, until further notice; and as

usual this further notice of yours is death, nothing else. Nothing, death, nothing, death, as they say, while bending over a corpse. Nothing will ever protect you from death, they conclude. And at this particular point a clash is born at the very bottom of the situation; as if it were a tree, as if we were talking about a tree and its roots. Why was it born, this devastating, harmful, humiliating clash? Because there are people who will never believe in the immortality of death. 'Death isn't invincible,' they shout. 'We'll put on a mask and death will draw back.' 'One of the drawbacks of wearing masks is inhaling its microbes, the ones it has gathered during your journeys through populated cities and tourist-teeming meadows.' Is the clash we have been looking for already in our midst? It has been on our agenda for quite a while, but now it seems to have emerged, rearing its ugly head. The people we are depicting minutely kick a lot of stuffing out of each other. And if there are young boys in the assembly, most grown-ups molest them to their heart's (sic!) content.

But these clashes (as might be expected) stem mostly from words, and no one knows to what they refer, our words, the words we utter without further ado, sometimes without giving a (one and only) thought to their meanings. And their meanings go on a spree as if ejected from a spray instead of being matured inside the mind. Mask, mask, mask, mask. You think of Verdi and his balls; and also of Lermontov and even of the last Kubrick movie where there are many masks, according to your recollection; and yet Covid-19 was not yet stigmatised and nicknamed 'the scourge of the Earth'. Anyway, no one knows for sure whether words get their meanings by referring to ideas. What are these ideas in which our words seem to originate round the clock? (Don't we exchange our ideas and words in the dead of night? And even after death?) What's the bright idea? they ask you now and then, and you answer invariably, 'Death, his forthcoming coming.'

'Don't you have any other bright ideas in your mind and body?' they ask.

'Life,' you answer.

'What about it?' they ask.

'It's about its extinction.'

Of course we are aware that people use words as 'marks' to convey their pre-linguistic ideas; even to animals, if they feel like it. What do their pre-linguistic ideas sound like? M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m. O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o. What do you mean? How do you mean? they are asked. 'M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m' must be a mental image. What kind of mental image does it correspond to? Mental, mental, mental, mental, mental, mental, mental. And what about 'O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o'? Well, you just draw a pin-up of your favourite pop star from your attaché case and everybody says, 'O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o.' Even the mute say that, unable as they are to withhold their admiration and rein in their basic and basest urges. Wait a minute! says someone. Do you only speak of this pin-up? Is libido the only subject on which your mind and matter meditate to the detriment of philosophy and natural sciences?

For philosophers like Locke, 'ideas' are usually talked about as if they were internal mental images. But as we have just seen and realised, they can also externalise, materialise – not out of nowhere, whatever they affirm – occasionally modelling their appeal on pin-ups and porn movies. 'Hence, language gets meaning by referring – but not to things in the real world.' Yet another clash in the offing. I wish you were here! (Locke.) As if poets had never written about their mistresses – lying with them in the same bed, in the same room; no room for imagination and its figments, in other words. Do we really need our imagination (even if we happen to write poetry almost every day) if our mistresses are with us, whenever we feel like touching them; in every sense of the word, in every

sense of the body. (In this sense, our body has hundreds of senses.) Actually the contents of this last parenthesis may come in useful during a short analysis I am duty bound to devote to the last sentence of the above-quoted masterpiece: 'Therefore it is rational to suppose that mental life ceases when bodily life ceases, and a good argument for insisting that human beings have only one chance of happiness, in this life.' If you think you have only six senses – *pour mettre les choses au mieux* (at best) – you might get scared out of your wits every two minutes, if not more often. Suppose one of these senses expires of its own accord – immediately followed by another sense. Sticking together, as they point out. All right, all right. But what about *you*, about the remainder of your feelings and thoughts? But if your body could justifiably boast about the multiplicity of its senses brought about through your beloved's presence, you would kill two birds with one stone. You would prove to the whole world you know what love is about. First-hand (sic!) knowledge. (Where *is* this first-hand?) And secondly you would live forever, for even nature and death cannot deprive you of this multiplicity in the twinkling of an eye. There are moments when this proverbial eye does *not* twinkle.

Does all that mean you have many chances of being happy? Is happiness a multiple phenomenon? One happiness expires – a woman you are in love with leaves you for another woman – and a man comes into your room, saying as he enters, 'I'm your happiness number three.' So you accept your new happiness without even checking on it, on its quality, warmth and tenderheartedness. If a piece of happiness assures you it is happiness you are facing and are about to deal with, in spite of Covid and other viruses, you accept your destiny and give it a bear hug. You may or may not say on this occasion, 'It's predestination or determinism I'm embracing so heartily – for the simple reason that there is nothing else in the world. We think we invited a man or a woman for dinner, but they come on their own. They're gatecrashers, all of them, and I wonder why there are gates in this world, gates left out there, over there. Do we really need them? Can we bear the noise made by these crashers? Let them come in smoothly and enjoy our common life, paying homage to happiness, to the multiplicity about which the Almighty spoke at the very beginning of the Bible. Didn't He speak of happiness and our bodies? Multiply and replenish the Earth or whatever else we should replenish in the wide, wild, unruly cosmos. It is pointless to multiply for no purpose at all. You're born and they ask you, 'Why did you leave your mother's womb? What are your projects? Do you intent to attain the highest degree of happiness? Is there such a thing as happiness? Do you know what it is? Forget about Aristotle and Nietzsche! Are you crazy or what?'

So it is no use being born just like that, as they say, flipping through a magazine or a book as if in search of a worthy pastime. But as one of my friends always puts it, 'I haven't written anything,' if you try and accuse her of not being able (or willing) to hold her promises. 'I haven't written anything,' she adds. Of course you are tempted to continue and even honourably finish the discussion you brought about – sometimes it *is* boring to talk to oneself – and say, 'I know to what extent the written word is superior to the unwritten one. You've uttered many unwritten words in the course of the last month, and most of these words remain in my mind under the heading "Promises". For instance, you promised your jewels to your niece. And three minutes ago you put me in the picture about their disappearance in a pawnbroker's office or pocket. In other words, you pawned all your jewels and have no intention of redeeming them from the pawn shop.'

'I need money. And I haven't written anything.'

'You mean you've signed no document whatsoever?'

'I signed something two weeks ago, but this signature doesn't count.'

‘Why doesn’t it, pray?’

‘Because I didn’t use my blood on that occasion.’

All the evidence goes to show that what we regard as our mental life is bound up with brain structure and organised bodily energy. Therefore it is rational to suppose that mental life ceases when bodily life ceases, and a good argument for insisting that human beings have only one chance of happiness, in this life. ‘If someone says, “That book over there is blue,” and that book is indeed on the table,’ says Bertrand Russell, ‘then it is that book that gives meaning to the phrase “that book”.’ Suppose you talk about your blood, not about a book you do not care about; anyway, blood is thicker than any book (even *War and Peace* is not as thick as blood). If someone says, ‘That blood over there is blue,’ you look at that blood and say, ‘Oddly enough, that blood is blue, but I haven’t signed anything for the last three years.’ But does the blood you see and even avail yourself of to some extent – you like blood in general, and even red blood does not really shock you: you are not a character from Andersen’s fairy nonsense – give meaning to any phrase, any sensation or thought? Does it give meaning to life? Of course it does, on condition that someone sheds it for the sake of humanity and its wellbeing, happiness and what not. You might say to a woman whose unwillingness to come to your place gets under your skin, ‘I’ll give you one of my bodies if you come to my place.’

‘I don’t like your body,’ she answers.

‘But you have no idea which body I’m talking about.’

This episode explains rather exhaustively the convenience advocated by so many theorists of happiness and paradisiacal attitudes. There is no accounting for tastes: in our small, weenie (and whining) world there are too many tastes to account for. People keep coming into your room and you array your various bodies on a Persian carpet, all the while glancing furtively at your visitors. A woman strides purposefully up to one of your bodies – it might be one of your *former* bodies, for all I know – and lies down on it. After a while she gets up and says, ‘I’m not sure I’m in love with your right hip. Could you replace it, please?’ You explain to the lady that it is far more difficult to replace anything than to place yet another body on the carpet, considering that ‘I have thousands of them, you know’. I am not convinced I like the word ‘nonsense’, although one is amazed at how quickly this word seems to conquer the world. Its pace and space are far more impressive than the spread of Christianity depicted by Dante in his *Commedia* which does not take into account Islamic spiritual and physical conquests. But I must admit that my talk – it is not really *my* talk – about the multiplicity of bodies is based on hearsay and guesswork. I guess (as the Americans say) I have an astral body – a dozen of them presumably. (I wonder who on earth can presume such a thing.) Suppose, however, that an army of beautiful ladies – young or old – come into my room and ask me if I have anything to endow their libidos with. Of course I am quite prepared to strip naked, but they let me know they are not interested in the body they see in front of them, before their very eyes. So I have no alternative but to fall back on the nonsense exposed and denounced a few minutes ago: my *other* bodies, a *multitude* of them. I speak at length about my astral equivalents, about my former lives, about ancient Rome and Julius Caesar, but they shake their heads and say, ‘Where are they, those bodies of yours?’ And if I ask them what they think about my multiple and fruitful minds, they say, ‘For the moment we’re not interested in your minds. Anyway, our IQs are much higher than yours. And even if you had several intelligence quotients, ours would be far superior to them.’ Try as I may, my stories about my bodies do not seduce them in the least. They even add that my words

have nothing to do with Hamlet and his words, words, words. 'His remark is famous worldwide, whereas –' they often stop after this 'whereas' as if to say once and for all, 'It's crystal clear, isn't it?'

MY DEAR FLEANCE

In the introductory remarks on the subject of the rejection of the world the contrast was presented between, on the one side, active asceticism as *activity* willed by god as an instrument of god, and, on the other, the mystic's contemplative *possession* of salvation, which signifies not active behaviour but a 'possessing' and by which the individual is not an instrument but a 'vessel' where action in the world must consequently appear as endangering the thoroughly irrational and extrawordly state of salvation. This is a radical opposition, if, on the one side, the asceticism of action realises itself within the world as its rational moulder for the taming of the creaturely and the corrupt through work in a worldly 'vocation' (innerwordly asceticism); and if mysticism, from its side, assumes the full consistency of radical world-flight (contemplation that flees the world).

Max Weber, *Intermediate Reflexion*

I have no idea what this introductory remark introduced and how this introduction proceeded; and for how long. But anyway we are not supposed to know everything because this everything – and any other everything – lies outside the scope of our mental capacities and bodily aptitudes. At some point Tolstoy realised that even the Bible was not within his reach – its texts and the comments on its text – and he set about creating his own version of the Creation. Sometimes it is easier to create something than to study what has been created already for the sake of libraries and tourists. So he said to himself (and whatever he said to himself was immediately transferred to a sheet of paper and to the world) that there was no chaos at the outset of the adventure justifiably called the history of the human race. As if there were no animals, no oceans, no trees of knowledge, ignorance and death – nothing but humans, humans, humans. All right. At the beginning we could see a couple standing somewhere, and logically enough this couple had two components: a man and a woman. For some time they went on kissing each other, but they had no options, no alternatives, no continuations at their disposal – for the simple reason that they were unaware of their human nature and of the world lying and flying around them, above them and under their feet. (A radical world-flight?) They did not even feel their own impotence. In other words they did not realise they were at sea with the life magnanimously offered to them by someone, not necessarily by God. Anyway, they knew neither this word, this notion – God, the Almighty, the Creator – nor anything else: they did not even know they were standing in the middle of nowhere. Shortly afterwards, however, God came to the fore and said, pointing at this fore, 'Here's the fore, my children. And you're what I justifiably call "human beings". You should be proud of this nominations or appellation – call it what you wish. You'll need names anyway, and some of these names will be given to you through my brain's bountiful agency. What about a cup of tea?'

'We're very fond of tea,' said both Adam and Eve. (Out of sloth, Tolstoy kept their names.)

'So we'll need a tearoom – after all, we're civilised, aren't' we? We're not likely to partake of our tea and currant buns in the middle of nowhere. Do you know why this would be inconvenient?'

'Not the foggiest.'

‘Because there are no tables in nowhere, especially in its middle. No tables, no tablecloths, no cups, no saucers. There are only flying saucers in the middle of nowhere. Can you see any?’

‘I’ve just spotted a flying saucer,’ said Eve.

‘This means there are other creatures elsewhere, beyond nowhere. Or beyond the middle of nowhere.’

‘Could we play with these creatures?’ asked Adam.

‘Do you mean to say you’re a social animal?’

‘Are we animals?’ asked Eve.

‘To some extent you’re my domestic animals,’ said God. ‘So I should make sure this kind of animal is tolerated within my tearooms.’

But let us go back to whatever follows the introductory remark I have just enlarged upon for the sake of clarity and brevity: I am reluctant to quote this remark in full. The subject I am inclined to pursue for a while is related to the note of discord that two or three centuries ago crept into relations between the world and its human inhabitants. So many humans are determined to reject the world and its intrinsic bounty that no one would be able to contain this number within one category only. (I am speaking about the category of rejection.) So I have no alternative but to admit that there are many sides to this rejection, many angles, many tendencies and points of view. One point of view is asceticism and Max Weber affirms that this activity – is it an activity or immobility, sloth? – is willed by god. Apparently it is an instrument of god and good. On the other hand and side, we are bound to come across ‘the mystic’s contemplative *possession* of salvation’. One wonders if one is really able to possess anything, be it salvation or a cake. As we all know, you cannot have your cake and eat it. Suppose you choose the latter solution and the cake in question is already below your palate, after spending some time in the middle of your plate. You are munching on it, savouring every bit of its texture, and then you swallow it, saying to yourself, ‘It’s high time I asked myself the following question, “Have I ever had this cake?”’ According to my recollection, I did put a part of it on my plate and then I removed this part from my plate, bent on enjoying this part to the utmost. Looking at this part is not enough – the enjoyment linked to your contemplation of your plate, of whatever is lying on it, is not the full enjoyment of this situation and of life in general. So I wonder if I really had this cake because it is nowhere to be seen at this particular moment. And I am sure the future I’m facing doesn’t contain such a moment because I ate the cake, although I can’t prove it unless I cut myself into pieces; unless one of the pieces I get after this anatomical experience contains the cake I ate a few minutes ago. Suppose it does. Suppose that in the aftermath of this anatomy lesson I do find a morsel which contains the cake I’ve been drawing your attention to for almost five minutes. (You should read my text very carefully, reciting it as you savour every word and syllable.) So what? So what? To all intents and purposes, I’m dead, I’m dead: no one can survive such a lesson without dying on the spot. And even if you don’t die on the spot where you started this anatomical torture, you’ll die a few paces further off – in some corridor or other. And the dead don’t care about cakes – even if they happen to have some in their corpses. By the way, I wish I could know if one’s food remains in one’s stomach after one’s death. I’m not sure this piece of information – the one I’m so eager to uncover – is useful and can help me survive in the world where Trumps, traps and troops are omnipresent to the point of excluding anything else from human life. All right, I *am* dead and I don’t feel like trying to find out what death actually means and what it looks like in the kingdom they call the Hereafter. I’m just kneeling by my corpse, being famished and frustrated: I didn’t find anything in the kitchen in the vicinity of which I died either naturally or unnaturally. So I said to myself, “I must

have something in my stomach despite its untimely and cruel death.” So I start fiddling with my intestines where I stumble upon a piece of cake. (Do I really *stumble* upon it?) After much soul-searching – my soul is still in my pineal gland – I devour this piece, saying to my corpse, “It’s a piece of cake, you know.” And then to my soul, “All this is quite pointless, for I’m dead. And you need no earthly nourishment, as some French writer put it.”

Incidentally, I had better devote my time and space to the Tolstoy text I quoted as I spoke at length about the Creation of the World. I recall the couple standing somewhere, kissing each other to each other’s lips’ content, and I wonder if I am supposed to comment on this state of affairs – in the Talmudists’ footsteps. They comment upon comments upon comments upon comments and so on. (They also comment on so ons.) Why does Tolstoy open up his worldwide perspective by putting one and one together, by creating a man and a woman instead of paying homage to the stars, oceans and other atoms or quarks? Because Tolstoy always agreed with St Paul who said in anticipation of The Beatles’ popular song, ‘All you need is love, love, love, love.’ Of course this tendency contradicts the point of view that predominates in the text composed by Max Weber, for neither asceticism nor mysticism are prepared to subscribe to this kind of love, to kisses and bodily tenderness. The couple depicted by Tolstoy indulge in human caresses, in human manifestations of love, and both asceticism and mysticism have something inhuman in their substances. Imagine a mystic who, more often than not, meets her God inside her cell in some monastery or other. Actually this time we are speaking of *other* convents where women live on their own, deprived of men, their company, their lusts and harassments. When talking about men in general, those women always use plural forms, for even when dealing with one man only, they get the feeling that they are confronted with a multitude of lusts, libidos and hands which are bent on tearing their bodies into pieces. So there is something inhuman about mystics and their visions because, according to Spinoza and other philosophers, God has nothing in common with humans, even if the latter were created in his image. And if you ask one of these philosophers, ‘How come we’re so estranged from His image?’ the philosopher in question (the philosopher you are questioning right now) says, ‘Why do you sound so disrespectful? Don’t you acknowledge God’s superiority in every field?’

The same goes for ascetics; and yet you can seldom find the representatives of this community in monasteries where you are often served both bread and butter; and a lot of tomatoes growing on your territory. So they (our ascetics) usually spend their time and lives in deserts which seem to have been adjusted to their needs: there are stones and brooks in those deserts. You suck the stones you find within your reach; or out of your reach, out of your arms’ reach. In the latter case you have to get up and annihilate the distance lying between the stone you set your heart upon and your previous position; the spot where you were sitting as you waited for your next and only meal. So you walk or hobble towards it and suddenly a vision puts a spoke in your wheels or legs: you see the Almighty Himself, Herself. For quite a while you are not sure you actually see God the Father or the Blessed Virgin, but then you calm down and say to yourself, ‘Whoever he or she is, it’s a vision I’m gratified with in spite of my sins, crimes and other misdemeanours.’

In the meantime, our lovers continue to kiss and cuddle – our boys and girls used to do it in the back row of the cinema – and they (our Adam and Eve) also pet and paw each other. ‘Eve loves to be petted and tickled behind the ears,’ says Adam to journalists. Well, Tolstoy realises to what extent such conduct can be harmful to the human race – if not alleviated or rather ennobled by a more peaceful, dignified occupation. That is why he comes up with the idea that brings about or builds the tearoom we touched upon around 5 p.m. (The time in the afternoon when some people eat a small meal, preferably in a tearoom.) Any tea room – unless we are talking

about tear rooms frequented by unfortunate lovers – is an image associated with peace and quiet, with harmonious talks or truces. Whenever your mind is in peace, at one with itself, you drink a cup of tea, and that is what Tolstoy insinuates when talking about tea ceremonies in his novels. He never talks about cups of tea in the part devoted to war, as one might have noticed while struggling with the texture and other intricacies of *War and Peace*; while ploughing through battlefields and other fields. But as soon as Napoleon disappears beyond the horizon they open a bottle of champagne or drink a cup of tea, talking about love, Natasha and Anatole's handsome figure. And what about Natasha's figure? (When drinking tea, you often ask yourself superfluous, ridiculous questions.) She got her figure back after having the baby, they sometimes say, notwithstanding Tolstoy's realistic, uncompromising descriptions of Natasha's post-war ugliness. What, however, counts in our evaluation of tea rooms and their atmosphere chiefly boils down to the sociably acceptable behaviour of their clients who seldom if ever throw bottles of whisky in each other's faces.

Gandhi is known to have modelled his behaviour upon Tolstoy's characters and maxims: in the films devoted to his devotional life, we often see him sitting on rails, on floors and twiddling his thumbs. His behaviour is somewhat tantamount to what tea drinkers do in tea rooms where they can also read newspapers, if deprived of companions in fortune. But – let me repeat this observation – no one throws bottles of whisky either at other clients or out of the window, aiming at passers-by and police officers. The aforementioned atmosphere of tea rooms predisposes you to anti-bellucose trains of thought, to the images associated with rural landscapes and Italian villas. You have no wish to resist any manifestation of violence, even if this violence does you a lot of harm, disfiguring your body and utterly squashing your soul. You just say to the hooligan, 'Would you care for a cup of tea?'

'Are you an Englishman?' he might ask, interrupting a series of blows directed against your jaw bone.

'No, but my grandmother drank a lot of tea with milk.'

'What did she start her tea ceremony with?'

'You mean which liquid did she pour into her cup first?'

'That's right.'

'Milk.'

'Do you know why the English give preference to milk?'

'Why do they start their tea ceremony with milk? Is that what you mean? In preference to Darjeeling?'

'That's right.'

'For the sake of their china's purity.'

So Tolstoy's methods and reason are crystal clear – in the light of what our analysis has revealed. Even if you are molested in the course of your tea ceremony, you can always come to terms with the guilty party because the very structure and texture of this ceremony invites you into the realm of peace, harmony and mutual understanding. That is what Tolstoy was eager to express, driving his point home whenever someone was reluctant to recognise his moral and ethical superiority. But what about Max Weber and his reflections, his conclusions? He compared a mystic to a vessel at the core of which any action looks like an invader, a destroyer, and this state of mind is somehow akin to what we might experience in a tea room as we drink and enjoy a cup of tea and a piece of cake lying on a saucer or whatever passes as such. It is noteworthy that the two main aspects of human existence meet and cooperate within Tolstoy's introduction to his *Art of Life – Kunst der Leben*, in German translation. These two aspects seem to originate in harmony or in Bach's preludes and fugues: love and nonviolent confrontation

with evil. An ascetic adopts the same stance throughout her parsimonious existence, for she has no intention of fighting either the sand or the wind; and only the sand and the wind can be found in a desert. And sometimes you spot a camel in the distance, but then you realise you have just fallen prey to yet another mirage which might have been willed by God, for all you know. Most of the time, however, you have no wish to know or learn anything, and once again you yield to what Freud calls ‘our death instinct’ and let a thunderstorm bury your body and earthly yearnings. The sand will see to it that no intruders interfere with your irrational and extrawordly state (or sentiment) of salvation.

Of course it is much easier to meditate under a layer of sand because very few people are prepared to dig you out for the sake of a short heart-to-heart talk about Kant and Schopenhauer. Firefighters always help to dig out the people trapped in snowdrifts. They are eager to accomplish their duty which is closely related to the bodies trapped in snowdrifts and other drifts, other materials, other dust and ashes. But you are peacefully dreaming under the layer I mentioned above, and the firefighters – the ones I mentioned above as well – just walk past your body, looking for fires, flames and snowdrifts that wait for them either in Switzerland or in Austria. What can you concentrate your thoughts upon? That does not really matter as long as you are allowed to concentrate on anything, without being disturbed every two minutes. You concentrate upon a mandala and suddenly someone knocks on your door, shouting, ‘Help, help, help, help!’ Politely you ask this person what kind of matter or what spirit preys upon his mind. And the woman answers – it was a female voice after all – ‘I don’t understand what my life is about. Does it have any sense? Does it make any sense? Does it make anything at all?’

‘What’s your chief occupation and preoccupation?’ you ask.

‘I construct boxes of matches.’

‘Do you really *construct* them?’

‘They’re skyscrapers in disguise,’ answers the woman.

‘Why?’ You cannot refrain from asking her this logical question.

‘Because I’m infatuated with Wall Street. With *The Wall Street Journal* in particular.’

Such interruptions might disrupt all your trains of thought – not only those you consciously devoted to serious subjects such as life and death, life or death, or just dread, as Kierkegaard put it. (Or red, as the Soviet Union put it.) Wait a minute, wait a minute! What about asceticism and mysticism? Of course you can build your mystic skyscraper on nothing, on a syllable, provided this syllable sounds like the proverbial AUM. It can even sound like UM or Ulm, and if someone asks you why you are wasting your time on this German city, you may answer, ‘My ancestors were born in Ulm. Do you wish to know *when* they were born? Five centuries ago.’ Actually all professional mediators are aware of the following rule: the slimmer your foundation, the greater your chance of winning God’s approval. And then your guru switches to human examples dictated by his anthropological bias: ‘She was slim, svelte and sophisticated,’ he says, lowering his hand as if with a view to touching a four-letter spot. Is it really a four-letter spot? Doesn’t matter. It is all the more tangential (as a question and assertion, I mean; or tangible, as the spot itself) since his gesture is interrupted and so does not finish its abominable, lascivious trajectory. Anyway, what he was driving at becomes crystal clear when you take the trouble to visualise this woman; whereupon, upon this visualisation, you realise to what extent she must have been intelligent and enlightened. Why? Because her legs and the rest of her body were slim to the utmost. In other words, she did not have her feet firmly planted on the ground. In other words, she was floating in the air like Simon the Magician and

any run-of-the-mill yogi. And if you make a laudable attempt to cast a shadow on this assertion, your guru says, ‘Haven’t you ever noticed how slim their ankles are?’ Needless to say you are dumbfounded by this repartee.

BUMP WITH THE WIND

‘No complete erotic relationship will be established in its own right other than through a mysterious *destination* for the other – *fate* in the highest sense of the word – and will thereby know itself (in a wholly unethical sense) “legitimated”. But this “fate” for salvation religion is nothing other than a purely accidental offshoot of the flames of passion’ (Max Weber). Here we go again. This passage or message reminds me of Darwin who wrote about the wind, at some point. At this particular spot the wind was blowing and so Darwin compared natural selection to this wind, saying among other things, ‘There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows.’ The same goes for everything, even for the way I chose this bit of Darwin’s corpus. When in doubt, you should not necessarily kill a child – this procedure is frowned upon by all those who are up in arms over paedophile rings – because there are other sources of inspiration. For instance, you just go out on a windy day and look at whatever happens to display its beauty before your very eyes. Something falls on your shoe or stealthily penetrates your eye, and you begin to meditate upon this object, upon this unexpected occurrence. Then you write a poem, a short story, a long story, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and children thank you for your magnanimity and your opuses’ will-o’-the-wisp beauty. How strange, how strange. You are born into this world, into one of its families – or you are just an orphan forsaken in some garden – and you hope that your happiness is embedded in its very texture, in the structure of the world; otherwise you cannot account for your mother’s suffering, cries and tears; and for all the trouble you cause to a number of people whose duty and pleasure boil down to lullabies they sing above your head. They also put into your mouth either a piece of rubber or a female breast. What for? For a gust of wind.

Something is gone with the wind; other things come with it and cover your clothes as if you were freezing to death. They take no notice of the temperature to which your body is exposed; they just come and go and fall and are cut to shreds by some scissors or others. And then you see a woman flying towards this body of yours, and you say to yourself, ‘She is my Juliet. Some time ago she was standing on her balcony, waiting for me or another Romeo. Am I the only Romeo in this world? Never mind, never mind. At some point – and she stumbled upon this point on her balcony – she grew weary of waiting for Romeo, Tristan and other suitors. And she flew off in her eagerness to come across (fly across) her fate at the earliest opportunity. But what does the text I began to quote say on the subject? This is another instance of what Darwin and his staunch partisans call natural ‘selection’; as if flying amidst the clouds and raindrops were as natural as all that. Well, I was speaking of the flames of passion and of their accidental offshoot. What is this offshoot, may I ask? A religious feeling? A belief in natural selection? A standing ovation for Darwin? All is purely accidental, and all is vanity; and all is a vanity fair and a suffering fair. And all this is unfair, to say the least. You see a woman in the sky and you say to yourself, ‘This appearance, this out-of-the-blue phenomenon must allude to religion and its representatives – purely accidentally, mind you. A palpable hint, forsooth! What am I supposed to do with this body, with the feeling of love that I feel in my breast?’ You continue to read the text. With the passing of time you realise that you misunderstood the essence of this text, the very substance of religion as such. ‘It is this (the flames of passion) that supports a pathological state of possession – everything is pathological, down to *natural* selection – idiosyncrasy, and a disturbed sense of

proportionality and of any objective justice, which to religion must appear as the total denial of all brotherly love and of submission to God.'

What does natural selection have to do with religion? It must have something to do with it, otherwise I would not speak of them in the same breath. Does this mean you *select* the religion, your religion, the one you will be faithful to throughout your life? Or do your parents shoulder the burden, the burden of your life, of your posthumous life? Or does an angel descend from the sky – from where could it descend, if not from the sky? – and informs you that you are a Christian adept and a church-goer into the bargain? Or do they let you know your inclination and vocation through the Internet? But what does your faith have in common with love? It is love that counts and lives both really and truly, and you cannot know the first thing about it if you do not take the trouble to fall in love with a human being, with a creature of flesh and blood. Instead of speaking to angels and picturing to yourself their lives amidst the stars and clouds and hurricanes, you wait for a man or a woman, and fall in love with them, after much soul-searching. For a while you search your soul for the sake of love and its whereabouts, and if you find it, you say to yourself, 'I've got a religion now.' And then you read Max Weber and realise you have not found anything, not even a tiny weeny attachment. 'The feeling of goodness and euphoria of the fortunate lovers with their friendly need to poetise the entire world with their joyful countenance, or else to enchant it with their naïve desire to spread happiness always comes up against the chilling ridicule of the genuine, religiously founded and radical ethic of brotherliness.'

Is it so chilling as all that, the ridicule of brotherliness? You stand in a church and everywhere you see your brothers and sisters with some of whom you might have shared your mother's womb. (After all, there are myriads of twin sisters and twin brothers in our world.) And only in your mother's womb can you really feel close to your fellow creatures to whose sentiments and reciprocity you are to appeal throughout your life. Yes, you find yourself in your mother's womb and you complain about your visceral solitude that seems irremediable, given the size of the womb in question. And then it dawns upon you that your mother's womb – any mother's womb – is literally infinite, without bounds. That is what they rightly define as motherly love. So you can invite as many people as you wish: you can invite them to your mother's womb either by sending those emails or waves and other signals. In due time you will know how one is supposed to communicate with one's brothers and sisters from one's mother's womb. You can even send them a lot of postcards, for all I know; if I am not bitterly mistaken. Well, we shall resolve this communication problem in due time, in due space. Anyway, we are told that so-called brotherliness is not to be discovered within passions and their flames, even if they are God-oriented. If I remember rightly, some nuns used to boast about their ability to make love to God either in bed or elsewhere – anywhere, not necessarily in a monastery. Let us resolve this problem once and for all: our brotherliness can be probed into only in our mother's womb, in its cramped uncomfortable room. Of course we contradict ourselves almost in the same breath: this womb cannot be both the universe and a cramped room, an attic where Raskolnikov slept before and after his renowned murders. But Emerson welcomed contradictions; nor was Friedrich Nietzsche utterly estranged from them. (Or was it Schopenhauer? Or Kant? Or wasn't it?)

What on earth is brotherliness? If you are brothers, you can from time to time sleep in the same bed, but you should not indulge in amorous scimmages, in lovemaking and so on. You should talk about your brotherhood, about philosophy, humanism and the refusal to comply with the almost inevitable use of nuclear weapons. Then you are sure to get closer to God because what God desires most and foremost is peace spreading around the

universe. A peace-wave is set in motion in a distant corner of the universe and then it reaches out to other distant corners where a lot of people and animals begin to embrace rather heartily, saying to each other, 'You're my brother, you know. Don't you know *that*?' And if someone answers, 'I'm not quite aware of that,' the would-be partner kisses you once again. He or she or it continues to kiss you. In the long run, you grow convinced of your brotherhood except that you begin to worry about the number of kisses exchanged in the course of this ritual, of the ritual called 'coming to terms with our brotherhood'. And you ask your brother or sister, 'Do you think we're running no danger?'

'What kind of danger are you talking about?'

'Aren't we in love with each other?'

'What kind of love are you alluding to?'

'Flames of passion, if I'm not mistaken.'

'I can feel a modicum of passion – somewhere, in one of my limbs. As for flames, I'm rather on the cool side at the moment.'

'How disappointing.'

'Is it?'

'Of course it is. Do you believe you can get share in this brotherhood thing at the push of a button?'

'I'm sorry, but I think I'm inflammable.'

'Are you?'

'I am.'

'Then get out of my mother's womb.'

'It is *my* mother's womb we're talking in.'

'Then get out of *your* mother's womb.'

What about sisterliness? Shouldn't we say 'or sisterliness', whenever we talk about our brotherliness? Are they situated along the same *lines*? As I said earlier, you kiss someone as you analyse and dissect the notion you are so fond of – brotherliness; to the detriment of many other notions, mind you. And suddenly you realise that, for the last two hours you have been kissing a woman – your sister, in all probability. So your discussion starts anew as if nothing had happened – no kissing, no passions, no flames of any kind. (Not even a tiny flame produced by a match.) So you say to this woman, 'Are you really a woman?'

'Do you have any doubt in this domain?'

'In what domain?'

'In the domain where my gender and sex are situated.'

'I think you're a woman, but you might be a female impersonator or a drag queen, for all I know.'

'What do you take me for?'

'For a drag queen.'

Well, the problem we are facing may be expressed in a few words: To whom should we send invitations? Let us omit the whereabouts of the meeting we project, determined to come to terms with our fellow creatures. To whom shall we appeal for help? They always say we cannot do anything on our own: we need others and their otherness. All right, all right. But it is hard to know where to draw the line, considering that we cannot invite *everybody* to our party. Some people should remain outside our space, be it our mother's womb or our living room;

or our country house. There is such a thing as a social contract, I'm told, but I wonder if this contract should include some rulers, governments and Trumps who might be found in any government, however small and smart. Do we really need a social contract? Are we wolves or poodles? Can't we respect each other without ministers and their dubitable justice? The point is we must keep all Trumps (and even trump cards, for fear of words' pernicious influence) at bay; otherwise our peace will be smashed to pieces. I'm afraid this boor who took himself for the best trump card of humanity has been immortalised through the abundant use of his insolence. They already speak of such a thing as trumpism (tropism) so one is inexorably driven to shout, 'No trumps please. And no isms either.' You shout, you scream and see yet another Trump on the Internet as if there were no other letters in the universe. You wish to spend an hour or so in a posh and appallingly expensive tea room. But its address continues to slip your mind as if your mind were slippery instead of holding everything tight, instead of 'grabbing pussies', as Trump put it on some bus or other. Well, you switch your computer on and see, 'Trump, Trump, Trump.' You type 't' and the computer says, 'Trump.' No matter how much time you waste on this exercise, the computer keeps on skipping the letters 'e' and 'a'. So you relinquish your tea-imbued idea and listen to Verdi's *Requiem* instead. To any requiem, any funeral march. The same goes for presidents and prime ministers. You type 'pre' and your computer answers 'Tru'; and you switch the computer off, being aware of what is in store for you. You are sure it will never show you the truth.

NOT ANY, NOT ANY

I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe – 'That government is best which governs not at all'. And when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government.

Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*

What can you do with statements? How to deal with them? Of course you can say, 'My freedom comes before any social contract, any government. I won't necessarily live in the woods, close to brooks and bonfires, but I **have no wish to be governed by anyone with the exception of my longings.**' And then they say to you, 'And what about thieves, bandits and murderers?' You answer, 'I can shift for myself. I was badly maltreated as a child – by my brothers and sisters. With the passing of the years, however, I began to follow what is known as the eye-for-an-eye principle. Whenever my eyes were exposed to their (my brothers' and sisters') blows, I would clench my fists and begin to pummel those hooligans into submission. After a while, they would say, 'If you wish to hit one of our eyes, you can do it with impunity.'

'I wish to gouge one of your eyes out.'

'Which one? Who are you talking about? About one of your sisters or brothers?'

'I'm talking about you,' I would say, pointing to one of my sisters.

‘Why don’t you propose to gouge out one of your *brothers’* eyes?’ my sister usually answered in a conciliatory tone.

‘Ladies’ first,’ I would say to her and to my brothers.

‘But you don’t behave like a gentleman, my brother,’ one of my sisters usually replied. ‘You should protect all women, especially those connected to you through your flesh and blood.’

‘Do you mean to say that if I gouge one of *your* eyes out, I’ll do the same to one of my eyes which are after all part and parcel of my flesh?’

‘And of your spirit, you know,’ they would answer. ‘Your eyes allow you to see the world in all its splendour. We’re sure that, sooner or later, you’ll gouge all our eyes out, whatever we do, however pleasantly and graciously we behave. So we’d like to know what you propose to do without your eyes, without your sight, without our colourful world.’

‘I could just live,’ I would say to them with a confidential smile. ‘You can live like a microbe, like that passage I lighted upon in Plato’s *Sophist*.’

But before quoting this famous dialogue, I had better get through my treatment of the problem related to burglars and rippers of all kinds. The point is you should train yourself for such hostile encounters when you are young, when your preoccupations with morals do not take too much room in your soul and brain. It is true that your parents do all they can to instil moral codes into your body and mind, but your boisterous age is kind enough to allow you to devote most of your precious time to wars, to your military instincts. ‘An eye for an eye,’ whenever you see an eye in front of your fist; and even if this eye does not offend you, your fist should strike while the eye is hot, so to speak. And if your father’s voice – it resounds in your conscience and moral code – says to you, ‘Calm down. Don’t gouge this eye out – it’s rather cold, you know,’ you answer to him and also to your mother, ‘Do you want me to touch this eye before striking the mortal blow? Why do you always talk about *moral* blows, my dear father and mother? Think about my future, my dear parents, my progenitors.’ Of course your father will not miss another opportunity to give you a lesson, saying this time, ‘My dear son! Your use of the word “progenitor” is incorrect, to say the least. “Progenitor” means: a person who first thinks of something and causes it to happen. Let me give you an example: Marx was the progenitor of communism. You hate both communists and their doctrine, don’t you?’

‘My dear father, I would ask you to give a thought to my future, to the burglars I’m sure to oppose sooner or later. How could I cope with the people whose code of behaviour is limited to the notion of “breaking and entering”? They break everything and enter, depriving you of your privacy and castle, let alone your life.’ But, understandably enough, your father turns a deaf ear to your arguments that feature your intention of gouging your opponents’ eyes out and pulling out their teeth. These conversations lead nowhere, even if your father accepts your decision to limit your interference with other lives to one eye, one tooth only. But he is likely to speak of Gandhi and the rails on which the Indian hero used to spend his time, waiting for British trains and their wheels. He might also touch upon Tolstoy’s adherence to rail-inspired attitudes, considering the way he departed from his estate, wife and children. Of course he was given no opportunity to take a plane; yet no one prevented him from riding away on his favourite horse from which he used to fall rather often, breaking either his arms or his legs. To cut a long story short, you have no time for such discussions, especially if you think that gunmen are in the vicinity of your front door, of your living room where you face yet another bottle of Burgundy. You should keep your hand

in; after all, you are unarmed and no bomb awaits you in your attic. But your father goes on instilling his doctrines into your head which is to govern your behaviour in case you forget what life is about. If you do, both gunmen and burglars – of course they are often identical like twins – will wreck your place, turning everything and everybody upside down. A lot of jewels might fall from your spouse's neck and arms as she stays suspended in midair, her head almost touching the sheets of paper lying on your desk. They turn your papers upside down too, attempting to rewrite your poems, your orders, complaints and the novel you began to write only a few days ago. Of course you say to those people, 'I don't trust computers. I still write in long hand, as Shakespeare did because I'd like to resemble Shakespeare, if only in the domain of handwriting. In short, this is the only copy of my forthcoming masterpiece – there are no copies, no originals on my computer's hard disc for the simple reason that I've got no computer, no Internet – nothing electronic, you know. No G 5, no G 6, no G 7. I work only with natural, organic products such as my arms and legs, let alone with my head. Please take whatever you wish – my wife's jewels are yours. They're yours for the taking so just take them and go, go, go, after partaking of my caviar, oysters and *blinis*. But don't you ever touch my manuscripts.'

According to your father, an angel (your guardian angel or just an angel) stands by your front door and says to burglars and suchlike, 'I wouldn't go inside if I were you. Inside you'd find only Covid and Aids. COVID, AIDS. What else do you need for your future and present death?' And the burglars sound the retreat and beat it. But sometimes they do neither and say to the angel or another guardian of sorts, 'We're not afraid of Covid, for our mask will protect us not only from this bogus virus, but also from Aids and syphilis. Anyway, the owner and his spouse will have no time to defend themselves from our bullets, knives and teargas. They'll be killed on the spot. First they'll cry their eyes out and once their eyes are out, they'll collapse on the floor, wriggling and screaming.' In this case, your training may come in handy so you will whip your revolver out and begin to shoot first at random – wounding your chandelier, among other things – and then masterfully, hitting every burglar's heart and sex organs. This time it is their (the burglars') turn. They burst into tears, saying to themselves and God, 'What a pity we've been prevented from turning everything and everybody upside down. The owner's wife is very beautiful, her figure being beyond comparison – we can't compare it even to Botticelli's Venus and anyone else's Aphrodite. We were prepared to give anything, all the tea in the world, for the view we might have enjoyed when turning her body upside down – slowly, slowly, enjoying every curve, every nook and cranny. Ah, her crannies, ah, her lovely nook, her lovely neck!'

But let me return for a while to Plato's *Sophist* unless I confuse it (as usual) with some Taoist treatise talking about sages and their invisibility. You say to your son, 'I wish you could follow in this sage's footsteps, otherwise you might go astray and then no one will ever be in a position to set your feet and thoughts on the right track.'

'What sage are you talking about, Daddy? Where are his footsteps, if any?'

'Not any, not any,' the father responds. 'That's what real wisdom sounds like, my dear offspring – not any.'

NOT ANY(2)

We are not playing a game because it is pointless to play games in the times we seem to be living in, assuming we are living and not just dying, dying, lying and dying. So we are not playing a game, and I don't know what we are playing at and whether we are playing at all, but let us assume we are just talking for the sake of talking. There are no stakes to write home about; there are just sakes and we have no idea what these sakes are and for whose sake

they are there, right in front of us all. What should the name, *that which is not*, be applied to? This could be applied to a Taoist sage, as we stated earlier, at some point in the past. This point is no longer with us, but that does not really matter: some points are still around and it is for the sake of these points we are talking now, instead of keeping silent. That which is not or that who is not, which amounts to the same thing or being. To the same being or non-being. Why should we resort to this expression and in what connection, for God's sake? And for what kind of purpose? Is there any purpose within our field of vision as we continue to talk to no purpose – seemingly at least? What would we impart to someone else, provided there is such a being as someone else? Suppose there *is* such a being, and this being wishes to know what we are talking about. Admittedly this being wants to find out about it, about that which is not. Not about that which is *hot*, mind you. No, no, no, no, no – about that which is *not*. And that that is neither hot nor cold and presumably it has no characteristics at all; no characteristics, no tendencies, no qualities. What *does* it have? It just has that or rather that which is not. How do Chinese sages proceed? First they imagine they are, although they are not – in accordance with the expression 'that which is not'. All right, all right – you *are*; for the time being and for argument's sake. Anyway, you have to start somewhere – from scratch, among other things. Well, this scratch is that or that's that, and you proceed along these lines or line, saying to yourself, 'Now I am that's that and in two minutes' time I'll be just that, nothing more, nothing else, nothing really; or really nothing. And then, with the passing of time, I'm sure to become just that or that, that, that – without any just, if you please. And then I'll become th – not then, not Zen, contrary to what might be supposed. And then I'll become 'T', a capital 'T'. And then I'll become a small 't' – not a lower case, as might be presumed. I'm not a case or whatever is the case. I am not, I am not. I am whatever is *not* the case. Anyway, this much is obvious to us that that which is not cannot be applied to any of those which are. Where *are* they, by the way? Those which *are*, I mean? If you are one of those which are not, you cannot see anybody or anything – any *is* or *are*, in other words.

Plato, *Sophist*

There are the ends of it and the beginning of our stupidity is known almost everywhere. The other day – and that day was yesterday, for God's sake; and there is no other sake in the world or elsewhere for some of us – I was looking for peace as if sitting on some commission. And somewhere peace appeared, not out of nowhere or out of the blue – it came out of the dark, according to their predictions; and I heard Leo Blech conduct some excerpts of *Siegfried*, recoded in the late Twenties. The Late are probably better because the Early are too early and the rest die too soon unless they survive until the letters FULFILMENT. I heard Leo Blech perform Wagner's music without thinking about the Jews. Without thinking probably, without feeling. Without. You just pass by and go straight to the sky. A Jew performing an archanti-Semite in Germany, in Berlin, several years before the advent of Adolf Hitler. Paradise on Earth? The Blue Ray? The only chance? The only winning algorithm? After all, I chanced on him, on them, through the Internet. Without looking for Tibetan books, for Shalala, or whatever its immortal name is and will be (not). Shalala, Shambala. Don't they say 'shambolic'?

There is no point in going on because there are points somewhere, no doubts about there, but you glide past them in your endeavour to get to the point that does not really exist. That which is not is not the point as such. It is as if you were asking someone about the nowhere to which you direct your steps, without knowing where you

direct them, in what direction they are going. How could you ever talk about nowhere or the nowhere? Add to this nowhere whatever you wish, it will stubbornly remain nowhere through the realm of time, reaching out to eternity and whatever lies beyond it. (Eternity must be as infinite as the universe we thought about two or three centuries ago.) So if you honestly ask somebody, ‘Where is the nowhere or just nowhere, if you prefer?’

‘What are you talking about? Nowhere, the nowhere or just nowhere?’

‘Doesn’t matter. I’m looking for its whereabouts.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I get the feeling I’m lost in the middle of nowhere, and so I’d like to get somewhere, to find a path leading somewhere, even if this somewhere is a kind of nowhere – in reality.’

‘What about going up the garden path?’

‘What about it?’

‘Don’t you wish to be up, in the somewhere situated in the upper region of the universe, then to crawl on all fours in the mud, in the muck?’

‘It depends, it depends. If they hang you on the gallows, you also get the feeling of being in the upper regions of the cosmos – if only for the space of a minute.’

Well, the chief thing is your capacity to go somewhere, even if this capacity leads you nowhere. Let us analyse – if only for a second – the expression ‘leading nowhere’. Is there anything positive about this negation, about this NOWhere? Is it just nothing, nothing more than nothing? Not quite, not quite. If you are led, if you put one of your feet in front of the other, and both your feet move in some direction, whatever this direction means and offers you, you are doing something, you live your life fully and thoroughly instead of dying on some patch of grass. All right, for quite a while you were lying on this patch, doing nothing except dying – as usual, as usual. And then something came along and said, ‘Do get a move on.’

‘It’s obvious to us that we always apply this *something* to a being, since it’s impossible to say it by itself as if it were naked and isolated from all beings. Isn’t that right?’ All right. But what about *nowhere*? Can it stand and live by itself? It cannot: it is nowhere except on the spot where it has been written or printed. So it is there, on the spot, and we cannot discard it light-heartedly – not only because letters, syllables and words count enormously, to the point of superseding, suppressing objects and even subjects. It is just there so you can look at it, walk on it and even pick it up and hold it in your hands, provided it is written or printed on a sheet of paper. And even if it is written on the mud, you can or rather should pick it up to prove to yourself and everybody that the mud does not exist: there are sands and suns and brightness everywhere. Nothing else is allowed to mar the beauty of the world, no mud, no dark, no impurities of any kind, no unkind kinds, no evil minds. ‘This mud is nowhere,’ you can say if there are individuals who are unable to receive the light streaming from the inscription you are about to hold under their very noses. ‘Your piece of mud stinks to high heaven,’ they say in unison. ‘Forget about the mud. Think only in terms of high heaven,’ you answer.

In China one can often hear the following dialogue, ‘Please, lead me nowhere,’ says a disciple to his mentor.

‘You’re already in the middle of nowhere,’ says the teacher.

‘Please, remove the middle that sticks out a mile,’ says the disciple.

‘You yourself should remove the stick,’ says the teacher.

‘But I have none,’ says the disciple.

‘Go and fetch a stick. And then remove it promptly and noiselessly. The same goes for the middle.’

‘Where could I find the middle?’ asks the disciple.

‘In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, you fool.’

Of course you can talk about your multiplication table (an upside-down table) for hours on end, coming to nothing at the end of the journey and calculus. Yes, you ask yourself, ‘Where am I?’ as you look at yourself in a mirror. And then you realise you are not looking at yourself: it is the mirror you are looking at. No, no, no: it is you you are looking at except that you can repeat your you, you, you, I, I, as many times as you wish without seeing anything substantial. I mean, you see only your insubstantiality – your absence, in other words. And your guru says to you, ‘Congratulations. You’ve reached your nirvana, your cosmic nirvana, your satori (satire) or whatever they call it. I spent a few years in India and Japan, but I don’t remember anything in particular except nirvana and the whisky they call Suntory.’ What counts, however, is your life, not your fake nirvanas and santories, suntories – your enlightenment-factories, as they call them. Once again you come across the ritual question for the sake of which so many Russians have sacrificed their lives over decades and centuries: How to live? We shall always have enough time for death and its accessories. Let us not forget that life is much more than a fashion accessory, which means we have to start from scratch; otherwise we shall inevitably land up in yet another nirvana or Suntory hall, as they say in Japan; in Tokyo in particular.

How could you start from scratch? And where could this (or any other) scratch be found? Of course our task seems much easier in the present case. What we are dealing with is scratch and not noscratch, which confronted us earlier; I mean we were striving for clarity and comprehension with nowhere – a hard nut to crack, to all appearances. Rather, on account of its continuous disappearances. Now and then you have the feeling and also hope that nowhere is within your reach merely because you focus your attention on *where* and not on *no*. We usually opt for the absence of nos unless our problem is related to the coronavirus which requires a negative reaction on our part; otherwise we might spend the rest of our life first in a hospital and then in a cemetery, on condition that you decide you will continue to live after your death. So we set our heart upon *where* and begin our fruitless search laboriously centred upon the lack of centre, on its conspicuous absence. ‘Nowhere is nowhere to be seen, let alone found’ is the best formula we can chance upon in the course of our obstinate, obdurate search. But we are go-getters, and we are not used to isolating our ‘go’ from our ‘getter’. Why should we embark on any journey if we are not sure to get what we want – and even more, much more? As Manilov put it in his conversation with Chichikov, ‘You know everything and much, much more.’ But even if you find a thousand nowheres, you will not be any the wiser, for you cannot set this number or object off to advantage. Indeed you cannot decorate your house with nowhere; and if you succeed in carrying your project through, you will feel dejected at the end of the process. Once it is over – the process, the hanging, the nailing and so on – you take a walk through your house and occasionally burst into tears. Why? Because, to all intents and purposes, you have a beautiful house, but the ornament you come across informs you you have no house whatsoever. Your house is nowhere and so you cannot even spend a peaceful night in your bed unless you transfer it to your garden and install it under one of the trees, anxious to be protected from winds and rains; or from hail storms.

The matter stands differently with starting from scratch – as long as you add no ‘nos’ to it. Why should you, for God’s sake? At some point, at some stage we may encounter in our life, we are bound to wish to deny everything, to say ‘No’ to everybody, down to our closest associates and mistresses. This tendency might be called

‘The Will to No’ which does not tie in with Nietzsche’s *scienza*, with its (and his) gaiety. What to do? Not to say ‘No’? To say to oneself, ‘No, no, no, no, no – for nothing in the world will I ever say “No”, for it is detrimental to my life and contrary to my ideals, to my *joie de vivre*, to my *tristesse de mourir*.’ Actually you need a strengthening to renounce your renunciation once and for all; your renunciation of life, delights, men, women and children. Spontaneously, almost automatically, you fall back on nos which seem mighty enough to cancel your renunciations and withdrawals – once and for all; as usual. So you say, ‘No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. No nos, no nos, no nos, no nos.’ Abruptly your speech comes to a standstill as you realise you are hammering it in, you hammer ‘no’ into yourself and therefore there are a lot of ‘nolives’ inside your body and soul this afternoon. You say to yourself you should eliminate them, remove them from your organism by drinking plain water. (Any sparkling water might breathe new life or rather new eternity into your denials.) You drink a glass of water and say, ‘Yes.’ You drink another glass of water and say, ‘Wow.’ You drink a third glass of water, look around, walk along a dozen of corridors and exclaim, ‘Wow! What a fantastic house.’

Well, when starting from scratch you should not go too far, for there are historic, ancient monuments we had better keep for the sake of beauty: they are things of beauty and joys forever. Where is the scratch we are talking about? Nowhere, nowhere. Well, let us drop this rubbish once and for all, for everything is everywhere, as mystics put it. I don’t think that Isaac Newton can help us construct a new universe, in spite of what may be called ‘the partial accuracy of his system’. Perhaps we should rely more on Plato’s metaphysics and the wrong, rudimentary mathematics to which he devoted a greater part of his old age; and a couple of esoteric lectures. Let us visualise an odyssey through space and a planet on which we find ourselves because of mistakes, miscalculations and extra-terrestrial vibrations. What do we see around us? A few half-machines, a few half-humans, a few half-dogs, a few half-pets. And we have no idea to what breed or race or nation we should attribute their substances. In this connection I would like to recall a sentence I read in some catalogue or other, ‘In a coda to the main exhibition are various works which were once attributed to Rembrandt.’ To what extent is this remark connected to what I wrote about my landing on a foreign planet or nebula? (Did I? Did I write anything of this seventh kind? When?) We cannot attribute those outlandish creatures to Rembrandt, can we? We had rather attribute them to Bosch or Yves Tanguy or Toyen – to anybody except Rembrandt. Why not bring in Salvador Dali who always seems to wait for us in the wings? At least in our earthly world.

LABOURS LOST, NOT FOUND

To describe the dancing movements of these gods, their juxtapositions and the back-circling and advances of their circular courses on themselves; to tell which of the gods come into line with one another at their conjunctions and how many of them are in opposition, and in what order and at which times they pass in front of or behind one another, so that some are occluded from our view to reappear once again, thereby bringing terrors and portents of things to come to those who cannot reason – to tell all this without the use of visible models would be labour spent in vain.

Plato, *Timaeus*

The form we use most often – to be or not to be – does not apply exclusively to our existence, to pistols, swords and skyscrapers; or their absence. At least the absence I have just touched upon refers to our dependence on their immediate action. In other words, all these swords pierce and transfix *other* bodies, whereas ours go on jogging somewhere, in some gardens or woods or even on Fifth Avenue. This time the form I am enlarging upon (and this form is really large) can be found scattered all around human life. Before embarking upon the adventure entitled (in the book of life) ‘The Creation of the Universe’, we must decide whether we content ourselves with one god only; in which case we are likely to become the Almighty. No partners, no adversaries. A do-it-yourself universe. I am not sure I wish to identify with the Almighty in Whose image I am not created, in my opinion. The only snag is my opinion is not as learned as might be expected, given my age and the amount of experience I stored up somewhere; perhaps in my heart, in my mind. (Let us forget about the astral body, if only for a few seconds.) What Plato depicts so minutely and succulently comes down to dances of all sorts; and one sort, the first sort, concerns only one God, which reminds me of Giselle. The Prince is surrounded by furies or willies, wollies, woolies – by vengeful, ferocious women modelled upon fairies with whom we are acquainted thanks to the Grimm (grim) brothers’ fairy-tales. They are rather a bunch of the living dead, of corpses determined to kill whoever threatens to encroach upon their rights. And what *are* their rights, pray? Their rights may be unlimited for all I know: the dead have much more room for manoeuvre than the living who spend their time in the straitjacket of our earthly existence. And even if they are limited (*their* rights) by occasional intruders, they are far more spacious than *our* rights, even if we think only in terms of so-called free countries where a president can exercise his power almost absolutely, on condition that the Senate is on his electoral side.

In short, all those wills or willies or whinnies (a homage to Samuel Beckett?) dance, kiss each other and gather blackberries from the hedgerow. (There is one huge hedgerow in their universe.) And they also kill unfortunate lovers who are on the point of putting flowers, wreathes and other tokens of their remembrance on their mistresses’ tombs. Once their flowers are put in the right place, the willies begin their dance and say to the intruder or lover, ‘What are you doing here, young hooligan?’

‘I’m still in love with my late, much-adored, much-worshipped beloved.’

‘Too late – she’s late. You should have put these flowers on your dinner table.’

‘I had no dinner table at the time of our infatuation with each other. I was too poor to acquire one for her sake – for her flowers’ sake, rather.’

‘Do you know that you’re intruding upon our privacy?’

‘I wish you to understand that your privacy – the dead’s privacy, that is – is sacred and has been enshrined in my heart ever since I realised I would die some day, in the future.’

‘We aren’t dead, young fop. As for your death, it’s no longer in the future, however imminent. Incidentally, we’re calling you a fop because you’re already in the past.’

‘Would you forgive my transgressions and mortal sins if I danced for you?’

‘What kind of dance are you capable of performing in our theatre?’

‘Are you acquainted with the ballet entitled *Giselle*?’

No one prevents you from coming into line with someone who calls himself god; and then she calls herself goddess and declares simply and frankly, ‘I am an androgyne, you know.’ Then this she-he says to you, ‘We’re

not aligned and the image we create when dancing in this makeshift paradise isn't beautiful. At least it doesn't correspond to our higher standards.'

'What am I supposed to do in order to change my tack?'

'First of all, you should take off your shoes – it is a modern dance we're supposed to execute on this stage. People still think of the Soviet Union as a backward country, deprived of modern machines and modern human beings. Your dances are still rooted in what one could see at the Bolshoi Theatre back in the Thirties, Forties and Sixties. You wear shoes and dance on tiptoe. It's no longer done, my friend. And if we still take the trouble to perform *Giselle* and *Sleeping Beauty*, we just rush towards each other and start making love on the stage, instead of indulging in pas-de-deux and such indescribable nonsense.'

So you remove your shoes and also your tiptoe, as you jokingly describe this action of yours, and then you join the club or the line, and you toe the line for more than an hour, getting used to Paradise. Those willis or their clones bring you up to speed with the latest cosmic developments, and you dance faster and faster as you do come up to speed with everything – with the sun and the moon, among other things. On your way to perfection or the absolute speed you come across many conjunctions made up of the gods you touched upon recently, before reaching the speed of light. Sometimes you are all in opposition to each other; or just in opposition – you do not know exactly what you do because most of your movements are spontaneous and can be found only beyond any description. You pass in front of a god and she passes behind you. Suddenly you realise that some deities or goddesses are occluded from your view and also from 'our view', as you say to one of your partners. 'Don't you think you're rather on the slow side?' says this partner of yours and of ours. 'Could you please bring me up to the speediest speed?' you say to her. 'You're too heavy,' she says. 'You must talk to our bouncer, my dear sir.'

At what times do we pass in front or behind one another? you ask yourself out of idle curiosity. And you answer yourself thus, 'I'm not sure that under these circumstances we can talk at all about times or time itself, Time the Almighty. I'm under the impression there are no more times in the universe: neither Bergsonian time, nor Einsteinian time, nor Newtonian time. No Nils Bohr's either, if I understand myself rightly; if I'm not lying to myself, simply and purely. I'm not even sure I am a hundred percent. A hundred percent what? A human being? A pure human being? A pure god? A dirty god? A dirty mass of gold? A nasty Demiurge? One of them? Every bricklayer is a demiurge in his or her or herhis right, as they used to say. Bricklaying is a skilled job, as they used to repeat. What are they doing now, all of them? I wonder?'

I am still under the same impression and so I wonder where I am, considering that I see no stars, no milk, no cream, no ways. Only a kind of intoxicating freedom sustains my élans, my words and thoughts and bents and yens. 'One knew of places in ancient Greece where the way led down into the underworld. Our waking existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down into the underworld – a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise. All day long, suspecting nothing, we pass them by, but no sooner has sleep come than we are eagerly groping our way back to lose ourselves in the dark corridors' (Walter Benjamin). I cannot say that quoting, relying (if only in part) on other sources, on others, on books in general is part of my nature. I am even certain it is not embedded in my style, although I often prefer to speak of books to the detriment of trees and other anti-artefacts. You look at a tree and think about your aunt, her beauty, her occasional nakedness that you might avail yourself of on a beach. (An aunt instead of Einstein.) You can say to yourself or write (to yourself, for yourself): 'This branch evokes memories of my aunt's right leg which I saw during one of our trips to the Atlantic.'

And the wind playing with this branch reminds me of my own thoughts which played with this leg to its (their) thoughts' content. How content they were, my thoughts, my own legs, my whole body! How happy I was during those summer days and even nights, for I continued to evoke the same memories which were not distant in those days, nights and midsummers!' You continue to look at the same tree, and other thoughts traverse your brain as if it was as spacious as the cosmos itself with all its galaxies, nebulae and cosmonauts. You think that the Tree of Life is not on its own in the cosmic, universal garden where you can also stumble upon a tree of death, a tree of old age, a tree of cards – you could play bridge with such arboreal representatives – a tree of music, a tree of my grandmother, a tree of glee; a tree of me, as a child might put it.

In short, I was fond of the procedure about which Walter Benjamin spoke on several occasions as he answered his colleagues' questions focused upon his projects, ideas and style. He said at some point, 'I'd like to write a book made up of quotations,' and he embarked upon putting a lot of quotations side by side as if they could not stand on their own, as if they meant nothing out of that (his) context. Actually I am also keen on quoting myself. Giselle, Giselle, Albert, Giselle. How many times did I write about his flowers and her body turning in her tomb? Well, I quoted a part of Benjamin's text included in the book in question; in quotations, rather. Speaking about his black corridors, I am not sure I ever leave them on their own: they cannot live without me unless I am mistaken, led astray by my way of life which has nothing to do with what the Americans call 'our way of life' or 'our melting pot' or 'our borsch' or...What is the name of that Hungarian soup? Goulash, goulash. (The soup they do not serve in gulags.) I think they speak of it in one of Lubitsch's movies. My way is just the opposite of all these borsches (I really don't like this soup, in spite of being Russian; not to the backbone, though) and I am even darker than the dark side of the moon. If I remember rightly, Benjamin gets out of his corridors at some point or other. He walks on and on, for hours and hours, and then he sees the light at the end of the corridor and says to himself, 'Well, I seem to have walked along a tunnel, instead of enjoying myself in one of the corridors described in my book entitled *The Arcades' Project*. Or was I in a coma? Or was I dead?'

I COULD HEAR THE CLACK OF HIGH HEELS WALKING PAST IN THE CORRIDOR

But another system of galleries runs underground through Paris: the Métro, where at dusk glowing red lights point the way into the underworld of names. Combat, Elysée, Georges V, Etienne Marcel, Solférino, Invalides, Vaugirard – they have all thrown off the humiliating fetters of street or square, and here in the lightning-scored, whistle-resounding darkness are transformed into misshapen sewer gods, catacomb fairies. This labyrinth harbours in its interior not one but a dozen blind raging bulls, into whose jaws not one Theban virgin once a year but thousands of anaemic young dressmakers and drowsy clerks every morning must hurl themselves.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades' Project*

I lived near Paris for 33 years and only at the end of that life did I begin to go down and use those corridors, trains of thought which pay no attention to cars, pedestrians, their pets and spouses. Do all these lines lead to death? The Japanese say the path to death crosses a number of tea ceremonies, and two hours ago I drank a cup of tea, believing I was on my way. And this way lies along the corridors that Benjamin described in his book, touching upon the Minotaur I am likely to meet: I have already met a lot of Minotaurs in my life. They all consumed children

(paedophiliac Minotaurs), maidens and the boys admired and partly used by Socrates. It is easy to switch from any corridor, any makeshift labyrinth to the Minotaur – as Benjamin does – and then go on describing his victims. One might even affirm that Aphrodite was consumed, devoured by the Minotaur, for the simple reason that there are no more Aphrodites on the surface of the Earth. And if you go down, reach the bottom of the Metro and look around you, they are sure to inform you that all Aphrodites have already thrown themselves under the wheels of the train you will see sooner or later.

Yes, I am also capable of embroidering upon this theme, saying my life unfolds underground where my spaces are traversed by my trains of thought, my poems and impulses. Anything goes in those spaces so you can write about corridors while walking along them towards your death or cup of tea.

I am in the corridor of death.
 How did I become aware of that?
 It is written all over the walls:
 The corridor of death,
 The corridor of death.
 And there are cups of tea –
 Everywhere, everywhere.
 I trip over them, I drink from them.
 No corridor makes any sense
 If there are no teapots in it.
 And the names? What *about* them?
 Elysée, Georges V, Etienne Marcel.
 You just put them into your pockets.
 You appropriate them, otherwise
 Neither worlds, nor languages, nor Adam
 Will ever grow familiar, dear,
 Dear, dear, dear.

Of course if you come across a tree, you are mostly tempted to attribute to it what does not really belong to it – instead of describing its leaves and the colours it receives from the sky, from twilights and dawns. I am not Claude Monet and my trees mostly refer to life as such, to death as such and to whatever I can recall in the context where a tree stands and even grows. I can imagine a love scene unfolding in the midst of branches on which you can sit while making your declarations of love, while kissing your future or former partner; or just your present. I should not forget that I am not living in the world I accept and call ‘mine’, although I have to look at it, whenever my nightmares are no longer within my reach. I wonder why I have only nightmares at my disposal; whether I open my eyes or shut them, determined never to open them again. What I should do, therefore, amounts to creation, to building a tailor-made universe out of nothing or Plato’s solids – to be on the solid side. Indeed I am bound to go on living in this world, in this dark, unlimited, unilluminated corridor that I seem to explore for the sake of shunning death in any shape or form. I go to sleep, I wake up and wonder if I am really awake or asleep: the corridor is still

the same and no Monet is about to enliven it. There are no dawns, no evenings and even the gods do not die, for there are no twilights to announce their deaths. In the Metro there are many people, many crowds that push each other, bullying their members whose peace of mind depends on their trains of thought, not just on trains, doors, brakes and strident voices. In the Moscow Metro, at rush hour you are likely to experience an onslaught of hatred directed against all humanity, all ages inhabited by human beings. All right, all right – you might remind me that among the people you encounter in one of these metros there are beautiful girls and boys. And these boys will not always be boys: sooner or later they will grow old and lose their manifold appeal. Nor will those girls always be girls, for a multitude of old hags will replace them in some future or other. Why not exchange a few signs, words, gestures and suggestions?

You spot a beautiful young woman, spot a sign performed by her body, her eyes, and say to yourself, ‘I’ve caught her attention/imagination/interest. After all, I’m a handsome young man and her excitement conveyed to my mind through her behaviour doesn’t come as a complete surprise – far from it.’ You recall your well-read brother who claims that a theory of meaning must focus on the speaker’s ‘intentions’ and the ‘effects’ these have on a listener to produce certain behavioural responses. In other words, you must exchange a few words with the woman you set your heart upon before jumping to delightful, flattering conclusions. So, instead of jumping to these conclusions, you espouse another theory according to which attractive women can have private linguistic thoughts that are not revealed by their external behaviour. What is revealed by their behaviour, by their courteous or uncourteous exteriors? A beautiful lady does not always send you to hell either verbally or bodily, through some gesture or other. But she might turn her head away from your glance as if she did not care in the least about your intentions and sexual potential – your libido, as they say and write nowadays. She can raise one of her arms as if about to strike you, and it is useless to think her hand will touch your cheek with the intention of stroking it for several minutes either non-stop or non-non-stop. What does she actually do as you continue to look at her shoulders, legs and nape? Whatever she does is probably not true at all – not true to her intentions or their lack: she is just deprived of intentions, whenever you stay in front of her or walk by her side. You take a few steps in her direction and suddenly she realises she has no intentions whatsoever either in her head or in the nether part of her body. Just a few seconds before she was full of intentions, projects and desires, but your appearance, your coming out of the blue paralysed her to the extent of emptying her substance as if in expectation of some spiritual purity, enlightenment and salvation. Actually she has just said to herself, ‘Hopefully this man will not pursue me, let alone harass me and my body. If he does, I’ll call the police.’ Or she turns her head for a different reason, prompted by her propensity for amorous games and delusions; and allusions, undecipherable hints. If is as if she was saying to you, ‘Did you see what I did? Did you follow my head’s twists and turns? Do you know what they mean? Do I really have to spell it out for you?’

We should not forget that Frege’s interpretation of this phenomenon is rooted in two notions: sense and reference. Sense is a public phenomenon based on conventional agreement. We can all agree to use the sign ‘woman’ to signify a certain kind of human being. So, if you walk along the streets of your native city in the hope of coming across your future soul mate, you may notice a woman walking in the opposite direction. Then you might say to yourself that her direction, her infrastructure is not really opposite (opposed) to what you think and dream about, whenever in the grip of what they call ‘dejection’. This afternoon you happen to be in the grip of this word, and this state of affairs speaks volumes about your stroll, your direct contact with the streets of the city

where you were born some time ago. Well, at some point in your *flânerie* (you often use the French language, when resolved to find a soul and a body mate) you spot a woman who seems to answer all the questions you put to your fate or God. Overwhelmed by this discovery, you exclaim quite spontaneously, ‘Wow, what a woman!’ Someone overhears your exclamation, stops and nods his head and says without glancing at your face and wide-open eyes, ‘Not bad, that lass.’ Let us not forget that, according to Frege, sense is a public phenomenon based on conventional agreement – as I pointed out earlier. You cannot deny you agreed with the man whose words struck a sensitive chord in your being. Actually you prefer the word ‘lass’ to the word ‘woman’ and that partly accounts for your acceptance of this man’s psychological, highly gracious judgement. But is your agreement really conventional? You may agree with your agreement, with the fact that the man’s reaction to the woman you have just singled out from the crowd usurping the streets of the city, but you violently disagree with the word ‘conventional’, for you cannot bear conventions in any shape or form. No wonder you resort to this definition when resolutely opposed to behaviours, tendencies, mindsets and so on. You might say, for instance, ‘What a conventional, middle-aged attitude he has to life!’ And you do say that upon seeing a handsome young man whose only preoccupations concern money, comfort and middle-class values. Or you have a go at debunking the myth that continues to grow up around our medical progress and therefore say out loud, ‘Auto suggestive techniques can help in the treatment of diseases which cannot be cured by conventional medicine.’

In short you disagree with every word, every turn of phrase – not with everybody, as might be expected and feared. Sometimes you agree with this or that individual, but after agreeing with him and her you realise it is better not to agree with anybody because this very agreement is a source of endless discussions, prevarications and exaggerations. As soon as you agree with someone, this person begins to pat you on the shoulder, whenever you come across ‘the patting distance’, as it is usually defined. This person can be a woman or a man, but even if you exchange a few monologues and come to terms with every term you utter or contemplate in one of your trains of thought, you feel uncomfortable and think you had better remain alone for the rest of your life. And if you yourself pat someone on the shoulder (inadvertently, without any ulterior motive) you will realise to what extent you are foreign to any human substance, however innocent-looking and generous. Is all this called ‘reference’ or ‘sense’? Frankly, you don’t give a damn, following in Donald Trump’s footsteps. Suppose you compose a sort of *Divina Commedia* and put in hell a lot of individuals about whom not all of your contemporaries are aware; let alone their numerous offspring. Then an army of commentators come and explain what you are talking about, writing a lot of words about your heroes and heroines. They will also write about Trump and even about his tower, provided they mean something in any context, however ludicrous and non-existent. All right, all right – let us leave Donald Trump alone, which is much easier now: he lost the presidential election and therefore another opportunity to get on my nerves and under my skin, under all my skins and tendons.

Well, let us return to the woman we saw in the streets of my or your native city – some time ago, if I remember rightly. When you say I can see an attractive woman walking down Novitskaya street, you are making a statement which may be true or false – even if this woman *is* attractive, at least to some extent; to the extent of your present judgement and mood. But is it really a woman or a female impersonator – a *travesti*, as they say in France? I think I have already asked myself this question – when speaking of another woman, needless to point out. But suppose this is a *real* woman you are talking about; a real woman by whose side you are walking right now – to make things easier for all of us, our offspring included. This woman may be far more masculine than any

man; more muscular and aggressive than Donald Trump. And this woman might say to you in the course of your first conversation, 'I wish I were born a man – Abraham Lincoln, for instance. Or Donald Trump.' Does this reference make any sense? Besides, according to Wittgenstein, to his later view, any philosophical search for 'meaning' is a mistake. Misleading, misleading, misleading, misleading, as he used to repeat almost endlessly, frowning and stamping his left foot. (It is not for nothing that he was nicknamed 'our left-footist'. And Giles Deleuze called him, '*Je m'en footist*'.)

'All philosophers can do is to examine how language is used by people in all sorts of different contexts,' maintains Wittgenstein. But the problem is we talk all the time, even when we see no women in front of us; no women, no men, no dogs or horses. We just say, 'I think I'll be in love with the first woman whose figure appears within my field of vision. And I'm sure she'll reciprocate to the point of allowing me to make love to her in the middle of the street, unmindful of cars, bicycles and trams.' You aren't necessarily expected to define your action in the manner widely known as 'Trump's way'. Everybody knows – at least in the 21st century – what this way means and how it is enacted in everyday life. I think they are afraid of talking about it openly in daytime, for many children are around until their bedtime, until 9 p.m. Trump said plainly, unequivocally, 'You just grab her by the pussy. That's it, that's it.' Many interpreters are duty bound to interpret these words, to embellish them, making their contents palatable. And if you protest, saying that every word of an American president is as precious as the most expensive precious stone (a stone on which depends the history of the world), they reply, 'Suppose you're asked to eat these words, instead of eating your hat. Well, you can eat your hat as a dessert, but first you should eat Donald Trump's remark which is indissolubly linked to women, to sexy, libido-arousing women. So you're supposed to eat their pussies, after grabbing them firmly. You grab them, remove them from where they have spent many years and eat them, chew them, munch on them, swallow them. Would you go to the lavatory in the aftermath of such an experience? What do you think? Tell us frankly what you think about your predicament?'

You answer thus, 'I agree with you, if only for argument's sake. After all, it's our argument we're discussing at this particular moment.'

'Well, let us skip the meal I described a few moments ago,' says a woman. 'You don't have to *eat* my pussy, but I allow you to *lick* it to your mouth's content, on condition that no child is present in this room, on the spot where you'll perform your feat.'

'All right, let's make sure there are no children in this room. But before embarking upon this cumbersome, bureaucratic process, we'd better say to ourselves that it is pointless to look for meaning in private inner mental processes.'

'Do you mean to say Trump's misogynistic declaration has no meaning?'

'It has a lot of meanings within his brain and even within his mouth that feels whatever it talks about. But these meanings never leave Trump's interior so we're not even sure he has ever grabbed a pussy in his whole life.'

'Apparently his Japanese interpreter translated his affirmation thus, "You just touch a woman and she says to you, "You can do with me whatever you like."'"

'I think,' you say, 'that she added (just a sort of afterthought): "Provided you don't grab me by the pussy. My pussy is very touchy, you know. You would break it irremediably if you touched it ever so slightly."'

'But an American president is incapable of bungling anything, even if the matter under discussion has nothing to do with politics, wars and universal trade.'

‘Anyway, the Japanese didn’t understand what he and she were talking about. Trump and his interpreter, I mean. The latter pointed out that the Japanese language offered no equivalent to whatever Trump had ever said about women.’

‘The Japanese thought that, upon hearing the woman’s words (you can do with me whatever you like) Trump set about treating this woman in the way associated with queens and goddesses.’

‘Do you mean to say that, whenever spotting a goddess on the horizon, you meditate upon how you’ll grab her by the pussy in a few moments’ time?’

‘Do whatever you like. But don’t forget to replace the word “pussy” by the word “vagina” – in your children’s unavoidable presence. Or just show them a pussy cat.’

‘And you should point out that your children shouldn’t *grab* the pussy cat. Just stroke her, stroke her, stroke her, stroke her.’

SKIN-DEEP

We are all interpreters and so we are used to supplying meanings to meaningless objects and situations. Actually there is nothing else in the world – only meaninglessness. But we are bent on feeding this state of affairs and little by little it grows meaningful – to such an extent that an atomic bomb explodes somewhere, once, twice and thrice. Sometimes it even explodes six times and then we start discussing the Sixth Sense, the Sixth Dimension, bypassing G 5 and other nonsenses of this kind. We are always going further and further as if the spot where we happen to be born, where we stand in the course of our short and meaningful lives were unworthy of our standing and status. And then Wittgenstein comes along and says, ‘To employ a useful word like “Truth” doesn’t mean there is one thing that it refers to – and that philosophers must hunt for this mysterious entity.’ And we answer him, after reading a score of books, related and unrelated to this subject about which we know next to nothing, ‘You know, yesterday we stood next to the truth you’ve just touched upon. But now we have the feeling we’ve lost it forever. The point is a meaningless life is meaningless, if you see what we mean. And any life, however important and high-pitched, is absolutely meaningless if the word “Truth” doesn’t stand at the centre of it like a monument. All right, we’re quite aware of the fact that now and then the statue of this dictator is toppled by the crowd. And yet we erect the same statue, over and over again, saying to this crowd, to that crowd, ‘This is the truth and you’d better get used to it, otherwise you’ll die like dogs run over by our trucks.’ Anyway, we do not have to utter the word ‘philosophy’ – today, no one takes it seriously. We just employ the word ‘Truth’ and point to statues, whenever there *are* statues within our reach and their attention spans. Their attentions span our statue and then they bow to the inevitable. They continue to bow as long as it is necessary to bow so low that the floor begins to mount and eventually comes up to your knees. That is what we call ‘the admission of Truth’. Incidentally, even Wittgenstein admits that the word ‘Truth’ is useful, saying, ‘Not pointless, not pointless.’ After a while he adds the following remark, ‘Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.’ We meditate upon this remark and come up with the following conclusion, ‘The chief thing is to be bewitched, bewildered and enticed into thinking the world is beautiful; otherwise neither the world nor our lives have any sense.’

Then we drink a lot of tea, without waiting for tea masters and their apprentices and ponder our next move in the game of life. Life plays with us and the game we get involved in goes on in spite of the absence of philosophy

and its premises. And yet philosophy still battles against the bewilderment of our intelligence – for all Wittgenstein’s might and doctrines. ‘Doctor Wittgenstein, what are your doctrines?’ ask our children to whom we keep saying that philosophy battles for them day and night. And then we say that Wittgenstein killed philosophy outright and so the only doctrine he ever professed is as follows, ‘Lock it up, lock it up!’ That is why he was nicknamed ‘our philosophical Trump’ or ‘Trump’s ham-fisted apprentice’ or just ‘Imp’. How do all these nicknames, all *our* theories translate into practical life, we wonder? And then we swallow a few tablets of the best smart drug and say to ourselves, ‘It takes half an hour for the tablets to kick in.’

All philosophy comes to a standstill when you feel the beginning of pain, wherever this pain may be situated; and sometimes it is outside your body, but you feel it inside, for some obscure reason. And obscure reasons are very painful indeed, as everybody knows; even those who pretend they never feel anything except their happiness. And then world misery comes to the fore (as if it were somewhere else, just before this moment) and everybody says to them, ‘You’re so callous, so indifferent to the destiny of the poor, to the pain of sufferers. Don’t you feel their pain? Isn’t their pain yours, if only in part?’ Empathy, empathy, empathy. Philosophy does its best to make you understand the world and its intricacies, but empathy pushes you towards those who stand in front of you and wait for the warmth of your embrace. They seem to convey to your brain and body the following message, ‘We’re in the same boat. Please come and say you understand our fears, worries and forthcoming deaths. Don’t speak to us about distant resurrections, for death is much nearer. It is not next door, as some of us seem to affirm. It is this door, this front door, the door of our room. Death doesn’t even have to push this door. This door is wide-open, as the Almighty put it. And a few hours ago He put a lot of poisonous cups on His dinner table. There’s enough poison for all of us so let us not fight for it. For once we’ve come across what they call “cornucopia”.’

Once again you say ‘all right’ without turning to anyone, without looking at anyone’s eyes and brains. You are on the threshold of another world that you might call the New Eden – upon putting some finishing touches to it. Will this world resemble a tea ceremony? There are enough teacups in your house, let alone in the houses you will built while bent on creating a new world. But you intimately, ultimately know that the first universe, the one into which you were born many years ago, is doomed alongside its inhabitants. And you remember a Japanese poem that reminds you of nothingness, of emptiness – call it what you wish. You just stretch your hand out and remove a few cups from your dinner table, whereupon you say to yourselves and others, ‘Nothingness doesn’t take anything from you, not even a cup of tea.’ After much soul-searching you add the following verses from a haiku:

Nothingness doesn’t take anything:

It has no hands, no arms.

Death takes everything. Million fingers.

Well, you can deplore these fingers, their effectiveness and might. And what if all these mighty fingers fall, drop off one by one? Would that really make any difference in the context of global doom, as we say nowadays when speaking of our village? These fingers fall, fall, drop, and you say to yourself, ‘Soon no one will be in a position to take anything from me. Incidentally, there’s nothing to take, nothing at all. I espoused the doctrine of nothingness many years ago. And these years seem to have witnessed the fall of many fingers – millions of them, billions of them. Not just one thousand and one, you know. As they usually say as if always thinking in terms of

the Arabian nights. In my previous universe I saw fingers everywhere – on trees, in the sky. Until recently my trees had only fingers, and those fingers fell – not only during the fall, mind you, during the American fall. During my walks through my garden I would catch those fingers, those yellow, rotten fingers. And I wondered how those fingers would play Beethoven's sonatas, if put on the keyboard of a grand piano.'

If you face nothingness for a long time, you are likely to accept those fingers that take something from you, now and then. This is called 'the rightful exchange' and they sing praises to give-and-take without which (without this ritual) nothing really happens and so nothingness continues to reign on Earth. And if there is nobody around you, you just put something on the surface of the Earth, saying, 'It is my gift for you, my dear Earth, my mummy, thanks to whom I fill my tummy.' Then you fetch some appetisers and dishes from your fridge and a few minutes later you realise (after touching your body) that your tummy is filled to the brim. And they call this 'a virtuous, natural give-and-take', adding that no society – human or inhuman, as the case may be – can prosper without this magnanimous ritual. And what about a cup of tea? It does not fill your tummy, but your spirit flies off, bent on exploring the universe's nooks and crannies. And you discover – no soul-searching is needed for once – that both the nooks and crannies you have always ascribed to the universe's multifarious treasury can be found in your own possessions. As inside so outside and vice versa. And then you grow weary of all these versas and reversals, leaving in your life only the tea ceremony I have enlarged upon so many times, on so many occasions. I do not have to ask myself if the occasion is appropriate and really calls for a celebration – for a tea ceremony, in other words. I just pour some tea into my favourite cup and sit back in my armchair. And for once I am not tempted to say 'if any, if any' – there are lots of armchairs in my house; and even in my garden. Does every tea ceremony lead us to death? A famous tea master said once (once upon a time, that is): 'I don't think I deserve the title of tea master.'

'Why does a doubt perturb your spirit?' asked his disciple, speaking within the same or similar 'once upon a time'.

'Because I've no intention of committing suicide. And all tea masters ended their lives with a hara-kiri-ceremony.'

'Is the ceremony you've just touched upon quite different from tea ceremonies?'

'No, no. Nothing is different from tea ceremonies. A true tea master wields his sword, opens his tummy and pours some tea into the opening. That's the right way, you know. The tea way, if you see what I mean.'

'You mean one has to turn one's tummy into a tea cup?'

'That's right, that's right. How right you are! For once.'

Another philosophical problem awaits us in the domain where the idiom (is it an idiom?) 'give-and-take' reigns and lays down the law. You may encounter a philosopher or just an ordinary human being whose point of view is confined to this problem – to the linguistic order, as it were. Do you really have to use this expression in this form instead of twisting its truth and words? This question may be aired in your presence at any time, considering that the number of have-nots is far superior to the haves. Or even to that of half-haves. So the man you might come across in a street of your native city refuses point-blank to use the idiom under discussion in its widespread, dictionary-advocated form. He says, 'I use this expression in a topsy-turvy fashion, if you please. I put "take" before "give". Do you know why? Because I have nothing to give to anyone, present company *not* excepted. But if you give me something, I'll allow you to take it from me, on condition that I realise I don't really need your present. You affirm that human society needs this potlatch or whatever you call it, assuming you do call

it. If you don't, let me proceed with this case fruitlessly, for argument's sake. Or just for the fun of it. They think we're not human because they can't call us "social animals". But then you pick up a stone – a non-precious stone, needless to say – and give it to me. After a while I return this stone to its legal owner – to you. From now on, we'll be called "human beings".'

Of course you may ask why my anti-hero could not pick a run-of-the-mill stone and hand it to his companion in misfortune; earthly existence, in other words. After all, no one asked him to offer a diamond to his fellow creature, which might have resulted in a sort of brotherhood-ecstasy, as they still call it, especially in German. But these are just details we don't really have to take notice of, being engaged in a far more spectacular relationship between objects and subjects, humans and inanimate things. Well, if you go on in a similar vein for several hours, describing stones, hands and phoney brotherhoods, you might relinquish the very idea of brotherhood; and even your relationship with yourself is bound to suffer in the process. Don't you always yearn for a present, a gift – a gift of nature or God? And if neither nature nor God comes to your expectations, you set about potlatching with yourself, for want of anyone better. Anyway, *on n'est jamais si bien servi que par soi-même*.

PART TWO

NOTHING DOING, NOTHING HAVING

And he gave it a smooth round finish all over on the outside, for many reasons. It needed no eyes, since there was nothing visible left outside it; nor did it need ears, since there was nothing audible there, either. There was no air enveloping it that it might need for breathing, nor did it need any organ by which to take in food or, again, expel it when it had been digested. For since there wasn't anything else, there would be nothing to leave it or come to it from anywhere. It supplied its own waste for its food. Anything that it did or experienced it was designed to do or experience within itself and by itself. For the builder thought that if it were self-sufficient, it would be a better thing than if it required other things.

Plato, *Timaeus*

One does not even wonder if the above description of the creative process applies to human beings, for we cannot imagine them without eyes, without mouths and food that usually fills their mouths to the brim. Who did our Demiurge create? Of course he says that the creatures he created on the spur of the moment do not need eyes because there is nothing to see, apart from their own beings – their own inner illumination, presumably. In the wake of such declarations, a mystic can say to you, 'You know, I need no eyes – no external eyes, that is. I have a huge inner eye that somehow resembles the organ described by Homer in the *Odyssey*. I'm referring to the Cyclops, you know, to Polyphemus, among other creatures of this kind. Polyphemus had only one eye, and that eye was *inside* his body, otherwise he would have spotted our hero and his team on the spot.' Well, at some point I thought the Almighty had created Moby Dick or another white whale, another Leviathan, to represent Him on the surface of the Earth. One thing is certain, at least until further notice: what was created once upon a time did not concern human beings. Even the blind keep their mouths open in expectation of some morsel or other. Some of them say, 'Please, give me a steak.' 'What kind of steak are you longing for?' asks an angel. And then you can see the following picture; on a blackboard or just in the air: 'T-bone/sirloin steaks salmon/turkey steaks.' But the blind man we are talking to says, after shrugging his shoulders, 'Steak and kidney pie.' 'Steak and kidney pie or steak and kidney pudding?' asks the angel. 'Both,' answers the blind man. And then everyone realises he has no mouth, and what we mistook for a real mouth is just a drawing that seems to adorn the blind face. Just another illusion, if you please.

But the white whale depicted by Melville (Robert Graves, on the other hand, depicted the White Goddess) has a mouth which permits him to swallow Captain Ahab and his companions, with the exception of the narrator, of Melville himself. Well, I think I shall have to postpone the discussion centred upon Moby Dick and the Almighty, the God of the Old Testament to whom we pay homage, whenever re-reading Melville's masterpiece. Isn't he terrible, wrathful, vengeful, this God of his, of Melville's, of Ahab's? Of course I am tempted to quote a few relevant passages from both the Bible and Melville's book – at *this* point of my narrative. But first I have to deal with Plato, for dealing with various authors is my favourite pastime, my cup of Japanese tea that leads some tea master up their Zen garden paths. So I am about to embark upon yet another commentary as if inspired (once and for all) by the Talmud, by its style, method and teachings. 'And he gave it a smooth round finish all over on the outside, for many reasons.' I am not sure the white whale was and still is round or spherical. In the film I saw last night he (it was he and not she or it, contrary to what might be presumed by feminists and itists) looked like a

huge fish furnished with the attributes associated with fish, with his fellow creatures. They all belong to the same species except that the white whale can swallow an ocean with all its contents in no time at all, in one fell swoop. As an appetizer, he singles out Captain Ahab, resolved to wound him with his harpoons. The captain brandishes his harpoon and Moby Dick bursts into laughter. This laughter resounds all over the Earth, and I think you can find its description in The Book of Job; if I am not mistaken. And if I *am* mistaken, we can just open all our windows and listen to this and that thunderclap, to a series of thunderclaps. And then we shall just put all these thunderclaps together, creating a sort of chord – not the Tristan chord, mind you. Not the Meistersinger chord, the first chord you hear in the *Vorspiel*. I am referring to the C Major chord you hear as you listen to Furtwängler's or Toscanini's interpretations of this piece. It is another chord I am referring to when talking about Moby Dick and his sarcastic laughter. The whole scene reminds me of the Mahabharata, of an episode where the hero shoots a number of arrows in the direction of some god or other. Well, let us not get sidetracked by other divinities, by other books.

Once again I am duty bound to point out that the internal process going on somewhere, perhaps inside my own substance, seeks to substitute another world (a world of pebbles, for instance) for the world inhabited by humans. At least, according to Plato's description of God, this God of his has nothing in common with human beings who are neither smooth nor round; what is more, they are unfinished, judging from the number of their intellectual thoughts. Every one of them has a pair of eyes and these eyes constantly take in whatever lies all around them as if spying on the world and its secrets; chiefly on their neighbours' bank accounts and status symbols. They glance at a symbol and say, 'I wish this symbol was mine, the symbol of my life.' And they appropriate the symbol they are talking about. Then they pass on to another symbol directly linked to human status, to the top of the political and social hierarchy we constantly read about in newspapers, let alone on our numerous screens. They pick up as many symbols as necessary to position themselves on the very top of the Tower of Babel and often the Almighty takes them down a peg or two or four. That is their way of learning the multiplication tables.

But let us leave human beings alone for the time being: we shall go back to them in due time. (And time is not always due, as we all know. It is much more often *overdue*, and we realise that as we go through our bills.) Let us forget humans for the sake of a beach where we can sunbathe in the company of pebbles. Doesn't Plato's description look like such a beach? Smooth, round – pebble, one is tempted to add, finishing the sentence in a blaze of glory. They need no eyes, no ears; they hear nothing, whereas we are often deafened by the crash of the surf; mostly during American hurricanes. Of course there is a lot of air around them. Well, they do not need this air; nor any other air. What do we care! We do need this air – many airs, as a matter of fact. An air of confidence, among other airs. Sooner or later we shall be driven to others, to our fellow men and women without whom we might just starve to death, for pebbles does not provide the satisfactory nourishment required by our body and trains of thought. Of course we can suck them but that is not enough, not enough, considering that we are not at the bottom of the heap, according to our calculations. Why should we live like beggars or Beckett's anti-heroes? No, we had better stop right now, otherwise we shall not be able to prevent human beings from entering our sphere of influence. In my opinion, we should discard them once and for all. And Plato drops a hint as to how we can get rid of them; at least within this period of time – this *kalpa*, as the Hindus say in their books, in their sutras and so on. So we deprive them, (human beings) of eyes; and if they protest, we explain to them why we proceed in this fashion. 'There's nothing to see,' we point out.

‘How do you know there’s nothing to see? Are you blind as well?’

‘No.’

‘Why aren’t you blind?’

‘Because I am not human, whatever you might say or think.’

‘How come you speak our language?’

‘I’m a polyglot, you know.’

‘How come we understand you?’

‘You don’t. Do you understand there’s nothing to hear?’

‘And your words? Your words?’

‘These are not words. These are not sounds.’

Let us go back and forth along these lines at the end of which there are nothingness and everythingness; or rather everyoneness. They say you cannot achieve the proverbial unity with the world if you do not pity its inhabitants; in other words, only overall pity can unify us all. Bertrand Russell lost his Christian faith at an early age but he often fell in love with women and probably animals about whom I know nothing. I know, however, that he wrote over 2,000 letters to Evelyn Whitehead, the wife of his collaborator A. N. Whitehead. So I know something about Bertrand Russell’s life; and about Whitehead’s wife. At some point – I think this point was on 10 February 1901 – Russell saw his collaborator’s wife in bed and in pain. Had he seen her in pain but not in bed (in his garden, for instance) he might have missed one of the greatest events of his life; one of the greatest sensations one can experience on this Earth. And probably on some other earths. He had a personal epiphany and every epiphany, especially the ones we qualify as personal, are great events; in one’s personal life. Russell wrote about it in one of his letters and he added, after shedding a few tears, ‘Here is the postscript to what I have just written, my dear friend, my collaborator’s wife. The loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached. You can ask, “And what about the loneliness of the human body?” I am not sure I can answer this question adequately or even inadequately. In my opinion, I cannot answer it at all, for it is a very difficult, almost unanswerable question that we often compare to the Gordian knot. Well, I might pick up a sword and cut this knot, and answer this question. Is that what you think? All right, I will answer it once and for all: I am reluctant to have a go at it later on; not even in the distant future. If love penetrates it – I mean, the human body – it is no easy task to resist its (love’s) requirements, its urges and impulses; its pulsation. I am still talking about a variety of love experienced through the human body. What do religious teachers say on the subject, you may wonder? Whenever confronted with the subject, they enlarge upon original sin and go so far as to ask you a series of indiscreet questions such as, ‘Are you in love with a woman or a man? Do you intend to live in sin with this woman or man? How long will you live in sin with him or her?’ And they preach ‘the grand refusal’. They have all sorts of grand ideas, those clergymen and clergywomen.’

Here is another letter he sent to his collaborator’s wife. (Some scholars affirm she was also *his* collaborator – in her own right.)

MY LETTER TO YOU

I still have no idea why I am writing to you now, this afternoon, before embarking upon my private tea ceremony. I wonder why I have written so many letters on which your name and address can be found without toil – rather easily, as a matter of fact. Why do I write to you? I know why I wrote three letters to Gandhi: I put him in the picture about my attitude towards the First World War and about the way one can resist any war – without lying down in front of a tank, as I put it. All right, you lie down on railway tracks, whenever you hear the wheels of a train filled to the brim with soldiers or those who are about to steal your natural resources: coal, gold and so on. But what would you do if you and your partisans were opposed to planes carrying bombs, atomic bombs? Would they fly across your body within some patch of the sky? Would you stop them from delivering their ‘goods’, as they call them? Whenever they drop an atomic bomb, they say, ‘We dropped a few bags of rice to help the needy and their children.’ Will you remain on the surface of the Earth for this purpose? What would be your purpose in the present case? To catch these bags, open them and demonstrate that only atomic bombs can be found inside them? And what if these planes go to Japan, for instance? Yes, they have every intention of dropping several atomic bombs on Japan’s peaceful population. But you cannot go to Japan, can you? Can you? You have no visa, and no one is about to deliver this visa to you under the circumstances, in the very bosom of the war they are fighting with the Americans. So you stay at home and address a prayer to the winds, asking them to change their course, their itinerary, and come to India, to the spot where you are sitting with your acolytes. You have been sitting and waiting for a long time, for you know that sooner or later these atomic bombs will be dropped on the earthlings and their terrestrial abodes. You said in one of your books, ‘If humanity comes up with a new idea centred upon a weapon of unheard-of destructive force, this weapon will come into operation in the twinkling of an eye because humans are bent on destroying their brothers. Nothing else counts in their lives and even in their deaths: even after their respective deaths they continue to annihilate their brothers and sisters; and their children. So we shall sit down and wait for their bombs; and pray to our winds which seem to understand our preoccupation and come up to our expectations. We expect them to convey all those bombers and their contents to our area and drop them in such a way that we catch them once and for all. We catch them, bury them and play our hymns dedicated to *their* destruction. And then we sing, “Aum, aum, aum, aum.” Or “amen”, if you wish.’

The exchange of letters I am talking to you about was rather useful, considering that Gandhi and his admirers caught as many as 14 atomic bombs in India, all over India. But why am I writing to *you*? I am still convinced that human beings need something else – not only electric cookers, cars and helicopters. You must be fully aware of our doom, otherwise you would not have shed so many tears on your cheeks and even on your collarbones. On your collarbones, of all places? How did you manage such a feat? Do you always turn your head when on the brink of tears, when crying your eyes out? Your eyes, your eyes. In this respect I recall a page from Melville’s masterpiece where Ahab talks about human eyes. He asks another captain to show him his eyes, the other captain’s eyes. Why? one might wonder. After all, Ahab has every opportunity to look into the White Whale’s eyes. Aren’t they more interesting than their human counterparts? Of course they are, of course they are. But what Ahab sees in his colleague’s eyes consoles him to some extent, for he sees some other humans in them, his own family, children and wife; whereas in the White Whale’s eyes he sees only his own death. And our captain is not as selfish as might be presumed. At least his family is dearer to his heart than his own existence which is submitted to Moby Dick’s whims and hate.

Well, you are more important to me than my own wife, than my books on mathematics and philosophy that Wittgenstein does not seem to appreciate at their true value. He does not even appreciate them at their false value because he sees no value in them at all. Perhaps he does not know where to look for such a thing as value – philosophical value, scientific value, human value. By the way, I wonder if Wittgenstein is human himself. Isn't he rather an extraterrestrial visitor? Frankly speaking, I have nothing in common with this Austrian upstart. And yet I do feel something in common with all the great things, songs. (And Wittgenstein is great, isn't he?) It is all very mysterious and I really don't know what to think of it. But I feel it is the most important thing in the world and really the one thing that matters profoundly. It has many manifestations...love...and truth. And Wittgenstein declares that truth does not exist. And what about love? What about love? All great things swell with love, if I may say so. You know, last summer my foot swelled up to three times the normal size when it was stung by a wasp. I was so proud of this swelling I ask another wasp to sting my heart. 'Otherwise I'll never know what the sentiment of love looks like, my dear wasp,' I said to her. But the wasp disobeyed my order and even now I don't know what the sentiment of love looks like, feels like, sounds like. It is not enough to listen to Mozart's operas.

Yes, neither bees nor wasps comply with my wishes directed towards love, not towards mathematics and logic, as might be presumed by an army of ignoramuses. They quote me, you know. They do, they do. 'So, for me, Mount Everest is, and probably always will be, a cluster of sensibilia, whereas the patches of shape and colour that surround me in this room are the immediate sense-data with which I am now, at this very moment, acquainted.' And they add rather maliciously, 'Love is Mount Everest. Your room is just a mirror of your inborn indifference towards the human race.'

'What am I supposed to do?' I ask them.

'Your books are a bundle of nonsense. In your opinion "atomism" means that you break things down into their smallest components, if you want to understand them. Stuff and nonsense, my dear Russell. You have to do just the contrary – putting things together, putting things and humans together, putting their nerves and tendons together.'

'Do you think I break Evelyn Whitehead down into her smallest components? On a regular basis?'

'Of course you do. You tear her apart, talking first about her pain and then about her tears. Talk about Evelyn Whitehead instead. Or rather *do* something with her.'

These people do not seem to understand that I do just the opposite: I *assemble* you, put your nerves and other parts together for the sake of unity and harmony. (I resemble you!) 'Logical' means you reassemble them (your parts) logically, rather than by using guesswork, if you want to be certain of what you are thinking about. I am certain of what I usually think about: you, you and only you. Even when I work with your husband, I think only about you so he often says, 'You know, this last idea of yours sounds like my wife's trains of thought. She uses the same terms, believe it or not. And she draws the same conclusions from them. I wonder why I'm writing this book with you and not with her. Writing it with her would amount to the same thing.' Well, I look at other people; I have to, my darling, otherwise I would not be able to proclaim my truth and guard the whole world against wars and other calamities connected with human beings. I look in their (other people's) eyes – out of decency I don't always look into *your* eyes in the hope of seeing your *soul* – and see your eyes and even your body, some parts of it. I glue the missing parts to your body's eye-constructed image and there you are, here you are. What *are* all those people talking about?

Do you know *what* they are talking about? Among other things, they give me a lesson on empiricism, saying, ‘The problem is that we have no way of knowing whether our personal “copy” is an accurate one of what is “out there”.’ *It is* accurate, my dear Evelyn. What I see almost everywhere is a dead spit of your personality, shoulders and curves. All the evidence goes to show that what we regard as our mental life is bound up with brain structure and organised bodily energy. I don’t know much about brain structure. As for my bodily energy, it is mostly disorganised, for I must pay attention to what is done within the context of moral rules. Actually, we are often undone by the moral code we are supposed to observe at all cost, for fear of being chucked overboard, so to speak. We live in the midst of other social animals, even if I cannot say I see them as I look at your supine body, at your face on which your tears have left dirty streaks. Anyway, it is rational to suppose that mental life ceases when bodily life ceases. A good argument for insisting that human beings have only one chance of happiness, in this life. Isn’t it?

COUNT ME OUT

Over the last 120 years, this letter has been submitted to a great deal of high-brow scrutiny which dissected its erotic and scientific contents. Of course the last sentence does not need any interpretation: it interprets itself, in a manner of speaking. Russell says to his beloved that his point of view does not differ much from that of Aristotle, and consequently the aim she pursues day and night is nothing but happiness, unbounded happiness. That time, however, the happiness under discussion was bounded by the bed where his collaborator’s wife experienced a variety of pains – throughout her body. Russell was looking at her body and also at the tears running down her cheeks and neck; and he might have experienced a sort of happiness, if I understand the set-up rightly. The point is Russell was too engrossed in logic and the procedures affiliated to it. He was so logical that no simple human reactions were accessible to his psyche, for all his talk about empathy and the peril inflicted by atomic bombs. Even when looking at Evelyn’s body, he was following a logical train of thought that usually began with the following questions, ‘What does it mean to be rational? Is it something that can be defined?’ He usually answered these questions thus (whenever he stood in front of Evelyn’s bed and body): ‘I am rational because I am standing in front of her body instead of rushing towards it without any soul-searching, any second thoughts. My second thoughts are too rational anyway. Even Othello knew what to do with female bodies; and so do I, so do I. But Othello did not have second thoughts, and my remark has nothing to do with racism, whatever they might surmise, these mice. My second thoughts tell me that Evelyn is not my wife: she belongs to my collaborator. Actually my last remark is not besmeared with the dirt universally defined as misogyny. I respect women and I love some of them, even if I believe that men’s intellectual arsenal – intellect may be defined as the most sophisticated weapon – is higher and more sophisticated than its female counterpart. Well, I am rational – there is no denying it. And even if I end up jumping into Evelyn’s bed, I shall remain rational, for I am not likely to allow myself to touch her body viciously and sinfully. I shall just lie by her side and talk to her about happiness as outlined by Aristotle and Nietzsche. Can rationality be defined? If you really intend to define it, just say, “Bertrand Russell.” That’s quite enough, isn’t it? Quite explicit too!’

For all the scrutiny mercilessly showered upon the above-mentioned epistle, no scholar has felt duty bound to praise Bertrand Russell for the delicacy he resorted to when making his declaration of love. Instead of saying (or singing) bluntly, after kneeling down in front of Evelyn’s bed, ‘I love you, I love you, I lo-o-o-o-o-ve you,’ he

said or rather wrote, 'I resemble you!' And he softened the impact of his declaration by means of the brackets into which he inserted it. Alas, the exclamation mark reveals the scandalous truth, speaking volumes about what went on inside Bertrand Russell's pathetic body which might have made love to its female counterpart several times in a row, in the course of the same afternoon. When asked to justify himself, the philosopher and logician might have fallen back on his innate empathy, answering thus, 'I couldn't have done otherwise – she was wearing a martyred expression.'

'What is the relationship of logic to truth?' This is the second question one may stumble upon during one's walk through Russell's brain or mind. Let us return to the bed where Evelyn Whitehead is still lying – for this argument's sake, no doubt. Logic is symbolised by Russell's presence, by the respect he shows to the body embedded in his first and second thoughts. Indeed his conduct is logical in the extreme, for he knows that if he dares overstep the bounds – the bounds of friendship, among other things – he will no longer collaborate with Alfred North Whitehead, thereby depriving the world of the book where mathematics are dissected fully and truly. And what about truth? Truth is Evelyn's body and also her tears. Her tears tell us the truth about human pain and desolation that she portrays rather realistically. Her portrait hanging at the National Gallery attracts a lot of visitors bent on finding out what human misery looks like in elitist circles; when displayed by one of their members. Such visitors often ask themselves the following questions, 'Do the rich and famous suffer? What kind of suffering do they endure, in spite of their money and fame? Do their bodies have something in common with ours? Do we only differ in the domain of brains? Do they feel their pains in their brains? Do they have bodies? Are their bodies astral? They must have some sort of bodies, otherwise we would not be able to see their photographs.' These visitors cross a few halls and their curious, devouring eyes fall at last on Evelyn's portrait painted by Russell's son or daughter or nephew. Sure enough, before one of his historic visits, Russell called one of those persons and said, 'Could you please paint her portrait? Her tears speak volumes about *la condition humaine*, as depicted by Malraux in his famous book.'

'Can logic prove something to be true, and if so, how?' The simplest logic, the simplest example of it can be found (and proved) in the human body and mind, within any human being, however insignificant or significant. You are born and logically enough, you begin to grow older and older, every single day. No day can elapse without your growing old, your old age constantly catching up with you. And consequently one day, once upon the future time, you are bound to say to yourself and even to your wife or husband, 'You know, old age has caught up with me. I think it happened yesterday, last night. Do you know why I think so and say so? Because last night I looked at myself in that big mirror over there and said to myself, "My goodness, my goodness! How come I've got so many wrinkles? I didn't know my body could produce so many wrinkles. The same goes for my face. I didn't know my face could welcome so many wrinkles and spots of unknown origin.' And logically enough, you die after saying a few last words to your uncles, sisters and nephews; or just to your doctor or priest. Logically enough, the priest asks you, 'How many sins have you committed throughout your life?'

'I've committed many sins,' you answer rather truthfully.

'How many? Approximately?' asks the priest.

'Two thousand, three thousand.'

'What?' asks the priest.

'Is that a question?' you ask instead of thinking about your last words.

‘Three thousand?’ asks the priest.

‘Let me ponder my next move,’ you say as you set about creating your last words; on the spur of the moment.

‘Your next move? Aren’t you paralysed?’ asks the priest.

‘My last words,’ you say to him after a while.

‘Are these your last words?’ he asks.

‘Yes,’ you say as you say to yourself that ‘yes’ is the best last word you can come up with. And go out with. And go up with. This is your last thought, by the way. On your way.

So can logic prove something to be true? Of course – just look at the priest I was talking about for more than three minutes. His presence proves that God exists. Moreover, it proves that the previous sentence is true, otherwise there would be no priests in the world and in the other world where they continue to worm quantities and qualities out of us. How many sins did you commit on the surface of the Earth? What kind of sins did you commit on that surface? How many sins have you already committed *under* the surface of the Earth? ‘Am I subjected to torture and lengthy interrogations?’ you ask. ‘In other words – am I in Hell?’ ‘Are there any mitigating circumstances/factors which might help explain her appalling behaviour?’ asks the priest. ‘On the surface of the Earth I felt pity for Evelyn Whitehead. And once I stood gazing in/with pity at the old lion in the cage.’ ‘Sit yourself down and have a cup of tea,’ says the priest.

Sure enough, you can feel pity towards an animal who screams in a cage where a few humans put her many years ago, bent on finding a remedy against yet another virus. Of just to feed it to the extent required by butchers and restaurants, their owners and clients. But can you feel any amount of pity for a stone, for an inanimate object lying under your feet? Of course you can, if only on account of its position, its whereabouts; after all, it is lying *under* your feet and you are about to step on it out of curiosity or just for the fun of it. Anyway, you have a lot of time on your hands, and as usual you kill this time and the many other times you happen to deal with in the course of your personal history and its doom. All right, so you kick this stone and it flies through the air or through any other substance you are bound to encounter in the vicinity of other planets as you travel through galaxies and nebulae. You kick this stone and it does not scream, contrary to your expectations: whenever you kick a human, she cries – there is no denying it. But stones do not cry. There are many sayings focused on trees that mostly die standing up, as this particular saying goes. Stones do not cry, according to another saying; and yet sometimes you get the feeling – as you kick yet another stone – that the object you set your foot upon reacts to your merciless act. What you hear, however, does not amount to a human scream; and there are no tears on the stone’s face unless your eyes tell you a lie, as often happens in the domain of the senses and the data you receive from them on a daily basis. What *do* you hear, then? You hear a sort of ‘ah!’ and that is enough to prevent you from going on with your barbarous ritual. Indeed, only a few moments ago you had every intention of kicking this stone throughout the morning and afternoon as if you were on holiday, disengaged from your habitual chores. Then you hear this indescribable ‘ah!’ and literally stop in your tracks: you no longer pursue this stone. You have no idea where (whether) it rediscovered the surface of the Earth, finding a new home, another temporary refuge from human feet. Well, the fate of stones is also submitted to storms and ordinary rain, and one is so inclined to pity a stone receiving so many drops of rain that one is unwilling to count them, for fear of growing too tired. Yes, you can pity a stone for many reasons, under many circumstances, and you should not discard these circumstances and substances from

your life, from your empathy and its horizons. Besides, stones are often precious – even some ordinary stones grow precious in the light of the qualities our memory attributes to them – and let us not forget that many people recall Jerusalem, its celestial version, only on account of the precious stones decorating its walls, portals and roofs. When asked what stones embellish this version of the divine city, they say, ‘Rubies, diamonds, sapphires and so on. We’d better recognise and define them by means of numbers because if we continue to name them, soon we’ll run out of words.’ So we say, ‘Stone number one, stone number two, stone number three and so on.’ For once the expression ‘so on’ is neither redundant nor meaningless. That is why the Kabbalath call Jerusalem ‘The Multiplication Table of God’.

By the way, if we take the word ‘God’ in English (made up of the signifiers /g/, /o/ and /d/), what is thus engendered for the hearer is not the ‘real’ God – even if this hearer believes in Him and accepts the proofs of His existence. Well, what I have in mind amounts to a mental concept of ‘Godness’. (Not of goodness, mind you.) What does this concept say to us in the darkness or rather in the lightness of our room? This concept utters the following words: ‘Good, excellent, wonderful, merciful, merciless, vindictive, all-forgiving, invisible, inaudible, thunder, lightning, unknown, indefinable, life-giving, life-taking, boundless, less, less, less, less.’ The real God, however, is an icon, a picture where He sits on a throne, a picture in the midst of which He chastises Adam, the picture at the bottom of which He kicks Adam’s bottom. And so on.

Usually you come across a lot of names as soon as you open a book, even if this book is devoted to a theft, a murder and some Agatha Christie sleuths. Perhaps it is better to see *other* names in the book you are reading, for many people refuse to read novels that induce them to spend their time pointlessly, without any profit either to their souls or their finances. But if you consume a few respectful names such as Kant and Saussure instead of struggling with Johns, Marys and Olgas, you learn something about the world you are living in, for better or for worse. Actually this expression applies to both your life and the book you are engrossed in because knowledge itself is not an ideal, a model of absolute values; in other words, knowledge as such is not unquestionable. While consuming its goods – books, architectural monuments, painting and suchlike – you do not necessarily become any the wiser, as they often say when referring to pieces of information. Sometimes you may mistake these pieces for what is called the gift of God, whereas what you consume amounts only to disinformation, to a multitude of its pieces. You pick up a piece and ask yourself if it is really a piece or something else. If it is a piece of cake you are holding, you may say to yourself, ‘It is a piece of cake.’ And if you put it into your mouth and begin to enjoy its taste, you think it is a useful piece of information. At least you are almost sure it does not belong to the category designed as disinformation unless you complain about an upset stomach in the wake of this culinary experience.

Let us not go so far and one might even question the very fact of our willingness to move from where we are ensconced. Don’t we feel comfortable when sitting in the rocking chair about which I have written so many pages in the course of my literary life? Well, we should not go too far, and the book I put in front of my eyes several minutes ago does not generate a frenetic turmoil amidst my muscles. This book conveys the following piece of truth to me (let us forget about cakes for the time being): ‘The signs which make up the code of the circuit between the two individuals “unlock” the contents of the brain of each.’ The sentence I have just written for argument’s sake – what is the argument I am talking about? – does not seem to belong to the category I touched upon and even described to some extent this morning, around 6 a.m. This category may and should be called ‘disinformation’ or ‘fake news’ or just ‘fake, fake, fake’. Well, as I have just pointed out, I am not sure it is a piece

of disinformation I am supposed to deal with at this very moment. But I am worried about another aspect of this piece over which I propose to ponder as if it were my next move in the game of life. All right, all right – it *is* my next move, even if I decide not to move at all, leaving my body in peace, in spite of this piece of information or disinformation. What bothers me refers (as usual) to the presence of another individual with whom I am supposed to exchange a few ideas about the world and the state of affairs we are involved in. I am supposed – and this supposition frightens me – to unlock my brain, permitting my opponent to examine its contents. Why should I do such a thing? Unhealthy, dangerous, perilous, infamous, perverse. Isn't it, isn't it, isn't it? Obediently, acting in accordance with some social contract or other, I dutifully unlock my brain and its contents spill all over the floor. My opponent throws a glance at these contents and says, 'I can't discern their identities from where I'm sitting. That's what actually happened in the course of the last American presidential election, as you must know. Watchers were standing too far from the ballots so they couldn't see either the names of their owners or even the ballots themselves. Could you please pick your brain's contents up so I could see them clearly, admiring their wisdom and profundity?'

'I'm sorry but I can't do that, I'm afraid,' I answer, moving my head politely from right to left, from left to right. 'I was recently operated on. I had a cyst removed from my spine.'

'Do you mean to say you can't bend over and handle your ideas appropriately?'

'I know it would be impolite to ask you to do it on your own initiative – you're my guest after all. But you don't suffer from rheumatism, do you?'

'I do. I've suffered from this debilitating disease for decades, if not for a century. I must have suffered from it in my former lives as well.'

The contents of your brain are scattered all over the floor, and the latter grows more and more intelligent as it absorbs the information it is covered with. You scrutinise the floor to find out if it takes advantage of the knowledge it has been endowed with as a result of your spilt brain over which you do not cry, contrary to what might be expected. But after the events you have lived through over the last decades, you do not seem to expect anything with the exception of catastrophes. So you do not prevent your charwoman from using the vacuum cleaner during her work, her struggle with the dirt she stumbles upon everywhere as soon as she penetrates your house's entrails, as you call them. Then she washes the floor and you heave a sigh of relief as you realise that the emptiness you discover in your house and also in your brain and mind (they are conjoined twins) help you surmount the problems and enigmas of life. 'There are no more enigmas,' you say to yourself, for your newly-discovered emptiness displays no nooks and crannies where problems and other nuisances usually crouch, lying in wait for your consciousness, your trains of thought. Do they crouch or just lie in wait for your attention spans? It does not really matter, and to your astonishment you realise that nothing really matters in your life and even in its aftermath, alias the Hereafter. No problems whatsoever; nowhere! But Saussure and his definition also lie in wait for you, although you do not know anything about their whereabouts, which means you have no control over all your nooks and crannies – 'my craziest crannies', as you call them. This is one of our favourite games, an adorable pastime that we inherited from Adam: we give names to whatever we see around us; and also to invisible things. Let us call them (names, things and beings) 'signs' so as to follow Saussure's argument more comfortably.

'It is this combination of the contents of mind with a special kind of sign code which encourages us to posit a new science.' No, no, no, no, no! Yet another science? We have just done some spring-cleaning and off we go

again: without any warning, Saussure and his surrogates go in and wreak havoc upon our neatness and cleanliness. 'All right, all right,' we say to them. 'But how do these signs which semiology studies actually work?' And one of his acolytes answers thus, 'Central to Saussure's understanding of the linguistic sign is the *arbitrary* nature of the bond between signifier and signified.' In other words or signs, there is no natural reason why the signifier 'God' should engender the signified. The connection between the two is arbitrary. To put it bluntly, there is no connection between them at all, even if you happen to know where all your nooks and crannies are located – thanks to your private mind and relief maps. Of course you do your best to connect them, the signifier and the signified, and so you spend a lot of time on all fours, crawling all over the floor in search of God. Luckily for you, you do not have to look for the signifier: you are still holding it in your right or left hand. Now and then you put the signifier down and push it around in the hope of hearing a sort of 'click' associated in your mind with connections and global triumphs. 'Can you hear that strange clicking noise?' you ask your neighbours who have come to your room to find out what you are doing on the floor. They answer they cannot hear anything apart from your heavy, asthmatic breathing. So click your fingers to attract their attention to the phenomenon defined as 'click'! You also doubt the sharpness of their sense of hearing. 'Do you often use earplugs?' you ask them naively, almost pathetically.

Others do not understand anything, not even the world that surrounds them, being rather close to their senses and bodies. You click your fingers, you hum Beethoven's symphonies – for hours on end, mind you; and they laugh in your face because they think you have a screw loose. And if you ask them what they mean, they just show you a screw, any screw and say this screw is exactly what you are about to lose, for it is already loose. And then they add with conviction, grandiloquently, 'You have already lost it, otherwise I wouldn't be able to show it to you.' So let us return to the universe minutely depicted and visualised – first you visualise it and then you depict it to the best of your abilities – by Plato in his opus entitled *Timaeus*. Sometimes human beings talk to you about their private world and if you ask them to paint what they are talking about, they say, 'I can't paint, you know.' Actually the problem they are facing lies elsewhere: they are incapable of visualising anything, not even their own death. So they say, 'The universe I'd like to live in is full of bushes and rivers. I'll plunge into those rivers and play hide and seek in the midst of the bushes with my mistress or wife. Or with my children. I intend to have seven children at least.' And if you ask them the easiest question in the world, 'What do your children look like?' they will not answer you at once. And if they do answer you after a while, they say they are tall, beautiful, intelligent, can play the piano better than Rachmaninoff, and so on; which means they do not visualise them.

But Plato did visualise the world he was talking about as he talked about the process of creation. And what could you create except a world? Every sonata is a world, every sonnet is a world. You create a series of worlds as you go from point B to point D and no one can say to you, 'You don't create anything.' You do create all sorts of things, but all those things, all those sorts are so ugly and abominable I just avoid speaking of them. I *am* willing to enlarge upon Plato's universe and I can go so far as to say that other representatives of the same race come up with their ideas about creations, from time to time. Yet I will never speak of these creations in the same breath. 'Why?' asks yet another representative of the human race. 'Because they're not in the same boat?'

I PUT MY HANDS OVER MY EARS BECAUSE I COULD NOT BEAR TO LISTEN

Ear Islands. Several small islands off the coast of Germany, inhabited by a tribe of fishermen called the Auriti or All-Ears, whose ears are of such abnormally large dimensions that they cover their whole bodies. As a consequence, they are very sharp of hearing and can detect the fish under the sea.

Pliny the Elder, *Inventorum Natura*

Plato did not speak of ears, if my memory serves me right. ‘And he gave it a smooth round finish all over on the outside, for many reasons,’ he said. Was he talking about a huge, all-receptive ear? It would be nice to be born in the shape of an ear that could hear not only the fish under the sea, but also music on the surface of the Earth – in the mountains, for instance. I said that most humans had no ear for music, and whenever I say such a thing, I visualise a human without ears. This human, be he or she a man or a woman, has a head and even a pair of eyes that spy upon you round the clock. But this head has no ears – not only for music, mind you. It has no ears for *Waldweben*, as Wagner put it (the way a forest can sound, when subjected to the breathing of a breeze); nor does it have any ear for semiology, for Saussure or for those who speak with a lisp. But if you happen to come across a being whose body is covered with ears – not with eyes, exceptionally – you can put on a recording of Haydn’s symphonies and pour into this human’s glass either champagne or red Burgundy: those who have one huge ear for Haydn deserve such a treat. And if this person says after a while, after listening to a dozen symphonies, ‘I don’t seem to enjoy this music,’ you can broach the subject with him at once. The subject is music and the human is a man: all women without exception feel music to the utmost.

‘You have a huge ear, don’t you?’

‘That’s right.’

‘What’s the use of this ear? What did it hear last?’

‘Your questions.’

‘And before them? Before the prelude to our music-oriented dialogue?’

‘The company’s shares dived by 90p to 165p on the stock market yesterday.’

The point is an ordinary human ear is too small to take in both Haydn’s symphonies and the stock market that issues its news every two instants. And even if you hear a bell, some clock or other, and there is still no news from the stock market you depend upon for your prosperity and earthly paradise, you get worried and run to and fro until some news reaches your ears. But Haydn’s symphonies are unlikely to reach them as long as you continue to wait for stock market news, running around your room, your house, running up and down the street where you live for better and worse. If, however, you happen to stay on the island described by Pliny the Elder and also by Pliny the Younger, you can afford to pay attention and homage to the stock market without losing sight and sound of Haydn, Beethoven, Wagner and Bruckner. And if an inhabitant of this island says to me some day, ‘You know, in spite of the monstrosity of my ear, I don’t appreciate music because even on this quasi-desert island we’re supposed to devote our time to money and prosperity,’ I will answer thus, ‘Your ear is not monstrous, contrary to what you’ve just said. Your ear is gigantic and so I’m sure that some of its parts were designated to appreciate music and its overtones. Yes, this event took place at your birth or some days later. Anyway, it took place in your cradle, without your being aware of what was going on. The Almighty scrutinised your ear, dissected it, so to speak, and said to your mother, “This part of your son’s ear is destined for musical delights, to the delights

indissolubly linked to great composers. I've just bestowed upon it, upon this ear, the divine gift known as "absolute pitch" – in every sense of these words. Do you know what I'm talking about? A person who can rightfully boast about this celestial gift recognises the notes performed either by musical instruments or by human voices. For instance, such a person says, "A sharp, E flat" – upon hearing a sound that you do *not* recognise, for the simple reason that your ears' contents have no absolute pitch within their domain. Your son, on the other hand, says "F natural" rather often unless it is G sharp he hears, when talking to you about his projects or the weather. What's more, the absolute pitch I endowed his ears and sensitivity with is absolute in a different sense – he can appreciate not only Haydn and Palestrina, but also Schoenberg and Berg, which is a hard nut to crack, you know. These composers are hard nuts to crack and your son will crack them rather easily, believe it or not.'

Unfortunately you do not live on this island, not yet, and no sign has ever presaged your setting down on it in the future, be it distant or not. What kind of advice can I give you under the circumstances? Of course your ears are ordinary, run-of-the-mill ears – deficient in some ways, considering that you have no ear for music. No ear, no heart, no lung, no nerve. The truth you have to reconcile yourself to maintains that none of your nerves, impulses and tendencies are attuned to music. What is to be done? Get into the habit of tuning your ears and the rest of your substance every blessed morning before getting out of bed. Of course many music lovers know that the whole body should be involved in the process, not only our ears which are too small for such a task, even if their sizes are exposed to the beneficial influence of our tuning forks. (And to tuning folks.) Music is an integral, cosmic phenomenon. When listening to a great piece of music, you are likely to raise your glance and contemplate the stars and other ingredients of skies, saying out loud, 'What a magnificent picture of our life is the starry heaven supported by music, melodically, harmonically.' By the way, we should not leave out twelve-tone music. Many of us go to aerobics once a week; or twice a week, as the case may be and often is, even if we are snowed under with work, bills and futile, fruitless projects. Instead of directing our legs and arms, an aerobics instructor/teacher should put on a few quartets – a Schoenberg quartet, for instance – and say, 'Listen to this piece of music. Listen to it carefully, attentively, with your whole body, otherwise your health might suffer and let you down – not in the long run, mind you, but first thing tomorrow morning. Every movement of yours should be attuned to this music and to all the other pieces of music I'll play for you during this week, month, year and decade. Your body is powerless without music, and both your wives and mistresses might complain, when subjected to your impotency in bed and elsewhere. But for music's psychological support, you might collapse in those beds, on those floors, within those haystacks. Can't forget the American movie where they juicily and judiciously make love in a haystack, of all places. Well, let us get down to brass tacks. And our brass tacks are music – the Bartok quartet we're listening to, physically, psychologically, psychically and spiritually. And don't forget your personal bodybuilding that is tantamount to music, to its harmonies. Your body should become a faithful representation of music instead of thinking in terms of Greek sculpture. When contemplating your anatomy from afar or at close range, one is supposed to say sincerely, with envy and admiration, "What I see is Mozart's best opera" or "It is Beethoven's last piano sonata I'm paying homage to as I stand in this aerobic hall." The paroxysm of happiness can be experienced in the presence of two music lovers who, while looking at your naked body, engage each other in conversation, saying to each other, 'Just have a look at that body over there. What does it remind you of?'

'It reminds me of Beethoven's opus 110.'

'I beg to differ. In my opinion, we both admire and meditate upon Beethoven's opus 109.'

‘Perhaps, perhaps. But I hope you’ll wholeheartedly agree with the following statement of mine, “This body isn’t Beethoven’s opus 106, especially not the fugue one can hear at the end of this opus magnum.’

A top-of-the-range discussion. One has to admit, however, that such discussions, such lofty exchanges of views do not happen on a regular basis: their basis is quite irregular, I must admit. They are few and far between, these musical feasts, these spiritual celebrations. Usually our instructors are confronted with obtuse, tone-deaf individuals; and those individuals are not just twelve-tone-deaf. They are just *deaf*, full stop. Unbiased observers may judge this state of affairs in the following terms, ‘It looks like negotiations between the two sides have come to a full stop.’ Those people view the cosmos only in terms of deals, money and billions. That is why you often encounter the robots whose ears hear only stock markets and stockbrokers, lifebrokers, lifebreakers, ‘The Company’s shares dived by 90p to 165p on the stock market yesterday.’ You put on Beethoven’s *Ninth* brought back to life by Furtwängler and his Berlin Philharmonic. Once the symphony is over, you ask the individual in question, ‘What do you think about this piece of music? Or rather describe your body’s reaction to it.’ And the individual answers, “‘The Company’s shares dived by 90p to 165p on the stock market yesterday.’ So you say to yourself, ‘I should try another version. The one we heard was recorded live in 1938. Let me put on a later version. This individual might be more attuned to the purity of sounds. Alas, old recordings suffer from all sorts of imperfections linked to sounds, frequencies and so on.’ But even after listening to the 1951 version of the same symphony (performed by the same orchestra, the same conductor), the individual points out that ‘the company’s shares dived by 90p to 165p on the stock market yesterday’.

Music instructors who spend their time in gyms where music reigns to the detriment of muscles and sterile, physical exercises never underestimate the importance of dialogue: it is not enough to show what should be done, even if accompanied, transported, transfigured by Beethoven’s *Ninth* and Furtwängler. So they talk and talk and talk, and their disciples listen to them, after listening to several symphonies, quartets and trios; and a few cantatas as well, needless to say. Actually these instructors are well-informed about modern atomic physics that goes hand in hand with music: almost everything goes hand in hand with music; in other words, the cosmos is transfixed by music, harmony and a multitude of melodies. And we all know that atomic physics is reluctant to talk about matter as ‘stuff’ but thinks of it more in terms of ‘complicated systems of wave motions’ or ‘events’. Let us leave the latter notion (events) aside, for the time being at least. Nincompoops who count out their money are capable of attributing to it the status designated as ‘events’. Designated, defined – these words sound hollow if they circulate in the money-space, so to speak. And music does not need them in the least: it has its own definitions and designations. Well, these nincompoops go on talking about the events that come to the fore within stock markets and their walls. These events surface, take possession of minds, souls and bodies; no wonder we hear all these sentences where something is divided by 90 or 132. And people commit suicide as they draw revolvers from their trousers and jackets, prepared to pull all the triggers they are allowed to lay their fingers upon. These suicides are events – there is no denying it; although one is tempted to disregard them altogether. After all, they concern the individuals to whom music has never said a single word. (Every musical sound is a word, in a manner of speaking; a logos, rather.) These individuals grasp gold ingots, saying or muttering, ‘This is the real stuff, the only stuff worthy of being talked about anywhere.’ And even if a renowned physicist reminds them of wave motions, they say as they try their best to pull together their thoughts, ‘We don’t need to grasp or grab these gold ingots. They

can be sent at once to Singapore where our bankers will take care of them in no time at all. They'll ride on waves and arrive at their destination thanks to a variety of motions.'

As for music, one might say it is not limited exclusively to waves, motions and suchlike, in spite of chords' affinity with waves. Sometimes I have the feeling I can hold a piece of music in my hands or put it on any member of my body, on account of its affinity with gold and the stuff our dreams are made on. Actually music is quite unlike the 'common sense' version of the world where we suffer and have the benefit of Bach's partitas. You side with Heisenberg and Nils Bohr as you do your utmost to eliminate the notion of 'matter' and dissolve it into no more than 'a series of events', as Einstein might have declared at some point in his career. But a great piece of music is both matter and spirit; or a series of events, if you prefer. And today some human beings prefer a series of events.

THE STONE AGE

But matter can be very helpful and we are all aware of this aspect of whatever we pick up or look at. You pick up a stone – a Japanese friend of mine sent me his latest poem focused on a stone – and you say to yourself, 'This stone might have adorned the proverbial Round Table during tea ceremonies presided over by King Arthur. Now our scientists believe that what really happened around the table we are talking about boils down to tea cups and their contents.' Never mind, never mind. What counts is the presence of this stone, and this presence contradicts our infatuation with waves and miniscule particles which cannot be seen in spaces devoted to tea ceremonies. Why do we talk so much about tea? Not because we are bent on paying homage to the English way of life, for all our devotion to Shakespeare and Orlando Gibbons. Thanks to Japanese sources and poems we know that tea ceremonies are intimately connected with our way to death, and whatever path we set our feet and hopes on invariably, irrevocably leads us to death. Our concentration upon tea and cups reflects this setup, the doom we are willy-nilly subjected to, even if we pray every other hour, putting all our energy into our prayers, into the AUMs we pronounce and sing devotedly. And then we read the following piece of information, "Counter-intuitive" means that, for instance, the traditional definition of causation no longer works with Quantum Theory. And Einstein's Theory of Relativity has drastically changed traditional conceptions of Space and Time.'

All right – for once we understand the meaning of what untraditional science says to us through books and other testimonies, other sacred lores. If someone has no ear for music, we cannot say to ourselves, 'Let us put the recordings of Beethoven's symphony on our record player and see what happens.' Actually, whenever we say, 'Let us see what happens' under these circumstances – a record player, a fabulous recording – we are convinced that, at the end of the ritual, the layman will kneel down in front of us and the records, muttering excuses and thanks. 'I thank you for revealing to me the sense of what I'm doing on this Earth. Everything is music, and what I do belongs to its realm. From now on, I'll do my best not to play too many wrong notes.' No, over the years we have grown better and wiser; and in the light of what Quantum Theory (capital letters? Capital Theory?) teaches its partisans and destroyers, we no longer require an immediate positive reaction to the pieces of music traditionally heard in our room in the presence of neophytes and dimwits. Yes, we still try to convert these imbeciles, making them realise to what extent a piece of music can affect our way of thinking, feeling and living. But they do not kneel down, for all our and the conductors' efforts. The cause materialised by divine sounds and LPs leads to no

positive effect, and our guinea-pigs continue to frown or look out of the nearest window in search of a cheap, abominable divertissement.

But let us return to stones about which both Spinoza and my Japanese correspondent had a lot to say as they continued to write both poems and treatises on aesthetics. Spinoza used to fling many stones into the air, in the direction of the stars and clouds – in the hope that sooner or later they (the stones) will realise that their will has nothing to do with those flights and falls. ‘They fly, they fall,’ Spinoza would mutter to himself. ‘And they think they do this on their own initiative, on their own. They ignore my presence completely. But I’m not Donald Trump and so my ego doesn’t require this attention. Let them (those stones) think what they are determined to think, and I’ll go on talking about determination and predestination.’ And my Japanese friend wrote something along these lines:

I might have seen it in a pillow book,
On my pillow, on my former deathbed.
The same stone, the same pain and joy.
Why fling it up, down or sideways?

Let us re-read once again Plato’s description of the world we inhabit without knowing for sure where it came from and whether it came at all, once upon a time. Of course we say that time is linked to space and there is no causality as such. God can say whenever He likes, ‘Light, light, light, light’; neither His light nor our world will ever come into existence. But there is a world we are supposed to deal with for fear of being let down by it once and for all. No, no – the danger lies *elsewhere*: the world may and does let us down, but then it picks us up once more as if nothing had happened. It starts again from where it left off, from where it let us down, dropped us, letting us fall on our knees or on our shoulders – in the shit, in the shit. At least that is what happens in *The Decameron*; and where does this episode come from, if not from the history of the world and its Creation?

‘And he gave it a smooth round finish all over on the outside, for many reasons. It needed no eyes, since there was nothing visible left outside it; nor did it need ears, since there was nothing audible there, either.’ Let us not forget what Spinoza told us about stones, about their Trump-like ego, and let me remind you that my observation, this comparison of mine is based on a few events pertaining to Donald Trump’s administration, to his handling of the world’s affairs. In those days there was such a thing as a corona virus, and Trump – he was the president of the United States, believe it or not – mishandled the whole business. And then he said to everybody, ‘But for my millions and billions, no vaccine would have seen the light of day and the darkness of your entrails.’ And that was it, that was it. Some supporters listened to him, saying, ‘We should name the vaccine after its creator.’

‘And who is their creator?’ asked the never-Trumpians and some Christians.

‘Donald Trump, the president of the United States. He ascended the throne of our country in 2016 and stepped down in 2020.’

‘Did he really step down or was he pushed down by the winner of the 2020 presidential election?’

‘He stepped down on his own initiative.’

‘Like Spinoza’s stone?’

‘At first he sat down on the throne from which, shortly afterwards, his body saluted the crowd. And then his body rose, directed its steps towards a few steps we could see from where we stood and descended these steps of its own free will.’

‘Did you understand our remark about Spinoza and his deterministic stone? Do you read at all, you, Donald Trump’s mindless followers and worshippers?’

‘We do read all the time. And we also consume all knowledge verbally, through other people’s mouths.’

So God gave it a smooth round finish all over on the outside. Didn’t Plato talk about a stone? Of course he did, which means that the universe was a stone at first, and God flung it up, following in Spinoza’s footsteps. It needed no eyes, since there was nothing visible outside it. That’s right, that’s right. Spinoza’s stone could not see the instigator of his cosmic flight because it had no eyes and consequently could not see either Spinoza or anybody, anything else. No wonder it thought it was doing everything on its own initiative. Flying, falling, lying for centuries on the same spot as if unable to move. Apparently the world depicted by Plato is still available in some quarters as if to remind us of both Plato and its own former life, former strife for life. In my youth I read a book that I lost sight of as I grew more intelligent and stronger; and more mature, to all intents and purposes. But I did not intend to lose it, for it says something appropriate, something I am prepared to enact nowadays as if I really needed all my lost books to assist me in this task of mine. The point is this book or rather the passage I recall at this particular instant insisted upon the importance of beaches and pebbles – not only with regard to holidaymakers who, whenever on a beach, by the seaside, under the real sun, unload their frustrations and prepare themselves for their next struggles for life. I recall this episode from the book I am talking about because it refers to writers and their way of taking their vocation and predestination seriously. ‘A real writer,’ it said, ‘should just walk along a beach, his right or left foot playing with pebbles. Of course he can bend down and study a few of these pebbles for the sake of studying them without any afterthought. I am not sure you see what I mean, what I am writing about at this particular moment. As a matter of fact, I am not even sure I am writing something, about something. I might be on one of the beaches I am talking about; I am not sure I am *writing* about them, as I stated in one of the previous sentences. Well, to cut everything short and sweet, you should not take your life seriously; not at all, as a matter of fact. If, for some unclear reason, you are inclined to take *my* life seriously, I will not sue you. Yes, I give you my word of honour that I will not sue you even if you dare take my life and whatever I do in the course of my existence seriously instead of playing with it on some beach or other. Why don’t you take me for a pebble? I wouldn’t mind, I can assure you. Well, a real writer does not write *Hamlet* or about hamlets and bees or not bees. Actually bees could attract his attention or criticism, but bees and not bees leave him or her or them cold. They are cold, whenever they hear the following words, “The human condition, is it worth our while? And death, what about death? What happens after it? No bodkins or a lot of bodkins?”’ Incidentally, the doctor who followed the last tsar of Russia everywhere – he accompanied him as far as his makeshift tomb – was called Bodkin. Yes, all his life he went by the name of Bodkin and one wonders whether Hamlet was not speaking of him in his immortal soliloquy. Well, let us get down to our *moutons*, as the French put it. In this particular case our muttons are pebbles we are supposed to play with as we walk along some beach or other. So do great writers, mind you. They take leave of their minds and just play with the pebbles they see around them as they walk or do not walk along the beaches I have spoken about for almost 20 minutes. Great writers play with pebbles instead of playing with bodkins of all sorts – with their doctors, among other sorts or things.’

We can and probably should take stones seriously, even if our kidneys are safe and sound – as sound as the bells we hear in Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*. While listening to these particular bells, we may say to ourselves – it just dawns upon us all of a sudden – that life is not limited to stones, pints of beer and skittles. Boris dies and so does his son, although his death does not take place in the opera I am talking about. Anyway, it is enough to think about COVID (capitals or something much lower?) and its victims – Enough for what, enough for what? Is it really enough? In a way – yes. In what way, in which way? Well (or bad), you think in terms of the virus and take in a panorama of the dead, of its victims, of its corpses that no cemetery, however large and imperial, can hold in its embrace. Yet let us imagine that, for once, Plato does not speak of ideas and immortality lying in wait for Socrates and himself; and also for Aristotle. What *is* he talking about, may I ask? About a celestial beach around which a number of pebbles turn and turn as if resolved to imitate our solar system. They have no eyes, no ears, no feelings, no hearts, but that does not mean they have no idea of what resounds in the universe, when I put on a recording of Schoenberg’s *Night*. This night is full of pebbles, of lights that these pebbles exhibit for our sake and salvation. We listen to these lights and a lot of smiles wreath our numerous faces. And we do not even have to ask ourselves whether the vision we are endowed with – a gift, a real gift – corresponds, ties in with Jerusalem as depicted in the last book of The Bible.

Carn Gafall. A curious monument in the Buellt area of Wales, which consists simply of a pile of stones, the uppermost of which bears the imprint of a dog’s paw. The print was left by Gafall, a dog owned by King Arthur of CAMELOT, during the hunt for the boar Trwyd. Visitors to the monument have repeatedly tried to carry off the stone bearing the print, but they have never succeeded in keeping it for more than a day and a night. The next morning, it inevitably returns to its place on top of the pile of stones.

Anonymous, *The History of the Britons*, 10th cen. AD

That is right. That is what happens now and then, when you make a laudable attempt – from *your* point of view – to pick up a stone lying on a pavement. You say to yourself that someone might trip over this stone and fly towards his or her own death without further ado. All sorts of ideas or sentences come in droves to see what happens in your mind. And when they realise you are not conscious of the dangers lying in store for those who walk along the same pavement, bent on paying visits to the same monuments or shops, you say to yourself you had better remove this stone from where it is lying in wait for some foot or other, for some future corpse. Well, it does not really matter what you think and when your thoughts traverse your mind. What counts is your removal of the stone you see on the pavement as you walk along this pavement in your endeavour to find a suitable present for your aunt. Christmastime, Christmastide, Christmasnight. All right, all right. You pick this stone up and say to yourself (one wonders if you do anything else), ‘Of course it’s not a ruby. But it’s a beautiful stone. And I’m almost sure my dear Plato spoke of it in his *Timaeus*.’ And then someone pats you on the shoulder (in order to attract your attention) and says, ‘Do you have any idea of what you’re doing? This is a historic monument you’re destroying either consciously or unconsciously. Are you destroying it consciously?’

‘No,’ you say as you shrug your shoulders. ‘Whatever I do, I do it or that or them unconsciously as I walk along a beach, paying attention only to pebbles. Or to the cosmos, if you prefer.’

‘Let’s not talk about my preferences,’ says the foreigner. ‘Did you give any thought to what you see on the surface of this pebble, as you call it?’

‘I think it bears the imprint of a dog’s paw,’ you say.

‘Do you have any idea what dog you’re talking about?’

‘A spaniel or a poodle? Is that what you mean?’

‘I’m speaking of Camelot, you fool. Of Camelot and King Arthur. I suppose you know only Donald Trump and probably Obama, Hillary Clinton, Osama bin Laden.’

BREAD AND HONEY. HI, HELEN! HOW ARE YOU DOING? I NEVER PLAYED LIKE THE OTHER KIDS

People – call them persons or human beings, if you wish – watch TV and sit in front of their computers. And those computers – and they will probably say the same nonsense in two centuries – say that Trump, this president you have never heard anything about, won the election he did not win. On such a day, in such an age, one may ask oneself what really counts. This is the question or that is, ‘What really does count?’ Of course Hamlet counts, and if there are several bodkins you can count upon you should put them in front of you – in your dining room, for instance; on your dinner table. Anyway, your dinner tonight is made up of bodkins and it is pointless to specify that these bodkins are of *Hamlet* fame. I am not even sure they are famous – they are not as famous as Lady Gaga, that’s for sure – but your monologue, dialogue – whatever comes your way – is famous, for the simple reason (all reasons are simple, even Poincaré’s theorem) that the bodkins you are talking about do not exist outside of Hamlet’s celebrated monologue. ‘One bodkin,’ he says. ‘One bodkin, one bodkin.’ He is repetitive, our Hamlet, isn’t he? As repetitive as a huge chunk of contemporary music. But when you analyse what is going on, especially in the United States of America, you realise you are not talking about everything. You are not even talking about something that counts. If you are, whenever you say something, you see a pile of gold on your writing desk because it really counts. You grasp both counts and go to the very best restaurant you are able to select, when perusing your charts, maps and magazines. But then you say to yourself that the bodkin emphasised and brought into play (into Shakespeare’s play) by Hamlet has everything to do with your life and happiness except that you use another word or words, namely, ‘Body, King.’ Well, you have your body and you also have your king, strange as it may seem to others – to the French, among other individuals.

What does anything have to do with your life and its prospects, its high expectations? Being as sceptical and frustrated as you are, you no longer have any expectations, for fear of being made a laughing stock at the first opportunity. You see this opportunity and say to the people engaged for the job, ‘Do you really hate me so much? Do you really have to humiliate me beyond measure? I thought the measure you took into account was over there, you know. But now I wonder if its limits and boundaries can be found at all, if any search is allowed in the country where you live and evidently prosper – fertilise, as they say nowadays.’

Let us leave this nonsenses or senses (in the lurch) – whatever they embellish themselves with before going, plunging, dropping into Utter Nonsense. First they hear the following announcement, ‘You are about to plunge headlong into Utter Nonsense. Do you agree to this ritual? Don’t forget we live in a free, democratic, fair-and-

square country. You also live in this country, to all outward appearances. And what are these outward appearances, may I ask? Whatever is outward, is outward. Socialism, and communism, among other things, isms, comms and socs.'

But what about Plato? For years and months French intellectuals have endeavoured to figure out what they could do without Marx. Other persons – I am reluctant to bracket them with 'intellectuals' – do not know what they could do without Trump. In their domain – they call it 'dominion' – Trump is God and whenever he goes to this dominion, he asks his acolytes or just collates (even if you say, 'I am coll', they understand you) the following question, 'Rigged?' 'Rigged', they answer, even if they do not know what he is talking about, to whom he is talking about (that). Previous elections in the country have been rigged by the ruling party. Previous elections in the country have been rigged by the unruling party. Previous elections in the cosmos have been rigged by the ruling party. Previous elections in the universe have been rigged by the Demiurge party. Have been rigged, have been rigged. We rigged up a tent between two trees. The sailors rigged the ship with new sails. (I am a sailor, Sinbad the emailor.) Rigged, rigged, rigged, rigged. Let us rig a universe, you say to yourself, after realising you cannot live either here or there. So you rig something for yourself, from scratch.

You continue to scrutinise Plato's draft of the universe. Yes, we have come to the conclusion that the universe is just a topsy-turvy beach where pebbles, stones and other elements await our intrusion as they hope to constitute a major setback for the Devil and his intolerable schemes. What does the Devil think about as he sits in front of his writing desk, eager to overturn the world and all the elections he has not won in the course of time and space and all the messes (or Masses) created by God? As Trump and his cards put it many times, over and over again: 'This election should be overturned. This world should be overturned. Let us overturn all of them.' So Trump and his partisans pick everything up and overturn this everything and also up, all the ups they happen to lay their hands on. So you can see them turn whatever they hold in their hands and in between their teeth. And everything turns and turns and turns, and everybody says, 'How beautiful our cosmos is, after all that can be said about its ugliness. It is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. Let us prosper and multiply our bodies, souls and tendons. Let us also multiply our stones because Plato touched upon them in his works. So did Master Eckhart. He would pick a stone up and fling it somewhere, saying to him and to us, "Do you believe in God?" And the stone would answer, "I don't know." And we would answer, "We do believe in God with all our hearts." "How many hearts do you have?" Master Eckhart would ask. "As many as you wish." "More than Scheherazade, I hope." "More, more, much, much more."'

... 'the uppermost of which bears the imprint of a dog's paw. The print was left by Gafall, a dog owned by King Arthur of CAMELOT, during the hunt for the boar Trwyd.' Of course you can go along beaches as you eat peaches, apples, paprika, popcorn and papyruses, but what counts in these matters refers to King Arthur who ate neither popcorn nor unicorns. What did he eat, one may wonder? assuming that one still wonders in his or her leisure hours. (I am sure, that women do wonder in the course of their leisure hours and even outside them.) It is the imprint we have to look for, even if the French and those who know their language speak to us thus, '*Cherchez la femme, cherchez la femme.*' 'No, we won't,' we answer them. 'We don't *cherchez la femme*. We *cherchez la* stone and an *ourse*; *l'ourse qui porte un chien*. Yes, we're looking for an *ourse qui porte un chien* and *un sceau de ce chien*, believe it or not.'

I think Pascal said something along these lines, along these faces and their smiles, expressions and tears, ‘Look at these faces I put together for your benefit, for the benefit of your sight and mind. What do you see? All right, you see two faces which look more or less alike. You could even say they belong to twin brothers and sisters. They don’t make you laugh, even if you look at them for a while, for two or three hours nonstop. You just say to yourself and probably to me (I don’t mind being spoken to, when I’m in the midst of human beings): these two faces belong to twin sisters or brothers, or to twin androgynes. Nothing to write home about.’ But if you separate these faces, these brothers and sisters or sisters and sisters or brothers, brothers, brothers, brothers, you realise how laughable they are – silly and not deserving to be seriously considered, in other words.’

Well you say to one face, ‘You look almost exactly like the other face, although I’m not sure you belong to the same family, to the same womb. You just belong to the same species called, ‘The Race of Most Sophisticated Beings on Earth.’ Incidentally, when people cull animals, they kill them, especially the weaker members of a particular group of them, in order to reduce or limit their number. You might remember the following truth, ‘Adam called animals by their names, “Boris, Ignat”, and so on. As for you, our present human beings, you *cull* animals, Moby Dick and his offspring – for the fun of it.’ But let us not forget ‘the imprint of a dog’s paw. The print was left by Gafall, a dog owned by King Arthur of CAMELOT, during the hunt for the boar Trwyd.’ Today we have only imprints, not real things, as Henry James put it once. You walk around your house and say to yourself and sometimes to your cat, ‘This is the last imprint of my late mistress’s hand or foot. To tell the truth I don’t remember what part of her body bestowed her mark, her sign in this fashion.’ Your mistress. You used to call her ‘my Helen of Troy’, although her name had nothing to do either with Helens or Troy, or the war unfolding on the pages of Homer’s book. The war unfolds but neither in Troy nor in Greece can you find anyone looking like the mistress under discussion because she was not really beautiful; pretty perhaps. And ‘pretty’ was not the word used by the Greeks, judging from the paintings we see on their walls. They all look majestic as if sitting or even walking on the throne; walking while sitting a throne. There are only imprints everywhere and that is what they call this day and age. And if you ask them, ‘What day are you talking about?’ they answer rather calmly as if content with what they get, ‘This day, this very day. And don’t you ever try to compare it to days of yore. These are days, there’s no denying it – the Earth continues to circle around the sun. And these days are yours, yours and mine, unfortunately, unfortunately. But they’re not what we might rightfully call “of yore”. Even “of” is different now, nowadays, in this day and age, in this day and night.’

The imprint of a dog’s paw. Now this imprint is far more precious than shoes and feet, whoever these feet and shoes belong to in this day and afternoon. There used to be a lot of men – we called them fetishists – who followed their mistresses on all fours, which permitted them to smell and kiss their imprints all over some asphalt jungle. ‘What are you doing?’ one might ask now and then.

‘This is my mistress,’ they would answer, adding after much soul-searching, ‘My Helen of Troy, *ma belle Hélène*.’

‘A few minutes ago I saw a woman whose legs appealed to my obstructed imagination. But she wore a big sloppy jumper and cut off jeans.’

Anyway, the stone enlarged upon in the text I quoted in the hope of being able to find this stone or create it out of nothing, out of an old imprint, out of yore, may come in handy if you are seriously bent on restoring the Garden of Eden and its inhabitants. Of course you can declare that every stone you pick up as you walk along a

beach – and this beach is out of reach for all those who have no idea how to treat old stones – is (the stone you have just picked up) very old – as old as King Arthur, you say to yourself. The stone can trace its roots back to the times of Arthur and Lancelot. Your imagination flies along this trace and at the end of a week you come across a round table on which a few dishes seem to wait for knights and for long, long nights during which those knights tell their stories. And then your servant spoils the fun, saying, ‘Did you notice the dishes I’d put on your table? By the way, my wife helped me a lot, although I don’t need any help, when cleaning someone’s rooms. I’m used to the job! When I was studying for my exams I used to clean the house as a sort of displacement activity. By the way, you’ll have to get down on all fours to clean behind the toilet. I was about to do it myself, but suddenly felt it was beneath my dignity. As for *your* dignity, it’s not likely to suffer in the process. Did you clean the inside of the car? We had an arrangement that you would clean the house and my wife would cook.’

I know that Spinoza did not believe in hope as such – ‘in hope as much’, as his followers used to say. (They still do, by the way.) I do hope it is enough to find one stone, one ancient stone, and say to oneself, ‘It is a foundation stone, the foundation stone.’ You can attribute it to Lancelot – he used to throw it at the queen’s bow window – or kill a few demons, which can be done without Notung’s priceless assistance. (Notung? Nothing? What’s the name of that legendary sword? I recall its birth which I often compared to that of Aphrodite. Coming out of the sea, emerging, emerging, towering above all the rest. Durandal? Excalibur, Excalibur!) We are not, however, naïf to the point of trusting inanimate objects, of relying on them, after getting ourselves into a mess. A cat is most helpful, given its boundless, limitless store of empathy. A stone, especially an old, historic stone is liable to leave you in the lurch and you have no alternative but to hunt high and low for this companion in misfortune, for this companion of sorts. Of course you speak to it from time to time – every night, before turning in, to be exact. You say to it you need it badly, and you add after clearing your throat, ‘As you know, I have no domestic animals within shouting distance and even out of it. My only hope seems to be incarnated by your cold, stone-cold, stone-deaf presence. You’re deaf and mute and so I can’t trust your eloquence, your empathic, emphatic discourses. Of course I’m quite capable of supplying a necessary material – the material I need for my consolation and salvation. For instance, I can put myself in your shoes and say to myself, “Don’t be afraid of Covid 19. It’s just another incarnation of the widespread varieties of flu known to every child, every dodderly old man. In a few days time I’m flying to Moscow, you know. In the course of my perilous flight, I’ll have to stop over at Frankfurt and Zurich, on my way back. If any, if any. If I don’t die in Moscow, for some reason or other (let’s not forget Moscow winters and slippery roads) I’ll have to spend a few hours at Zurich International Airport. Well, you must say to me at this point, after listening to my confession and fears, “Don’t be afraid of Zurich. It’s a civilised airport and all travellers will be wearing masks – several masks, in point of fact. They’ll wear masks all over their bodies, for the virus in question can squeeze into your soul through your navel, among other openings. You’re used to contemplating your navel, even if you have something urgent to accomplish, before it is too late. So, if I were you, I would devote one of my contemplations, one of those sessions to the coronavirus, to its travel arrangements, to its dexterity and smallness. It is so small it can invade your body through any of your pores. Do you know the difference between sweat and the virus we’re trying to dissect? Let’s not dissect it any further, otherwise it will be able to squeeze through your atoms, genes and quarks and anti-quarks. Well, the difference between sweat and the virus can be explained by the following sentence I culled from one of my encyclopaedias, «Sweat passes through the pores and cools the body down.” And what about the virus you’re so afraid of, if I’m not mistaken?’

‘You’re mistaken, you are, you are – I don’t fear this virus. I fear only the Almighty as if I were of German origin.’

‘Sweat passes through the pores and cools the body down, whereas the coronavirus passes through the pores and *heats* the body *up*.’

Well, let us forget about my trip and the coronavirus, its merciless behaviour, because there is a world in the making, and I have not yet made this universe; although I might have started – rather clumsily, judging from the result. And what is this result, pray? I see a few handpicked stones in front of me, and I am itching to fling them upwards, bent on creating a semblance of the universe to which we are accustomed, for better or worse. We are with it for better, whenever enjoying a starry night in the company of a beautiful companion; in fortune, this time, in fortune, believe it or not. As soon as you say, ‘In fortune,’ many people turn their heads and question you on the subject as follows, ‘What are you talking about? What kind of fortune do you have in mind? And what about the coronavirus and its consequences? What about our tombs waiting for us rather impatiently?’ So you answer you are talking about a beautiful view you can enjoy from where you are standing on your balcony. But of course these matters can be only characterised as worse, worse, worse, neglectful of grammar and its austere, inhuman prescriptions. You feel like crying (in every sense of the term), ‘Worse! Worse! Worse! Worse!’ and if seriously asked what is worse – so many people ask such questions in earnest – you say, ‘Everything, for God’s sake! Why are you asking?’

So I fling a few stones in all the directions I can spot in front of me, for I am too lazy to turn back, facing yet another world. And I have a fling with my companion in fortune. And then one of the stones falls on her head, on my head, whereupon we instantly become two companions in misfortune. So it is better not to have too many things in common with these stones, these poor imitations of celestial bodies. Anyway, they cannot create even a makeshift universe of no value whatsoever. Moreover, you can send your cosmonauts to these stones, saying to them, ‘We hope that data from the space probe will pave the way for a more detailed exploration of Mars.’

‘Do you really think those stones will reveal anything to us? Nothing, nothing, they’ll reveal nothing either about Mars or the cosmos in general. As for themselves, study them on the surface of the Earth, before picking them up and playing baseball with them. If you feel like it.’

‘I never played baseball like the other kids,’ you answer.

You disagree with cosmonauts, astronauts and other inhabitants of the planet you constructed on the spur of the moment in your eagerness to leave the Earth forever. And this disagreement results in one of your bad moods which incites you to curse the human race more often than usual. Usually you devote to this pastime two hours a day; and you grow weary at the end of this period of time. This time, however, you grow more and more elated as if your curses had a physical, let alone psychical, impact upon the species you hate so much. Yes, you recall Blaise (Blasé?) Pascal and the persons he compared, when in need of a good, salutary laugh. But you go further, much further. You begin to compare *all* humans without exception, and after a while you realise you do not even have to array them somewhere – no military parades to come – putting them together for the sake of your forthcoming comparison. Small children are often told that it is rude to point. So were you, by the way: at some point you were a small child and had a mother and a father who did their best to inculcate the code of impeccable social behaviour into your mind and spirit. Yet, when looking at these representatives of the human race, you cannot help bursting into laughter as you point, point, point, point. Nothing doing – that is your point. So you are unable to stop and go

on for hours and hours until you literally drop and become a drop of sweat, according to your sensations. You pass through your own pores and cool the body (and the spirit) down.

PILLARS AND BENCHES OF SOCIETY

Let us forget about stones, you say to yourself as you turn to other distractions, other do-it-yourself occupations. So many utopias can be found in libraries and even on the surface of the Earth: not all of them remain in the state of utopias. Bitterly disappointed with stones, you go so far as to turn once again towards humans and their shortcomings, their crimes and abjectness. You do your utmost to come to terms with them; on your own terms, mind you. Once again you consult your books, which is much easier and more hygienic than consulting humans themselves.

A fifth recommends him to get some hold over the judges, so that they'll always give a verdict in his favour. He should also invite them to the Palace, and consult them about his legal position. He may be quite obviously in the wrong, but one of the judges is sure to discover a loophole which will serve to defeat justice. Whatever motives he may have for doing so – a passion for contradiction, a dislike of the obvious, or a simple wish to please – the result will be the same. Soon every judge will be voicing a different opinion, a perfectly clear case will begin to see controversial, and the plainest facts will be questioned. This will give the King a splendid chance of interpreting the law to his own advantage. Everyone else will agree, from either fear or politeness, and eventually this interpretation will be boldly pronounced from the Bench.

Thomas More, *Utopia*

This happens whenever you approach a text which you see from afar, discarding other constituents of the scenery you are supposed to cross for some obscure reason. (All reasons are obscure except those which are unreasonable and are usually associated with go-getters or mad scientists.) You see a name or a number; somebody comes and you try to figure out whether it is a human you are contemplating, meditating upon, trying to kill times and spaces. There are terms and you come to them, painfully, painstakingly, and at some point you realise that once again you are in the midst of human beings who give you a piece of advice and let you down as if there were only ups and downs in this world. You are fed up with ups and downs and so you try to construct your world, a tailor-made world. For all your efforts you stumble upon a substance, somebody who is designated as a fifth person; not a team captain, as usually happens in human societies – just a fifth. And this fifth recommends him (you, to all outward appearances) to get some hold over the judges. Why do you usually get hold of judges, of any other representatives of the human race? You want them to give a verdict in your favour. According to Kafka, there are only judges and their victims – in the world where we walk and read books either by Kafka or somebody else. What's the verdict? you ask all the time if you happen to belong to the category designated as victims. Or you say, 'The verdict is,' and some critics limit Kafka's contribution to our mentality, to our mental horizon, to this operatic duo.

As you continue to read More's text, you say to yourself you have no alternative but to become a tsar or an emperor or the president of the stars. This alternative which also features your downfall or rather your fundamental

non-existence makes you understand the importance of thrones and whatever takes place behind them. You should keep in mind the following rule, 'Before ascending any throne, however miserable and short-lived, short-lived, you have to walk around it several times in a row to find out if nothing is hiding in the immediate vicinity of the throne and your power, however unimportant and ludicrous.' But sometimes it dawns upon you that no one *should* stand beside or behind the throne because it is not postulated as a basic principle of the universe. In other worlds, the world can exist if there are no powers behind, beside and above the throne on which you intend to sit as long as you feel like it. Sometimes you feel like taking a walk in your royal park and so you leave the throne and go for a walk, which only confirms your prerogatives, for no one dares sit down on your throne. And this might mean there is no one in the whole world – no one apart from you, needless to say. But who is this fifth person about whom Thomas More speaks in his masterpiece that has led astray so many politicians and daydreamers? The number attributed to this person may reveal the bitter truth I am trying to escape from, bent as I am on enjoying the peace and quiet described so eloquently in Buddhist treatises. These persons are certainly analysed in More's text which should be read in its entirety, apparently, judging from the other persons' absence. If you wish to find out who they are you should read the text from beginning to end; and you should go even further, according to some specialists: you should read a lot of commentaries referring to this text. But you drop both the text and the commentaries into a well and listen to the sound they are supposed to produce upon hitting the water sleeping at the bottom of the well. Well, well, well – too much ado about nothing. You just say to yourself there is nothing, nothing, nothing whatsoever: no persons, no commentaries, no busybodies you cannot receive and talk to because you are very busy. You say this out loud, 'I'm busy, busy, I'm very busy,' and everything disappears of its own accord; or rather of *your* own accord.

Of course you can dismiss all this nonsense, shrugging it off, as the saying goes, but you wish to justify your gesture, if only in your own presence, in the absence of the busybodies you touched upon without touching them – perish the thought. The thought perishes and you say to yourself, 'For all my efforts, I can't get rid of all my thoughts on the spot, once and for all. Let us proceed by stages. First I should make my assurance doubly sure: I should make sure that living on my own, being utterly deprived of companions in misfortune and fortune, is what I really hanker after.' But what other solution to existential problems could you light upon after reading More's text? There are judges and some of them are likely to judge *your* behaviour and decisions instead of sending all your rivals, contesters and other busybodies to prison. What is more, you should invite a number of human beings to the Palace. And if you do invite them to the Palace you will have to talk to them for hours and hours, asking your servant to bring in a lot of drinks and appetisers; and dishes, main dishes. All depends on the length and importance of your discussion. Well, all of them have already given four verdicts in your favour. But one of the persons you see around your round table is sure to discover a loophole mentioned in the Scripture. You scrutinise your guests' faces, one by one, one by one, and say to yourself, 'This is the one, this is the one. This person discovered a loophole through which I'm likely to squeeze on my way out of the Palace; unless I obstruct this piece of justice.' And you recall an episode dating back to your childhood. At the end of this childhood of yours your father took you to a theatre where *Othello* was performed by a few legendary English actors. Your father enjoyed the performance to such an extent that even 20 years afterwards he could not help talking about it with gusto. As for you, your view of the stage was obstructed by a pillar. So if you ask yourself, 'What should I do if I find the loophole I'm talking about? I should obstruct it with a pillar. And where would I find such a pillar? There

are many pillars both inside and outside my palace. I should remove and use one of them to get rid of my predicament.'

All this is boring and tiring; and tiresome, nauseating. A passion for contradiction, a dislike of the obvious, a simple wish to please another emperor – all this happens in the world where humans take centre-stage instead of leaving the stage forever. Of course you can obstruct this view, the view of *their* stage by *your* pillar, but one wonders, one still wonders if it is enough to feel happy in any living condition, within any life you were endowed with at some point, at some date in days of yore. And what if one of those humans decides to head for the pillar with a view to removing it from where it obstructs unhappiness, misery and death? More often than not you ask yourself the following question, 'Why have all these humans put a multitude of spokes (pillars) in my wheels? And a lot of bones in my meals?' And you answer this question thus, 'Because they have motives.' And here is another question you have on the tip of your tongue, 'What kind of motives do they have?' For a while you mull these (and many other) motives over and end up saying to yourself (*de guerre lasse*), 'Whatever motives he may have for doing so and so and so and so...' And every dot is just another 'so'. And every 'so' is another dot.

And then they say (no matter who these *they* are), 'Emperors are out of fashion, whatever the Japanese might think on their islands, within their minds. The Republican Party was voted into/out of office – these are the lines along which we should think and act.' So there come into existence a few parties and a lot of party members whose chief aim and only aspiration happen to be the posts occupied by prime ministers, presidents and supreme judges. These judges are mostly in the right but there are loopholes almost everywhere, and one can see a lot of heads and ideas squeeze through these loopholes and reach either a few billion or a certain degree of power – the utmost degree of power, to be exact. And it is better to be exact in these matters, which (this exactitude) leads us to the following conclusion, 'The only enviable position we can aspire to is located on a throne, even if this throne is occupied by a president and not by a king. You can always say to the inhabitants of your country, "It doesn't really matter whether I am your king or not. You're my subjects and that's what really matters, if you see what I mean. And if you don't, you remain my subjects, even if you vote me out of office, out of my kingdom, out of your native land, your native Earth.'"

'Soon every judge will be voicing a different opinion,' wrote Thomas More as if perfectly aware of what he was talking about. Actually time does not count in these matters – in the matters of judges, in the matters that are taken care of either by judges or by their judges, as Kafka used to say. (His hierarchy.) Neither years nor minutes really count, for all this happens in the twinkling of an eye, and all of a sudden you hear so many voices that you realise the extent to which it is useless to count anything. And all these voices utter their truths, varnished or unvarnished, as the case may be and often is, whatever really happens. Of course you waste no time in voicing your interpretations of whatever is going on, or whatever went on several hours ago. As I said and wrote earlier all these nuances and definitions do not count: there is nothing to count, there is nothing to live through with the exception of some exceptions to the same inviolable rule. The case is no longer controversial – at least it does not look controversial at first glance – and everyone agrees that the king or the prime minister or the president is always right, for the simple reason that he or she or she or he has every right to be right. And everyone else has every right to be wrong. And this interpretation is boldly pronounced from the Bench. The participants – they all take part in the same play – go to the nearest park, choose an appropriate bench, sit down and pronounce their truth from this Bench. That is how the matter stands and sits, as they say nowadays.

Of course, at the end of your fantasy inspired by Thomas More you might be subjected to a torture called 'interrogation' because human beings – at least the pragmatic sort – are sure to ask you how your bench could seat so many persons. That is what this interrogation sounds like, if I am not mistaken (the veracity of my imagination has its limits): 'Only one bench? How many people do you accept in the parties which affect the politics of your country?'

'I don't meditate in terms of numbers,' you say to the intruder. 'What counts is the quality of the members, of the participants of our rallies. And the number of the arms they have and therefore raise, whenever I give them the appropriate signal.'

'What is this signal?' asks the intruder.

'Do you think animals are endowed with our gift, with the gift we can boast of when accused of being the worst representatives of animals?'

'We're the worst anyway,' says the intruder.

'Language, language, language. That's what I'm talking about. And I'm able to talk about it because language can be found in the midst of my possessions.'

This is not a very promising start and so I recall my father's words, whenever engaged in a conversation of this meddlesome kind. 'Decide what you want in life – don't just muddle along,' said my father, and I said I would follow his advice to the very end of my existence. My existence is not yet at its very end; it is certainly a partial end I am confronted with, but it is not very, very, very, this end; at least I hope so. I must inform you that hope has been on its deathbed – as far as I am concerned – for more than 20 years now, but it is not dead yet. Yes, my hope looks at me and my relatives who spend their time, their years, in the vicinity of my bed as if awaiting my legacy, as if resolved to lift my mattress and see how many millions I hid under it. My nephew likes dogs to the point of bestowing their characteristics upon his relatives and buddies. He thinks that humans dig the Earth and hide their valuables in the holes produced through their efforts, by means of their spades. And if there are no traces of their efforts in the neighbourhood, in the vicinity of their deathbeds – no signs of the freshly overturned earth – you have to look for their jewels and other representative riches under mattresses. That is how the matters are construed by some young people who wish to inherit everything except the wisdom of the world.

You should make others feel you muddle along, and that is the only way of avoiding tiresome explanations, discussions and expositions of various semantic theories. Yes, you should have recourse to language, to its essence – to semiotics, in other words; because people do not understand the first thing about semantics. If you broach another subject with them – in your endeavour to get rid of their figures, faces, smiles and frowns – they say to themselves upon hearing your very first words, 'Well, at least we know the first thing about the subject he chose for our conversation. We'll enlarge upon it for an hour or two and then we'll see what can be done about the second thing. Sure enough, we know nothing about this second thing, but let us wait and see. Perhaps this so-called king (what a nickname!) will die in the course of his exposition and we'll find a few diamonds under his mattress.' So you talk to them about signs and the minds of those in whose linguistics depths these signs continue to germinate and prosper. You say to them, to your interlocutors, to the busybodies I touched upon so many times: 'Confronting the complexity of semiosis, Morris had divided semiotics into three discrete areas.'

'You didn't answer my question,' says the intruder. 'How come you put so many people on the same bench, in the same park?'

‘This wasn’t an ordinary bench. In point of fact it was a flying saucer where they had put many armchairs so the whole population of our city could have found refuge on it.’

‘A refuge?’ did you say.

‘Aren’t humans constantly seeking to escape from persecution?’

‘From political persecution?’

‘From political persecution, from divine persecution, from diabolical persecution, from linguistic persecution. Don’t you think we’ve always been persecuted by language?’

‘By communists, you mean? By their slogans and Marxist theories?’

‘A few minutes ago I touched upon three discrete areas. There are three discrete areas in the domain of semiotics. The first deals with the relations between a sign and other signs. You’re a sign and so am I. And I’m dealing with you, it seems to me. Unless I’m bitterly mistaken.’

Usually your interlocutor – or whatever his name or profession might be on that particular occasion – says, ‘What kind of nonsense –’ and takes one of those leaves (French, English) we have dealt with so many times. And if he (a beautiful woman is allowed to remain on the scene of the discussion) takes no leave whatsoever, you continue as follows, ‘The second concerns relations between signs and denotata which Morris called semantics. Do you know what denotata means? Relations of denotating, my dear interlocutor.’

‘Detonating?’

‘No, no, no – denotating! But I, for one, have no wish to denote anything. Do you? By the way, as regards the question of whether animals possess a language, Sebeok steadfastly says, “No.” I think he goes on saying “no”, which means he’s still alive and kicking. He says “no” and immediately kicks something. Nice, isn’t it?’

TOTENTANZ

Even if the persons you inadvertently put in your flying saucer or lying saucer – after all, it is lying now in a park which does not exist either – leave you to your own devices, you now have so many devices, alias problems, scattered around your imaginary park that you have no idea what to do with them and the rest of your life. Well, you have no alternative but to muddle through because there is nothing else either under your feet or in front of your belly. Muddle, muddle, muddle, in the middle, at the end; the no-ending muddle, so to speak. But do you really have to speak? Animals have no languages, which does not altogether liberate them from signs’ omnipresent theory. Suppose you find yourself in an empty room, and for once you are deprived of any opportunity to admire either oriental carpets or modern paintings: the walls of this room are as empty as an authentic representation of nirvana. All right, all right. Nevertheless this emptiness is a sign, if only in virtue of nirvana-oriented thoughts which enter your head and are reluctant to leave it, for all your intentions and purposes. Sure enough, you are brimful with intentions and purposes, and all of them do their best to free you from cumbersome, meddlesome notions, semiotics and names such as Sebeok, Morris and Derrida; let alone Roland Barthes.

So you quote Sebeok – in the hope of getting rid of all these signs and minds (you are weary and bored to death) – and here is what happens next. But first you should quote Sebeok so as not to renege on your promise: ‘My work was to transcend the stalemate of behaviourism and fruitfully lead semiotics beyond the bounds of merely human phenomena.’ Of course you are completely at sea with this statement which does not seem to behave itself – from *your* point of view. Indeed both signs and languages are duty bound to communicate a number of

truths – to all those who take the trouble to listen to them or read their meanings or loads of twaddle. Those scientists' behaviours do not fit into any civilised exchange of views and ideas, for most of the time they rely on opacity, hermeticism and nonsense-sounding sentences that seem to sentence you to a lunatic asylum, no less, no less. How to transcend this kind of behaviourism? To throw your books (all of them) out of the window? All right, you open a window but then have a change of heart or of mind: your thoughts emerge from a brand-new mind at present. And you wonder whether this new mind belongs to a human or an animal. After all, it is the latter that made you change your mind. Let us not forget the ending of the above quote, 'Beyond the bounds of merely human phenomena.'

Suppose someone dies and this person belongs to your family, being one of your closest relatives, probably your daughter, your son. You go on holiday, drive your car that you know by heart, having driven it for more than 10 years and suddenly something happens and someone – your daughter, your son, your nephews – dies in a car crash. You don't know for sure whose car crashed into a tree, a mountain side, into someone's deranged mind: there are people who go left instead of going right or up. So you collide with these people, and some of them drive cars, huge American cars that crash into all other drivers, if driven the wrong way, on the wrong side of the road. So you are in doubt, but this doubt concerns the way your destiny unfolded this accident, not its result. The result is lying in front of you, and you see a lot of blood in front of you, on all sides of your body, your eyes. Your eyes see nothing but the bloodshed from this accident, the blood of one of your daughters – your *only* daughter, to be precise. Is it necessary to be precise under the circumstances? You know that the blood you are contemplating right now – you will meditate upon it later on, all your life in all probability – belongs or rather belonged to your daughter. How many daughters do you have right now? Five or six? You continue to put your late daughter in the middle of your family. It is as if you were constantly picking up her corpse, resolved to install it at your dinner table at the beginning of some celebration or other. What kind of celebration can you envisage, considering your daughter's untimely death brimful with gore? Never mind, never mind. No more celebrations, you say to yourself as you bend over your daughter's tomb throughout her funeral, your funeral. And then a few human beings remind you that you are also a human being and that your grief can be shared by your brothers, sisters and nephews; even if they do not really belong to your family; not even to your wife's or husband's family. They say, 'Let us go and drink something. Even two bottles of vodka might do you a lot of good under the circumstances.' Upon hearing the word circumstances you see the sea of blood and your daughter's or nephew's tomb. You burst into tears. Actually you don't really have to burst into them: they are all over your face, your clothes, your soul and so on.

And you join this well-wishing crowd and go somewhere, heading for some table or other, making your way towards a few bottles arrayed on this table. Someone opens these bottles, but you do not endeavour to find out whose face you see above these bottles' necks. As a matter of fact, you see no necks, no faces, no fingernails, no fingers. You see only your only child's tomb and her or his blood left to its own devices on the spot where two or three cars came together as if to embrace each other, to kiss each other. They did embrace each other and you cannot forget their kisses – for all your efforts, as they usually say when depicting someone's grief or wrath. You always burst into something: tears, song, sarcastic laughter and even flames. These flames bear a multitude of names: passion, love, libido. What do you care about names? Under the circumstances? Of course all these friends of yours continue to talk to you, keeping you in stitches, for they believe that only stitches are able to make you

forget your grief, daughters and other representatives of your clan. 'Is the whole clan coming to visit you for Christmas?' they ask you with a noncommittal smile.

'Not the *whole* clan, not the *whole* clan,' you answer as you continue to think about your daughter's tomb.

'How come? Why don't *all* of them come to your splendid house which is usually adorned with flowers and fruit? And your fish tank? Don't they long to enjoy the sight of your tropical fish?'

'Have you forgotten my daughter's blood?' you ask them. 'How *could* she join us for Christmas? Do you want me to pour her blood into a vessel and put this vessel on the chest of drawers? Do you want me to install her corpse on an empty chair?'

'No, no, of course not. We just want you to realise she'll never be with you anymore.'

'Do you want me to dance with this empty chair? I think Fred Astaire did it several times, in several films.'

'He also used to do it at his place, you know. I knew him personally, you know.'

ENTENTE CORDIALE

In numerous such cases of an animal responding to human attempts at communication – for example, doing sums by stamping a hoof repeatedly – it can be shown that the animal is not responding to the manifest human signs. Instead, it feeds of the various non-verbal cues of the interlocutor, which have often been deliberately introduced in the service of a hoax.

Paul Copley and Litza Jansz, *Semiotics for Beginners and for Sufferers*

Sooner or later one is bound to realise to what extent all languages are powerless and can be put to use only if someone refuses to recognise their powerlessness. You lost a child. Yes, you are a woman and for some reason everything goes wrong during your pregnancy. One reason is enough to make you unhappy for the rest of life, but this time, for some reason (it is not necessarily obscure) *everything* goes wrong and so you go so far as to divorce your husband whom you seem to have loved to distraction for almost seven years. Your unfinished baby is lying somewhere; not in a tomb, not in a cemetery. Your relatives and friends console you thus, 'Don't cry.'

'No, she should cry, otherwise she'll never forget her dead and unburied baby.'

'All right, let her cry her fill. But first she should *eat* her fill. After all, she hasn't swallowed anything since last Saturday.'

'You shouldn't *swallow* food. You should munch on it and this procedure will allow you to avoid all sorts of complications linked to a stomach ulcer.'

'Don't you worry – you'll have another baby.'

'Two babies, if you wish.'

'You'll have two twins, my dear.'

'And a pair of Siamese twins.'

'And another husband, a better husband.'

'The former one wasn't as handsome as all that.'

'And he didn't know the first thing about mathematics.'

In desperation, you endeavour to communicate your numerous losses to your cat – without asking anything in return: he is not duty bound to stamp his paw. He is not even supposed to put his paw on your shoulder or on your shoulder blade. You just talk to him about every loss of yours, calmly, at length, going into details; and you do not come back from these details for hours and hours. They elapse, these hours go by and away, but you continue to voice your grievances in your cat's presence, in your closest friend's (Paul's) absence. And the cat looks at you as if you were asking him for one look only, for one compassionate sign. You require no signs, no acknowledgments of anything, but your cat continues to look at you and you – once again you realise, you realise, you live and learn – that languages are not only superfluous: they are pernicious.

DOLLARS, DAUGHTERS, DON'T THINK

All right, your nephew can also look at you – for hours, if you give him a thousand dollars. You give him two thousand dollars and he sets about looking at you compassionately. And if you are not satisfied with the amount of compassion and pity you read (or rather do not read) in his eyes, you say, 'Don't you feel any pity for me, for my predicaments, for my dire failures? I won't give you another thousand dollars if you continue to look at me so cold-heartedly, so unsympathetically.' After a while, your nephew says to you rather bluntly and frankly, 'You know, I can't look at someone appropriately. But I can *talk* appropriately, to someone. To you, if you wish.' Without waiting for an answer or any other reaction he begins to talk:

'Do you know where you live and who presides over this mess we're living in? Of course, from time to time we should look downward instead of spending our time in heaven, amidst its creatures that we often call heavenly, for want of a better word. We gaze at our ceilings and then we shift our gaze towards the stars or the sun, as the case may be. Usually we spend hours gazing out of the window when we should be working. I'm talking about spiritually minded people, and we should look up to them, otherwise we'll remain down-to-earth creatures.'

'What does all this have to do with me?' you ask, pointing your cane at your daughter's corpse.

'The point is,' your nephew says, 'you feel an overwhelming urge to give yourself over to your grief. You think about your daughter's corpse and former life. You shouldn't *think*, you know. This pernicious habit of yours will lead you nowhere. St Augustine said that our knowledge is literally nothing, either inside or outside, if we don't believe in God Who can justify everything, even an oversupply of knowledge. You seem to know that your daughter is dead, but if you push another button – we're robots, you know – you'll switch to God and faith in no time at all. Let us switch to Him and them (His heavenly creatures) at once, disregarding our earthly obligations. Do you know what St Augustine said? Do you really know what I'm talking about? *Intellige ut credas, crede ut intelligas*. Do you see what I mean? If you think at all – I mean, if you can't live without thinking, being unable to mediate in the domain of nirvana, you should think in order to understand why you think instead of playing golf as Donald Trump does all the time, even when his secretaries die of the coronavirus.'

'I've never had a go at it, at this game. I don't think I've ever seen golf links anywhere.'

'You should go to the United States and pay a visit to Trump's estate in Virginia, if I remember rightly. Well, let's get back to our Mouton Rothschild, as I usually put it. Speaking of Trump and Covid, do you know how many people have died since the beginning of the pandemic? All right, let us confine our discussion to starvation and other problems we are beset with in our vale of tears, inside our skyscrapers. Do you know how many people have died since the world got moving? If you take the trouble to look upwards, you'll see that God's

heavenly bodies move all the time as they go round and round. They go round themselves. They go round their fellow-creatures. And humans go on dying. They don't even have to go round, to go on the rounds, as our doctors do almost every day. They die of hunger, of cancer – like your daughter, if I'm not mistaken. Many, many human beings, millions of them, billions of them. And you think only about your daughter's corpse. Is that nice?'

'I can't do otherwise. My grief seems to have obliterated everything and everybody.'

'What about me and my words?' asks the nephew. 'I'm sure you would sacrifice my life for the sake of your daughter's existence – if given this choice. If someone says to you, "If you agree to put your nephew to death, you'll have your daughter back, alive and kicking. If the world was your oyster, I would already have died many times.'

'No, no, no. I swear I wouldn't harm a hair on your head.'

'I have hairs all over my body, you know. Well, never mind. By the way, did your daughter believe in God?'

'I think she did.'

'Don't think! Don't think!'

'I don't know.'

'Do you know what the Scriptures say? "If you don't believe, you're unlikely to remain on the surface of the Earth or rather in the vale of tears." Your daughter is no longer *on* the surface of the Earth – she is *under* this surface, if I understand these matters rightly. I have no idea whether the vale of tears has dominion over whatever goes on below the surface of the Earth, but never mind, never mind.'

I think (I don't) Hamlet was wrong when emphasising the importance or futility of what we and he call words. Words might be useful – for Kabbalists who would be powerless in the domain consecrated by Mendelssohn in his *Lieder ohne Worte*. You just say one word, and you don't even have to pick and choose because any word would do, even such an important word as 'angel'. An angel comes, whispers something in one of your ears and you fly off, end of story which might be tantamount to the end of a period in the history of the human race. You could also utter a syllable and a lot of people admit it is more or less harmless unless you dabble in black magic and prepare the birth of the Devil's son, as they do in *Rosemary's Baby*. They went around saying or murmuring, 'De, de, de, son, so, vil, vil, will, will, will,' and no one was any the wiser; in other words, there were no wise humans in the streets where these syllables resounded. But let us (for the time being) forgo the pleasure of indulging in such perverse deviations from the normal course of human history directed and even performed by deities of all kinds, of all sizes and degrees of importance. Generally speaking (not generally *thinking*, mind you) words are harmless, on condition of being isolated, torn away, dragged away from language as such. But whenever language as such appears on the world or word stage and sits down on its centre, both hell and high water joins it.

There are meanings all around you and you have no idea what they mean or suggest or murmur. You begin to think, saying, 'Therefore I am, therefore I am.' But you are not, contrary to whatever your mind construes under the circumstances. As for 'therefore', you are not even in the vicinity of this notion, of this precarious causality. 'Here goes a man or a woman,' they say as they realise that the object they spotted some instants ago is thinking about this or that. What is more, sometimes this object thinks about this *and* that, at the same time, getting lost in the middle of both 'this' and 'that'. But there are individuals who think that their thinking, their thought-stuffed

processes, enable them, permit them to give lessons to bereaved husbands, fathers and daughters. If you lose a son, such a teacher says to you, pointing to heaven, to the lowest cloud, ‘God needed your son. Actually God couldn’t live without him. God would have died if deprived of your son’s presence for another minute or so. And so you should be happy that Nietzsche hasn’t won in the end – God is *not* dead, you know.’ And this thinker thinks that a feat has been accomplished on the spur of the moment: this particular variety of language soothed the crying father.

Humans are bizarre creatures – to say the least, as they say. A woman lost her only child, be it a son or a daughter. Imbued with deep religious feeling, another woman comes in and says to her crying fellow-creature, ‘Rubbing dock leaves on nettle stings helps to relieve the pain.’ And the crying woman stops crying and sets about rubbing dock leaves on her breasts and heart. And if there are no dock leaves in the neighbourhood, near her house, she picks up a soft substance that is full of small holes and can absorb a lot of liquid, of grief, and is used for washing and cleaning souls and hearts (a sponge, an ordinary sponge) and begins to rub her body from head to foot. She tries to convince herself that any kind of massage is good, and if you add to your hands a few herbs, the massage you are carrying out will be even more effective, removing from your body and psyche all the pains stored there ever since you began to lose your parents, daughters, husbands and so forth. And only when you end up losing ‘so forth’ you can stop rubbing your limbs and tendons, otherwise you will never be able to use your hands elsewhere; you will always rub your skin and clothes. If you go on rubbing your clothes as if they were your skin or internal organs, your intestines, for instance, you will succeed in ironing them so perfectly that everyone will take them for your skin, no less, no more. And your lovers will ask you to remove your clothes, ‘otherwise we won’t be able to make love in earnest,’ they are likely to add. But you say to them, ‘I’ve no alternative, I’ve no alternative.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘About my clothes. They’re my skin, you know.’

‘We don’t know anything of the kind. Be so kind as to remove all your clothes at once.’

You go through motions, through notions, and eventually love penetrates the zone where this event is unfolding despite the odds no one can either predict or ward off. They (your numerous lovers) make love to your clothes – not just by talking to them suavely, if you see what I mean. They *really* make love to your clothes, but you cannot affirm that your clothes reciprocate; at least you do not detect any sign prepared to confirm the conclusion you arrived at at the end of your investigation. As usual there are many signs around you, above you, but they are not prepared; they are not prepared for anything – even your naked eye is capable of informing you about this phenomenon. What’s to be done? Of course you say to your numerous partners – in case they complain about your insensitivity – that what you all undergo (a kind of operation) is fitted into the general scheme of love. ‘We call it “universal love”’ you say to them. ‘We love our clothes, don’t we? We do love them, otherwise we wouldn’t wear them. We would throw them away or burn them on Red Square. But we wear them and wash them, when taking our baths. To tell the truth, I’m in the habit of making love to my clothes even when you, you and you, my dear partners are far away, enjoying your holidays on islands and beaches.’

As it happens, there is a teacher amidst your partners, and this teacher of yours reminds you that only God should be loved for Himself – ‘for Himself’, shouts someone, not necessarily a woman – and so you are duty bound

to stop caressing your clothes and private parts, whenever an opportunity presents itself. ‘And what if this opportunity doesn’t present itself?’ you ask, shivering with cold in your thin cotton shirt.

‘Then you should say to it, “Bye-bye, my dear opportunity. Let us postpone our meeting until further notice.”’

‘And what if the further notice presents itself? It presents itself and introduces itself as follows, “I’m further notice. From now on, I’ll be at your service.”’

‘Then you have to say, “Sorry, but you’re here under false pretences. I really am waiting for *short* notice.”’

‘And what if short notice presents itself?’

‘Then you should say to it, “Sorry, I’m waiting for long notice.”’

Whether you are faced with short or long or further notice, you should not however abstain from alcohol/smoking/sex. In other words you should not fall in love with these notices, be they abstract or realistic, materialistic, sexual and so on. The only love worthy of our attention, of our bodily tension is the one (love, love, love) we can display in front of God or an icon. If the vision of a *living* God (Dostoevsky’s touch) is not bestowed upon your eyes and feelings, you might content yourself with an icon hanging in a Russian church. You look around and if you happen to be alone in the church which I shall not describe in minute detail – I am not good at describing churches, especially when asked to describe them in *graphic* detail – you remove your clothes one by one. Apparently this occurrence is rather common in Russian churches; it is said that Russian authorities turn a blind eye to such rituals. They turn a blind eye, look the other way and yet another convert sees the light, the divine light of heaven.

Humans cannot survive without answers, responses, reactions, and consequently it is not enough to be surrounded by others (others, others, always others – *à d’autres*, say the French). You cannot stay there, sit over there without emitting sounds, without making gestures and producing other signs of recognition. You speak to others and if they do not answer, you raise your voice, paying attention to the decibels, not to the meaning of the words you utter. You know this meaning by heart – you have uttered these words many times and under myriads of circumstances, but others should hear these words, otherwise you had better keep silent, being as silent as your own grave. So you raise your voice, yearning for an answer, for good advice, for moral support, for financial, essential support, but the human being you are talking to does not even take the trouble to turn a deaf ear in your direction. Is his deaf ear turned in *all* directions? That is the question you are likely to ask yourself after a while, after a prolonged period of your personal lapse of concentration. Another decibel, another decibel, another decibel; another lapse, another lapse, another text. What is to be done? Suddenly you hear a mower, and you ask the other human, ‘Can your deaf ear hear lawnmowers? Is it acquainted with the noise they make, when engrossed in their ritual?’ And if your other human makes a positive sign, you say to yourself, ‘All right. He heard my question. But the question I asked him wasn’t existential: lawnmowers don’t habitually affect my immortal soul. They don’t kill it, in other words. Well, the typical lawnmower makes about 90 decibels of noise. So I should raise my voice substantially, dramatically. I should go on raising it until it reaches 95 decibels. And if my other human continues to turn a deaf ear to my existential worries, I’ll say to him reproachfully, ‘Are lawnmowers more important than my life-or-death question?’

Whatever you do in front of an icon, it will never respond to your contortions. Of course an authentic church-goer might say upon hearing your grievances, ‘I beg to differ. Icons cry rather often, when listening

attentively to human discourses and heartaches. But your heartache remains within your heart of hearts instead of bursting out. Why doesn't it burst out? Because you do not cry, my dear sufferer, my companion in misfortune.' And then this companion of yours asks you a simple question, 'I suppose you go shopping from time to time. Christmas shopping and so on. Suppose you carry a bag and you say to yourself at some point, "It's not for nothing that I picked this bag up in the kitchen. I should put something in this bag – a lot of apples, for instance." You put a lot of apples in this bag. Too many apples, in my opinion. It's little wonder that on your way home the bag burst and the apples fell out. You should burst like this bag, old chap. In front of the icon, this particular icon, if you want it to shed a few compassionate tears.'

Of course an icon can stare at you like a cat; and that is what you appreciate most in the world where language reigns to such a point the Russians compare it to Ivan the Terrible. There are many languages in our universe and body language is one of them. There are also such things and phenomena as arm language, head language, mouth language (no talking, however), eyebrow language and so on (and its language, so on's language). And icons also have their language that might affect your life, your attitude towards death and even your death itself. But your cat does not budge as it looks at you without winking; even if you turn your back it does not wink at another cat to insinuate you are a cad.

St Augustine seems to disdain all thoughts, especially if they are part of a train that goes somewhere in its endeavour to explain the world and its diseases; and to console those who suffer from them. Cats just look at you, and you cannot look and think at the same time unless your look is shallow and reflects nothing apart from your own stupidity. But if you literally plunge into the world headlong, glancelong, you have no time for explaining what you are looking for because you are looking for everything; and seeing everything you need to see at this particular moment. And then you start looking at time, listening to it; and once again you realise that no thought can be taken on board of this train of contemplation. Can we call it thus, a train? Do you contemplate whatever lies around your body from one point, from one point of view? Or is your view global, as they sometimes say? Globalism is tainted with our stupid, unrealistic villages where one might go for a breath of fresh air if there were any fresh air inside those villages. My God, my God, how difficult it is to survive under such circumstances, being literally squashed by them – probably on account of our thinking. We have our bed and we can lie in it as long as necessary to get rid of language and its trains of thought leading to elucidations, recommendations, crises from which no one can extricate oneself. And then you remember the word 'love' that St Augustine does not disdain unless he is about to undergo another operation, another conversation which might bring him a sort of no-God conception. After all, God also belongs to the language-domain unless you say to the words pertaining to God and even to these famous denials (not that, not that, not that): 'No, no not that, no that, no nothing.' They ask you if you believe in God, if only for the sake of your children, and you answer, 'Not that, not that.' And if they ask you to explain what on earth you mean, you realise that even 'not that' is not 'that', so that you just emit a few sounds tantamount to what is often printed in the books we try to read, 'M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M-M. And you see O which reminds you of your own open mouth. You look at yourself in a mirror and see O, just O, nothing else. And then you shut your mouth, even if no one says, 'Shut up.' You are disgusted to the point of shutting both your mouth, all these OOOOOOOOOOO and also your thoughts that seem to have given rise to these OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. You woke up, looked out of the window and thought, 'O.' You thought it to yourself, as they say, but then you heard this O as if the universe were speaking to you in its endeavour to put

you on guard against this and that. (To put you on God.) Well, apparently you should admire the beauty of the world without wasting too many words on this beauty; too many OOOOO, to be precise. O is a language, an open mouth is a language, an open window is a language. 'Not that' is a language. Whatever you touch or look upon as your daughter or house – and that is your way of looking at the world: everything and everybody belong to you – becomes a language, one of the languages we have already spoken of so many times. Does this tendency or habit denote the love we experience towards those and other languages? Do I love my own 'OOOOO'? Do I love the window I am opening right now? In spite of all the horrors it shows me unashamedly? The window should be ashamed of itself. It is not, I'm afraid, it is not, not that.

ENTENTE CORDIALE (II)

And the cat? He continues to look at me and his glance has nothing to do with any language I may see in my mind, crossing my mind, slowly, slowly. Let us go back to the hoax you often see in circuses and elsewhere. A passer-by asks, 'Do you want my horse to demonstrate his knowledge of arithmetic and quantum mechanics?' Automatically, out of politeness you say, 'Yes, yes, of course.' And the horse begins stamping its hoof because the passer-by in question stamps his foot as well. He stamps his foot and the horse apes him through his hoof's agency. And the passer-by says to you, 'It's a pity I don't have a pair of hoofs, otherwise you would hear the same sound, exactly the same.' You listen to this multiplication table and your thoughts revert (slowly but surely) to your cat who knows you are ill or in trouble. You do not brandish your fists, nor do you vociferate a few syllables speaking volumes about your pains. You do nothing of the kind, but your cat looks at you and you realise you are dangerously ill; or you are on the verge of a discovery, of a new poem, of a new *commedia*. His glance does not remind you of languages, perish the thought. Perish the thought, the language, the meaning. If they say, 'Well, you're as great as Dante. Your brother tries his hand at a bit of Chinese cookery, but you're much smarter than your brother and sister. So you might and should try your hand at a bit of *Commedia*, at a bit of *Paradiso*.' If they say all that, you just put down your quill and go in search of your cat, of his glance, because you are fed up with the Wilson-promoted deafman's glance. Whether this man is deaf or not or blind or paralysed, he is a man and that characteristic is enough to make you exclude him from your field of vision. You look at him, nonetheless, for a minute or so, and say to him and to yourself, 'Your deafness is a language in its own right. Why do you do your best to decipher the universe on your own? Your own eyes bring you only colourless colours and the words you read in various books. Look at nothing, at nobody in particular; nor should you look at any particular, be it particular or general. There's no such thing as deafman and his glance.'

And what about the cat's omniscient glance and response to the world and its din, racket and whatever? 'Whatever' is the right and only response. You say, 'Whatever,' and go your way, wherever this way can lead you, if left to its own devices. There is nothing in your cat's glance except love, truth and a notorious absence of languages, signs, semiotics and other tics. Karl von Frisch said, 'I determined that certain trajectories of flight and movements of the tail on the part of a bee returning to the hive indicated for companion bees the direction and proximity of a nectar source.' I wish I could determine something of the kind referring exclusively to animals, insects, ants, bees – to the detriment of humans, it goes without saying. How often did I say that? Humans, against, humans, no. There is a runoff election in the United States and a woman who is part and parcel of the senate, odd as it may appear – such women are associated in my mind with parcels they can carry from one jeweller's to

another; not within the Senate, though – kept repeating in a TV debate: ‘American dream, American dream, American dream, I was born on a farm, I was born on a farm.’ No so on, mind you. Just this dream, that birth, and some other repetition; the repetitive music of inanity. Is that what I call ‘humans’? I suppose this woman meant she was indicating for her fellow citizens the direction and proximity of a nectar source. And if asked, ‘Where is it, your nectar source?’ she would answer, ‘Your favourite jeweller’s and our common American dream.’

Some of my former fellow students envy bees who communicate freely and joyfully with their companions in fortune: they are happy to share the hive and also a huge portion of honey and nectar. And when they ask me, ‘Why don’t you join us for dinner? Why are you so unsocial? Why are you such a poor mixer?’ I answer, ‘Because I’m quite busy at the moment.’ ‘Are you a bee, then?’ they ask. And then I answer thus, ‘The source of my unsocial behaviour lies in my aversion to cocktails in any shape or form.’ (Even if these cocktails continually brag about their ingredients such as vodka and champagne.) And then I hear something along the lines of, ‘I was born on a farm, farm was born on an I,’ which reminds me of DNA that is very fond of repetitive music or minimalism, in spite of its occasional maximalism. Sometimes the same brief message is repeated thousands of times. Often, the order of the DNA letters make a palindrome: they read the same backwards as forwards. And upwards as downwards. So you hear and read as well, ‘American dream, dream American, dream America, America First, America First, First America then, then first, then America, dream, dream, dream, dream, mread, mread, mread, mread. Does this all make sense? Sense it does, does it sense, no sense, every sense, everybody, every American body, every French soul, soul is immortal, mortal is body, infinite is universe, finite is human, God, God, God, God, dog, dog, dog, mouse, cat, glance, glance, The bullets glanced off the car, off the American presidents the bullets glanced, off, off, off, off.’

In animals and plants, unlike bacteria, most of the DNA IS JUST A FEW OASES OF SENSE IN A DESERT OF NONSENSE. The genetic message of toads and salamanders, in particular, is largely gibberish; but even humans, mostly humans, only humans, humans, humans, humans, confirmed, salamanders denied, only humans contain quite a lot of meaningless DNA. I was born on a farm, I was born firm, my company is solid, money, nanny, ninny. Glenelgy, Glenelgy, Glenelgy, energy, Glenelgy. Immortality, tality, ytil, utile, futile. And so on. Yes, this time we can rightfully and lustfully say, ‘So on,’ and we are even allowed to repeat it several times before passing onto ‘and so forth’. On so, on so, on so, on so, on so. Pass, pass, pass, pass. Show me your pass please! Do you have any? Any, nanny, ninny, Amy, mummy, money, money, money, eymon.

We often think in extraterrestrial terms or rather we are waiting for extraterrestrials and hope we shall come to terms with them in the twinkling of an eye; of their eye. Heidegger said, ‘Only the Almighty can save us,’ but the Almighty does not come. Only mightys come, come, come and go, go and come, come and DNA. There are critical moments described rather minutely by Jasper who used to repeat daily and nightly, ‘American dream, American dream.’ No, no – the wrong program, I’m afraid. I’m afraid, I’m afraid, I’m afraid, I’m afraid. Of what? Of what? Of *Tod*, of *Tod*. And of toads of all kinds. Well, once again they spoke about their presence, the extraterrestrial presence in *The New York Times*. An Israeli scientist said, ‘They’re up there, very near, within our reach. So are we – we are within their reach. They’re there on account of our atmosphere, of the structure of the universe reflected in our landscapes and doings. To understand the universe in its entirety, these extraterrestrials are studying human nature and its perversions, its versions of the universe and God. And Trump is in the know. And the know is in Trump. The know is Trump.’

Soviet scientists would have disagreed with this statement, I suppose, given their conviction that lies on the opposite side of the mere scientific curiosity depicted by their Israeli counterpart. They thought (the former Soviet scientists who lived in the former Soviet Union or Russia) that the extraterrestrials or rather their unobtrusive presence denotes a humane streak in their (extraterrestrial) minds. ‘They’re not evil, contrary to what American presidents say about our country, our Soviet Union; about our union within which we do not fall; unless the union itself falls one day, in the near future, in the Nineties.’ That’s right – the extraterrestrials we are talking about know everything down to our moods, evil habit and inclinations, our perversions, deviations and sexual harassments. They know everything down (and up) to the structural nuances of the universe. But they are human, all-too-human, as I always say, when in need of some emphasis or another. I need to emphasise our empathy, our invincible desire to help our fellow creatures. Alas, we are unable to do it either on a regular basis or on an irregular one (basis). So we think in terms of extraterrestrial fellow creatures; if only for a while. And this while enables us to escape the civil war which might have become a natural outcome of our presidential election and illegitimate choices. Thanks to our extraterrestrial friends, we escape unharmed from burning buildings. And we also leave home just to escape the tyrannical rule of our mothers. And our mothers escape the tyrannical rule of our fathers, their fists, their feet and so on. (Their belts, among other things.)

Trump is in the know, the know is in Trump. So Trump tweets, weets, weets, out of his wits, ‘The Supreme court doesn’t help me. No courage, you know, you know no courage. So, so, so, sos, I resort to sort of, sort of, sort of, extraterrestrials, extras, extras, extras. They’re there, up there, down there, under my carpet. They’ll overturn the election, overturn, overturn, turncoats, turnelections, you know.’ (An incumbent American president who lost the presidential contest, but refused to concede his rival’s victory. In 2020, according to the former or present calendar.) The point is the extraterrestrials might be in the know of what is going on in the United States of America and even in Russia, although all this is not worth their while, so to speak. Even if their ‘while’ is 10,000 times bigger than ours, they should pay no attention to our human condition. After all, they wilfully overlook our air-conditioners, for their own machines are far more appropriate for handling airy substances, be they related to temperature or oxygen. But whatever happens or should happen, they (the extraterrestrials of whose presence Trump is quite aware) might be acquainted with the following piece of information: ‘Critics say GOP-controlled legislatures in Georgia and Pennsylvania have been prevented from properly investigating allegations of irregularities because their states’ governors have refused to call special legislative sessions.’ They fly in their homespun, otherworldly helicopter all over American voters and realise with amazement that some controllers – the opposite group of humans in relation to voters – carry enormous bags stuffed with ballots. And all these ballots are destined to overturn both the election and the candidates who can be seen in mid-air, hanging like Mussolini and his mistress – heads downwards as if looking at the surface of the Earth, in spite of their eyes being shut forever. No, no, no – the candidates’ eyes are not shut forever, although they are not as immortal as some of their supporters presume. Yes, Trump’s partisans firmly believe he is immortal, considering that he can triumph over the winner of the presidential contest. In their minds the winner, Joe Biden, is identical to death; at least he is identified with death, in their minds and even in their bodies that continue to march to and fro, up and down the streets carrying placards where Trump’s name is conspicuous by its presence. There are heavy, very heavy odds against your presence and its conspicuousness; yet you are present on those placards and in those hearts. So you

are immortal – such is the conclusion to which Trumps’ supporters are driven in the long run, in the short run, in the course of their long march towards their idol’s victory.

The extraterrestrials ensconced in their flying saucers say to each other, ‘Apparently GOP-controlled legislatures in Georgia and Pennsylvania have been prevented from properly investigating allegations of irregularities because their states’ governors have refused to call special legislative sessions. Haven’t we seen a lot of irregularities during our flights over their territory? There are so many irregularities down there that even our perfect, brand-new machines are unable to count them. Nor can they (our machines) count their human votes. No wonder they, those human beings, can’t count them either. Or rather they do count them – the other way round, upside down. But what’s GOP in your opinion?’ they ask each other. They open their in-built dictionaries and light upon the Russian word *zhopa* which mean ‘arse’, no less. And *our* extraterrestrials – there are many *other* extraterrestrials – end up jumping to the following conclusion, ‘Human beings are topsy-turvy or upside-down,’ which reminds us of the famous article or book or conference in which Thomas Nagel asks his readers or listeners the following question, ‘What is it like to be a bat?’ Do I not continuously ask (chiefly myself) the question which echoes Nagel’s inquiry, ‘What is it like to be a cat?’? All right, let us first answer my question. Our choice is all the more understandable as it is much easier to answer one’s own questions: their answers are situated in their own neighbourhood. We do not think about unthinkable things, and it is very sad (and we have no wish to grow sad for a long time) not to be able to communicate with one’s own thoughts. You think about something, but at some point your thought stumbles upon a little problem it cannot overcome, overstep. So you trip over this problem, collapse and say to yourself as you go on lying on the ground, ‘What’s the matter? Why am I on the ground and not in the sky? After all, Lucy is not alone. I mean she’s not the only human being whose ability to fly allows her to fly off, rise towards the forthcoming rain and stay in the sky as long as necessary to understand everything and God.’ Well, instead of dropping almost dead and spending a few hours on the grass, we can just ask ourselves a question pertaining to the problem we have come across in the course of our wanderings through the human brain; our own brain, on this particular occasion, under these particular circumstances. So I look at my cat and ask myself what I would feel in his shoes, with his paws and claws? Of course I would scratch a few humans unless they – all humans, the whole of humanity – are out of my reach, which is highly improbable: humans worship cats, if only for the sake of power, of the feeling offered by might, power and domination. Let me explain this peculiar thought. You hate the whole world because you think it is unjust, unfair, awful and so on. Why is it terrifying? Because evil always triumphs over good. Criminals always get the upper hand in the course of their struggle for life, and their victims drop like flies – drop, drop, drop, drop. At some point you begin to wonder whether the corpses you see all around your own body are humans or flies – if the species they belong to have more affinities with flies than with humans. Well, it does not really matter: both flies and humans die round the clock, and we are not duty bound to know the names of all those wholly extinct creatures, of all those weak or mighty fallen.

To cut a very long cadaver short, we should answer Thomas Nagel’s question – before going any further, before stumbling upon another stumbling block. And what about *my* question? If you really wish to identify with a cat, you must look at a human being for quite a long time without incessantly going back to your own problems, to your identity and inescapable mortality. You look, you look, you look, and your own perception, your soul disappears in the process: only the other remains within your reach, your field of vision, your thoughtless train. As for bats, most of them find their way about by echo-location. When the Russians get lost in the woods – they go

mushrooming and get lost, a natural process – they begin to cry in every sense of the word. Now and then their mouths produce the following sound, ‘A-a-a-u, a-a-a-u!’ And somebody, not necessarily a human being, answers them, ‘A-a-a-u’ and a few minutes later they encounter either a wide-awake sleeping beauty or a bear, a Russian bear, a Siberian bear. That is how our bats proceed during their wanderings through the world. Of course they emit no sounds of *this* kind, of the *a-a-a-u* kind. They emit something else – high-pitched sounds, for instance. They emit a series of high-pitched sounds and use the echoes to figure out the location of physical objects. Donald Trump – oddly enough, at some point he became an American president – also emits a lot of sounds, but they are not high-pitched, contrary to what might be expected in the context we are bent on analysing rather thoroughly and exhaustively. The point is Trump thinks that the 2020 presidential election was rigged, and many, many humans hear the word ‘fraud’ issuing from his big, gigantic mouth. Fraud, fraud, fraud, he says, and logically enough they ask him what he is talking about. ‘About the fraud,’ he says.

‘What fraud?’ they ask. (Journalists, judges, lawyers, television-viewers.)

‘My election was stolen,’ he says. And he adds after a while, ‘Thieves, thieves, thieves.’

‘All right, all right,’ say the others. ‘But where are the proofs of the fraud you’re enlarging upon so relentlessly?’

The intent of Nagel’s question is: ‘What is it like for bats to sense objects by echo-location?’ The intent of our question is, ‘What is it like for Trump to sense the fraud he is talking about by echo-location? His lawyers located something and showed this something to judges and other lawyers.’ ‘It’s not that, not enough,’ said the others. So Trump said to his lawyers and other republican partisans, ‘It must be like living in the dark, spending a lot of time hanging upside down, and hearing a barrage of high-pitched noises.’

‘What are you talking about?’ ask the others.

‘You should become bats who always find everything.’

‘Bats, bats, bats?’

‘That’s right. You should hang yourselves upside down and listen to the high-pitched noises I described for your sake, for the sake of my forthcoming victory.’

ENTENTE CORDIALE (III)

In the extraterrestrial archives one comes across a few descriptions of our customs and idiosyncrasies; or idiocies, if you prefer. When tackling the problem I endeavoured to describe for the sake of bats and the humans who look for something or someone without resorting to St Antony’s help, I said that Trump was searching for proofs or lawyers. This may happen even in the 23rd century and so one does not have to explain what my contemporaries are doing when faced with a predicament. They think that all these predicaments will disappear in the radiant future where science will provide us with stability and harmony. What is this harmony about, I wonder? Someone wishes to become president of the United States of America and usually dictatorships are not tolerated in this democratic country. So this someone says to himself – up to now there have been no female presidents in the United States – that he should surround himself with loyal judges and ministers, otherwise his American dream may not come true. It may come false and he is afraid of this outcome – to the point of going berserk, whenever such an idea sees the light of day in his head. He goes berserk and shouts, ‘You’re fired, you’re fired!’ At least Donald Trump does what I convey to readers or non-readers, and no one knows anything about Trump in the

23rd century. But human nature undergoes no metamorphoses in spite of the steady, implacable flow of time, saying to us all, 'You can't step twice into the same river.' Actually we step into the same river twice, thrice – all the time, whatever philosophers think about time and its frolics. We end up swimming in this river, weary as we are of just stepping into it. You step into it once, twice and then you experience what they call 'an irresistible urge' to unify the world: in this case I have in mind both the river and the body to which the foot belongs. The foot plunges into the river and the whole body follows in its footsteps. Now you are blessed with a vision that faithfully, punctiliously reflects the entente cordiale of elements, of humans and nature. For once the former do not destroy the latter through their toxic waste (oil spills are common, as is the dumping of toxic industrial waste) and any unbiased observer feels like bursting into a triumphant, joy-sustained song.

All right, all right. Going back to bats and electoral systems, in extraterrestrial notebooks we find the following comment upon terrestrial life, 'In the United States of America there are only two types of humans: hanging humans and their walking counterparts. The first variety looks like bats: they hang upside down from a multitude of ceilings. The second variety carries ballot-stuffed bags which some of these humans open and empty, now and then, whenever they happen to find themselves in the rooms where they count ballots. Which variety is entrusted with this task (counting ballots)? No idea. We should devote another eternity, another infinity to this problem.'

Yesterday I flew from Moscow to Zurich and from Zurich to Brussels, not hoping to get home in the course of the next week. Then you confuse the next week with the next-next week and that is how time goes, flies, cringes and sits in a corner. Well, on this flight, during this flight, I read a book where my old, too old friend, Kalunov, talks about two varieties of light. You see a candle and you ask yourself if this candle was lit in your body or elsewhere – near your chest of drawers. You decide it has something to do with yourself, your habits, rituals, failures and suicide attempts. You believe that light is efficacious enough to lead you from despair to pair, to pair – to a marriage of stars and earth, and also that (of marriage, I mean) of two human beings. And you ask the human being you set your heart upon, 'Are you carrying light in my direction?' And if she does not answer your question exhaustively, you repeat it differently, 'Will you ever carry light at all?' Then you see some light that comes from the nearest star, from the closet bulb, and you say to yourself that all these lights are right and they are your rights – they are lights in their own right. So you can say, 'Light, light, my light, my Saviour, my Redeemer, after all logos and light are synonyms.' But there is not enough light in your hand, given that you just hold a candle, a puny handle; and its light is puny. And this 'goes without' does so on its own initiative – without anything: not even a poet sustains it in its effort. What kind of effort? You may also just light a candle and press it to your heart, hoping it would inflame it without burning it to a cinder. And if it does, if your heart is burnt to a cinder, you can talk to it for a while, trying to convince it that a cinder is a phoenix and so you can resurrect it, raise it from the dead or even from the quick in no time at all – if need be, if need be.

So you light a candle and manoeuvre it as long as you can perform this rite which may allow you to feel the truth in the long run, in the short run, in one of the runs bestowed upon your destiny from afar, from on high. What do you feel right now? You feel the light that outstrips reality and whatever can be found in it, after a careful search, because it is the internal, invisible light you are exposed to – hopefully, hopefully – for several instants no one can really measure or count upon. You wait and wait, saying to yourself you see this light internally, and you even utter the name of the person for whom this light counted much more than visibility and all Friedrich-born

landscapes you have already come across in the course of your life. Many people ask you what you are talking about, and on this particular occasion you can answer them thus, ‘His (Friedrich’s) drawings in sepia, executed in his neat early style, won the poet J.W. von Goethe’s approval and a prize from the Weimar Art Society in 1805. His first important oil painting, “The Cross in the Mountains” (c. 1807), established his mature style, characterized by an overwhelming sense of isolation, and was an attempt to replace the traditional symbology of religious painting with one drawn from nature.’ And then they turn their heads towards you and say, ‘Do you lay stress on the Mountains or on an overwhelming sense of isolation? Usually we lay stress on the freedom of press which suffered during Donald Trump’s reign in our and other countries. So what are you talking about, dear Sir?’ And I answer them fully and truly, ‘I’m talking about an overwhelming sense of isolation.’

‘And what about the candle you’re holding in the vicinity of your heart?’

‘This candle continues to stress my sense of isolation.’

‘Is this sense overwhelming or not?’ they ask.

‘It is overwhelming,’ I answer.

‘Is there really no room for other senses, sensations and thoughts within your carcass?’ they ask with fervour and rather indiscreetly.

‘There’s enough room for light,’ I answer.

‘Is your light – the one you have in your mind – visible or invisible?’

‘It is not visible to my mind,’ I answer. ‘It is sensitive, sensible and notable within my being as such.’

There is a light, my soul. There is a light. And my soul is not far from this light, for nothing is really far from this light. I feel, feel, I know; but it is a different knowledge, it is a non-knowledge, so to speak, so as not to speak. I know I can become tomorrow, and this or that tomorrow can become today or Tuesday, Thursday. I can become a Tuesday, a Thursday – a day, to put it mildly. Put it mildly, if you wish. And if you don’t wish to do anything, you just pick me up and drop me as if I were there for the sake of being dropped. For this only sake if you can say this, that in English. For this sake, mine, thine, youine. And if I hesitate, if only for an instant, I must say to myself I believe, believe, believe. And if this believe is not enough, I can say, ‘Faith, faith, faith, faith.’ I say all this and revert to the bat I was talking about some time ago. I identified with this bat not only linguistically – I am a bat, I am a bat, I am a bat – but (bat) I also hung myself upside down and sent a few signals to the outside world; to the world that does not hang upside down. I suppose the world I am talking about does not stand on all fours, fives, as is usually assumed rather light-heartedly; or heavy-heartedly, as might be presumed. The world is hanging upside-down, down-upside, right-left-straight-awray, awray-up-ap-and-down. And you give a stray or ray up or bang or kick or non-kick to this world, and then everything or rather everybody goes all right: Copernicus and the solar system. And everything else.

But whenever we dare speak about the whole of the human race and our compliance with its ways and wishes, we should not forget that our own, crazy ideas pile up a lot of obstacles on the road leading all humans to mutual, universal understanding. And once again we spot an eternal, inextinguishable light in the eyes of our pets, our horses and dogs. Of course at some point we resolved to find out what sensations one is likely to experience in a bat’s shoes; and we also jumped to the conclusion which assures us that hanging upside down is not the radical solution to the problem. Actually, when talking to human beings, we should resort to this upside-down procedure – more often than not, as a matter of fact. Or we should strike a topsy-turvy pose, while doing our best to unravel

the intricacies of our interlocutor's arguments. So, in my opinion, the world will never come to any sort of mutual understanding unless (one day situated in the not-too-distant future) we see an army of invalids walking around, about, down and up, upward and astray – the only way to come to terms with your fellow creatures. You see a creature who looks like a human being, and you say to yourself, 'I'll never accept either his standpoints or his crazy ideas.' And then this creature produces a few facial and bodily contortions, and you realise you will come to terms with his or her mentality in the near future, provided she or he goes on with his or her exercises. Incidentally, the most common *terrain d'entente* discards both genders and names: you just greet a contortionist without asking him or her a lot of embarrassing questions such as, 'Are you a man? Are you a woman? What are your breasts made of? Are you a homosexual or paedophile? Could you please show me your files?' Such questions and answers belong to the category known as a thing of the past, and let us not forget that in this proverbial or legendary past our fellow-creatures – were they really our fellows? – walked on two feet and had their heads on their shoulders, not under them, not on the left-hand side. But if you cannot avoid confusion and chaos, you recall – in the very midst of mayhem – that you can never unite without God, without His permission, authorisation, moral support and financial stimulus. Your love should stem from Him, not from your poor unreliable heart that can be operated on by any second-rate surgeon, contrary to what they might think at the American Hospital or in a Lausanne clinic. It is just enough to open your breast, as the Koran does, and fiddle with your heart as long as necessary to make you understand the greatest enigmas of the world. But first you should become an invalid, a contortionist whose identity must have got lost in some fog or other. Every cloud (or every fog) has a silver lining: now you do not have to put 'she, she, her', after saying or writing 'he' – even when talking about God, mind you. Incidentally, bats are not used to genders either, and their numerous names have been reduced to one name only – 'bat'; at least within my vocabulary.

ASCENSION?

Well, St Augustine is likely to downgrade you if your ascension is followed by a downward movement – if only for the sake of the cards that should be dealt to all your fellow-creatures. Yes, you are in love with them, and you can swear on the Bible that you love them even more than your own self. And yet your love has no intrinsic, ecclesiastic value, for God is no longer within your field of vision which is wholly overtaken by cards and money. St Augustine warns you that your downward tendency leads you from truth to a multitude of lies – even if you are reluctant to cheat at cards. And if someone accuses you of cheating you should answer, 'I'm in the habit of cheating death, only death, no one else.' It is easy to contradict you and you must know that nothing is more embarrassing than to be caught telling a lie. You hear a knocking and go so far as to recite the proverbial episode from *Macbeth*. Incidentally, it would be far more appropriate to hum the opening bars of Beethoven's *Fifth* because death himself vouchsafes to welcome you on your own threshold. He stretches out his arms, but you say to him, 'The Russians never salute each other across a threshold.' So death comes in and kisses you in front of your friends. Not quite, not quite. Death endeavoured to kiss you on the mouth, but you rebuked him thus, 'Have you forgotten the coronavirus? What about social distancing, Mister Death?' Is that what they call in earnest 'cheating death'?

At some point we realise – there are always points at which we realise something unless they are situated beyond death – that we cannot answer questions without resorting to the languages stored in our substance. At a further point we realise that we had better lose all languages so as not to tell too many lies: languages are lies in

disguise, as they say (both languages and linguistics. And semiotics.) But how to lose a language, the ordinary language I touched upon a few seconds ago? Some people lose verbs but retain nouns, even when the verb and the noun are the same word so that, for example, they can understand *milk* in *a glass of milk* but not in *milk the cow*. There is a glass of milk in front of their mouse and nose, and they proceed to avail themselves of its contents in the light of what might happen to them if they do not touch it and fail to quench their thirst. So they empty this glass of milk, but their thirst is not quenched, contrary to their expectations. In other words, their real thirst was greater than the one they had pictured to themselves some time ago. So they look around in search of another glass of milk, but there are no glasses within their field of vision. Instead, they see a cow and they even go so far as to appreciate its contours, its earth-bound beauty. (Cows seldom fly overhead. Except perhaps in nursery rhymes: the cow jumped over the moon.) Alas, they do not associate the cow's body with the presence of milk inside this body and so their thirst continues to grow, without outgrowing itself. Not only don't they know how they usually milk those animals, alias cows: they have no idea what kind of liquid these animals hide beyond their skin. (Do they protect their internal organs with skins or some other materials?)

'A French-English bilingual sufferer may lose his French but keep his English, then suddenly regain his French but lose his English, and may do this several times' (*Introducing Linguistics*, R. L. Trask and Bill Mayblin). This game is somewhat similar to the well-known version of hide-and-seek. Of course you may encounter a lot of problems if these particular problems arise in the course of your question and answer session presided over by Gabriel or Samuel. He questions you in English and you answer him in French. 'Why does your answer sound like in French?' asks your interlocutor.

'Because I phrased it this way,' you answer. 'Besides, I'm sure you're well-acquainted with the language of Racine and Bergson.'

'It doesn't really matter *what* I'm acquainted with – not at this particular moment anyway. Our discussion, its intrinsic harmony and truth require a certain homogeneity. You seem to flout our customs and rituals rather shamefully, insolently.'

'I'm a sufferer, you know,' you answer almost disdainfully.

'I'm about to cure you from your suffering, but your behaviour doesn't allow me to make a show of leniency with regard to your pain.'

Once again, you are sure to draw the same conclusion that disparages languages – all of them without exception – and does its utmost to put you on the right track. Why is this track right? you ask yourself. You answer yourself thus, 'This track is right because even if Samuel or Daniel keeps track of this track, he is unlikely to diagnose a fault in the way my brain and soul function. Something is definitively wrong with your language, and you wonder if you do all this on purpose, determined as you are to get rid of languages altogether. What did they use to call the huge rallies staged by Trump for the sake of his re-election? Or rather what kind of words did they attribute to the coronavirus that prevented Trump from being re-elected? A superspreader event – that is what they used to call Donald Trump's rallies. You harbour this virus in your bosom, go out and begin to cough outrageously. This is a minispreader event, if I am not mistaken. How to find out if I am mistaken or not? I should catch the virus, go out...Well, well, well. I don't mind catching the virus, but leaving my study and house cannot be envisaged or visualised – even under the most favourable circumstances, within the best of my sunny moods.'

Anyway you are entangled in a net made up of languages, signs, gods, devils and other conveniences or inconveniences (antonyms are always present in our lives) and so there is no exit, talks about loopholes lead us nowhere. All right, they think some talk or other can lead us to the truth that should be announced verbally, publicly, otherwise no one will ever understand anything. But didn't we decide to get rid of words, signs and suchlike inconveniences in one fell swoop? One fell swoop, another fell swoop – just in case, just in case – and we are free and *truthful* forever. The point is some truths, most of them as a matter of fact, can only be proclaimed from rooftops and linguistically. What else can you do on rooftops? You can scream, drive your message home by shouting, 'Peace, bread, butter, computers!' You can also piss in the wind, but I would not stamp your feet, resolved to attract their attention at all costs. At what costs? Roofs are often in bad repair and so sometimes you go through roofs and ceilings in your attempt to change the world or just a president, a presidential election (if you will). You plummet all the way down, and when you are really down (at least that is what you think on the spur of the moment) you discover a series of downs that you might reach in no time at all unless you do something about it; about reaching them in no time at all. Languages, languages, languages. They always point out that The Bible is based on languages, being undoubtedly inspired by logos.

And what could be done with the following text: 'Our Lady sees the Creator's greatness, and her own insignificance; the great drops of blood running down from the crown of thorns; man's greatest joy is to know almighty God's holiness and courtesy' (Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*)? How could you convey its meaning if you remain adamant in the domain of linguistics and semiotics? I mean you have already excluded all signs and word-oriented minds from your field of vision and hearing, from your conception of the world; let us call it like that. Your conception of the cosmos, your tendencies linked to it and so on. How to impart to all those imbeciles the good news, the only good news we can lay our ears on, so to speak? All right, you can easily show the Creator's greatness by referring – through your gestures and fingers – to the greatest skyscraper ever. Somewhere in Dubai, I bet. And what about our Lady? Don't forget you ought to eschew not only blasphemy as such, but also any hint inadvertently dropped within her framework. (Our Lady's, I suppose.) In relation to these real problems, blood is just a piece of cake; as it were, so to speak.

Blasphemy is a variety of chastity and I am not sure that if you say in the wingflaps of the above-mentioned author, 'So at the same time our Lord God, in order to teach this lesson, showed me Our Lady, Mary, and the true and outstanding wisdom which made her gaze on her Maker, so great, high, mighty, and good' you do not blaspheme. I am not sure, not in the least. Whenever I read such a confession or declaration, such a manifestation of omniscience, I feel like questioning everything and everybody, with the exception of myself, contrary to what St Augustine used to do day and night. After his conversion, after a few conversations with our Lord, he became a question to himself and probably to us – according to his own confessions. As for myself, I question every word I read in such books because I will never dare say that our Lord God showed me Our Lady, even if He did show me Our Lady several times in a row, in the course of the same night or evening. Her wisdom made her gaze on her Maker, but my wisdom is not on the same wavelength – probably it is a particle, I suppose. It is a particle that can turn into a wave at the end of the path along which I must be flying, judging from my sensations and beliefs. For the moment, however, I am just a particle that endeavours to squeeze through a hole – not through the eye of a needle, mind you. It is quantum mechanics I have in mind, not Paradise and its lakes. And when I read the following sentence, 'Because of this basic humility she was filled with grace and every virtue, thereby surpassing all

creation,' I picture to myself either Giselle's disrespectful ghost or even Tchaikovsky's swans, for all their syrupy appearances.

DISSENSION!

Let us move away from this idea – not from God, God forbid, but from the idea that God is visible, accessible – and let me remind you that no amount of negative theology can really put you off this connection, this fraternisation with God which is excessively frowned upon by ecclesiastics. They keep saying, 'No, it's not God's body that carried out the miracle you're talking about,' 'No, your torn-apart leg doesn't mean your God, the creature you mistake for your God – your God is elsewhere, in spiritual regions – takes care of you like a surgeon, using tubes and scissors. Don't you realise that God has no need of scissors? God is a pair of scissors and also a hammer and an X-ray machine that usually clutter every clinic unless its staff decides to work in accordance with spiritual, extra-sensory prescriptions. These men and women just stretch their hands above your heads and everything is done in accordance with a superior prescription that I cannot describe right now. You can describe a woman, saying or writing that her face has no wrinkles. And if it does have a few wrinkles they can easily be removed by some cream or other. (As my mistress used to say, 'I prefer the *other* cream, you know.')

What do you actually reach in the course of your discussions and tribulations? I saw something last night, but I am not sure I saw the cosmos in its splendour, in its whole splendour, if I may say so. What is the cosmos? The usual question. But the cosmos I see from my point of view, through my vista of visions, tells me something about Goebbels whose life lies outside my preoccupations, for the simple reason that my preoccupations, occupations – and dinners, Mahler's symphonies and other events – lie on *this* side of the world where I find St Augustine and myself. Well, they dug up his (Goebbels') ashes and mixed them with Hitler's, with Hitler; either with Hitler himself or with his ashes. If they mixed them with Hitler, it might mean they were both alive, more or less. You begin to wonder if they are more or less alive, and you arrive at the conclusion that they are more or less alive – like Schrödinger's cat. You are Schrödinger's cat; you are also Schrödinger and you might be his cat if you do not agree to become what you represent at this particular moment and also in the future. But what do you wish to say to all of us? That is what we are waiting for? If you are not Donald Trump, Franklin Roosevelt or Stalin we shall never listen to you, even if you recite a poem, a beautiful poem. What kind of poem do you wish to hear, you may ask? And I answer you as follows,

This poem is as follows:

The virus kills tomorrows.

And you'll enjoy both hollows

And crowns. And all owows.

'Ow, stop it, you're hurting me!' And you do not know who exclaims 'ow', you or someone else because voices mix in the morning air and voices are far better mixers than people, than bodies, than nobodies. Well, you know that truth is not within your reach and you proved this phenomenon (its lack, its no-luck) to yourself just a few minutes ago. You reach out your arm and your arm does not reach the truth you are talking about; unless you were bitterly mistaken. (Actually your arm and fingers should teach the truth what it is, otherwise this truth of theirs

would not be human.) You ask your friend, ‘Does truth radiate from my eyes?’ and your friend answers, ‘No.’ So you reach out one of your legs and the result you obtain in the course of this laborious action – your legs suffer from arthritis and sciatica – supply you with the same conclusion: truth is further off. And you could thank your lucky stars even if the truth (with the definite article or without it; what’s the difference?) is still far from your being, far from being in the midst of your possessions. But if you say to yourself, ‘I know the truth,’ you actually do not know it because knowing the truth is tantamount to looking for it; or rather at it. You turn your head in all directions, open all the drawers you can lay your hands on and say to everybody, ‘Truth is everywhere because I don’t know it.’ And your friends and foes burst into laughter because they believe that with the passing of the years you have become a question to yourself. Yes, you are a question to yourself – in the manner advocated by St Augustine whose spine was as crooked as some of his ideas. Sitting hunched over a computer all day can cause problems, and that is exactly what St Augustine did as he noted down his confessions, his sensations, his questions.

He caused problems and his confessions had serious repercussion for his spine. ‘I am a huge question,’ he used to repeat from time to time. ‘But to whom is this question addressed, I wonder? In whose direction do I continuously bow?’ And suddenly he would say to the Almighty, ‘I had a hunch that you’d be here. That’s why I’ve asked you a series of questions over the last 40 minutes.’

‘I’ve heard none of your questions,’ God replied.

‘But you must have *seen* them,’ said St Augustine.

‘How so? How do you mean?’

‘Can you see this hunch of mine?’

‘The hunch on which you relied when full of expectations?’

‘What expectations?’

‘The expectations related to my present visit to your abode or cell. Call it what you wish.’

‘The hunch I have in mind is actually on my back, spreading all over it, from buttocks to neck. Well, let’s not waste our precious, spiritual time on hunches, on bunches.’

‘What about lunch?’

‘A brunch at most.’

‘Why didn’t you offer me a bunch of roses?’ asked God.

‘Could you please tell me what truth is and how it should be analysed in a philosophical book?’

‘With the definite article or without?’

‘Do you use articles in your palace?’ asked St Augustine.

‘What do you think I do up there, apart from twiddling my thumbs? Writing poems? Singing praises to myself?’

‘I filled her with holy dread,

And caused her to see herself for the insignificant,

Lowly, simple creature she is.

‘She was compared with her Lord Lord God.

Why, what, what, what God, what, what, Lord?’

This poem cannot be found in the books distributed during the period just before and after Christmas Day. Usually at Christmastide all children – except the poorest representatives of their age-group– are showered with books; and in some of these books St Augustine and his beard ask the Almighty a few questions such as, ‘What is time? What is a tree? What is three?’ St Augustine goes for a ride or rather traipses round the shops where God creates a real shower which looks like a shower we might use at home every morning unless we are so sleepy we cannot get out of bed. Through big holes hanging from the ceiling there come down books, tiny cars, big cars, aeroplanes, computers and so on. St Augustine is aware that his picture embellishes most of the books imperturbably or casually dropping from the above-depicted holes, and now and then he yields to the well-known temptation, opens one of the books and shows one of his portraits to a child. And the child inquires into the meaning of the portrait – of two portraits, rather: on this occasion the Almighty rubs shoulders with his favourite saint. ‘Why are you carrying a question mark?’ asks the child. ‘Because I’m bent on scrutinising the nature of time. You know, when I think about time, I seem to know what it is; and when I don’t, I know nothing at all. My dear child! Can you see the answer with which the Almighty furnishes my question? Can’t you see this tiny, weeny alarm-clock? That’s what time looks like. One of Dostoevsky’s heroes exclaimed at some point – that point was situated within the space of time, by the way – “And time will be no more!” After uttering these words, he picked up an identical alarm clock and flung it out the window. There were a lot of rivers beyond the window. We call this variety of water ‘river’. So the alarm clock fell into the river and drowned. And if you fall out of the window or plummet down some mountain or other, you’ll drown too, provided there’s some water under either the window or the mountain or both.’

The above book is very instructive, but it does not tell its reader the whole truth: St Augustine never carried question marks – either in his pockets or in his hands. He was himself a question mark and so he would head for God at the earliest opportunity to ask him the following questions, ‘What is time? What is space? What is space-time? What is quantum mechanics?’ And if God was reluctant to answer these questions, St Augustine would get closer to His shoulder and rub his own shoulder against it. Incidentally, God looks and thinks like the Exclamation Mark – the only mark of this sort engendered (endangered?) by His wisdom and clairvoyance. Anyway, you cannot know anything about Him, even if this Him is Her because we deny everything we might chance upon in this divine connection. We say ‘no, no, no, no,’ whenever our eyes fall on a text where a mystic says, ‘He opened my eyes and put into them His form, His thoughts, His wisdom and perspicacious visions. All the time he was showing these things to my inward sight, I still seemed to see with my actual eyes the continual bleeding of his head.’ What can you know about this bleeding, about this head, dear Sir or Madam? What kind of insolence is this? And of course we should also list false prophets, saying to ourselves and others, ‘I can’t begin to list their heresies and idiocies.’

‘Do you see this column?’ says a false prophet. ‘You should know that you are seeing it for the last time in your history and history in general. A bomber is already on its take-off runway. A few minutes ago a soldier put an atomic bomb into it. So the whole palace will vanish into thin air, after a while, in the very near future. You can touch this future, if you wish, for it is within your reach. But you don’t wish to touch anything. You think that everything is all right. How wrong you are! How wrong you are! You think you’ve never sinned. How wrong you are! You think you’re right, but you’re unright, if I may say so. And I may and must say whatever traverses my

brain, for it is the Almighty Himself who stuffed this stuff into my brain and soul. Your sins cry out, scream, and every mystic hears them. My ears can no longer bear the decibels emitted by your crimes against God and harmony, divine, universal harmony. Can you see those golf links? You should learn that in every link there is a bomb, a tiny atomic bomb. Do you have a multiplication table in one of your pockets? Pull it out and begin to count the links and their atomic bombs. And you should count yourself in, for you are to die in a few minutes or seconds. And no one, not even the Almighty Himself, will save you from this ignominious death because you're a sinner. You're the greatest sinner within human history and also outside it – in the infinite sea of the cosmos.'

But you can answer this accuser, and they are bound to say afterwards, after hearing your answer, after pondering over it, 'All the while I saw the head bleeding so freely I kept saying, "*Benedicite Domine!*"' And if they doubt your confession, you should pick up a kitchen knife and wound yourself in the face and neck. And then you should twist the knife in the wound, saying to them, to all and sundry, 'Can't you see my bleeding head? *Benedicite Domine!*' And then you should rub salt into the wound, saying, 'Can't you feel my pain? *Benedicite Domine!*'

CLICK, CHIRP, *AD, DA*, SUCK

Let us be serious, if only for an instant – for the space of an instant, as physicists usually say, anxious to emphasise Einstein's discoveries and prerogatives. We should never forget that truth is unattainable, and whenever we feel like declaring from the same rooftops, 'This is the truth, the only truth known to the universe, and help me God,' we are in the wrong – in the wrongest wrong, as St Augustine put it. There are two inviolable principles to which we should stick with all our might, otherwise we shall live without principles – for ever and ever. Some time ago humanity got stuck on freedom, as they used to say. Freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom, they kept repeating day and night. Their wives and children would remind them of time and its flow, saying, 'It's past midnight already,' but they would stubbornly, obtusely answer, 'My freedom is timeless, infinite and borderless. I'll pray to it until dawn, until midday, until another midnight and so on.' Actually there is nothing more injurious and wounding than freedom. Look at yourself in a mirror. Can't you see your bleeding head? It is the outward sign of your freedom, no more, no less. You should never omit predestination and determinism – from your list, from your numerous lists. Don't forget Spinoza and St Augustine. You cannot sit still for long without fidgeting. You fidget all the time because you think you are free and unbound – like Prometheus. No less, no less. You think you are free, but Trump sends you a letter where your death comes to the fore. He says literally and alphabetically, 'If you don't agree with my principles, words and orders, you'll die from my bullets, rays, poisons and other lethal elements,' whereupon you realise that bullets are part and parcel of predestination, determinism – of the old world order. There is such a thing as '*immobilisme religieuse*' – the first principle on which we should build our existence, our paradise on Earth and in heaven. Dante used to talk about dances executed by saints and other inhabitants of the *Paradiso*. They are immobile, all those right-minded people. Throughout their eternities they stare at the bleeding head I described for argument's sake, for the sake of this book and my cheerful disposition. But we are not allowed to peep into their bliss because we are not in Paradise – not in *their* Paradise anyway. Of course we are permitted to content ourselves with the following excerpt from the above-mentioned book, 'In this revelation I saw six things: (i) the tokens of his blessed passion, and the copious shedding of his precious blood, (ii) the maid

who is his beloved Mother, (iii) the blessed God who always has been, is now, and ever shall be: almighty, all-wise, all-loving, (iv) the whole creation –’ But what’s the use? What the hell?

God is not a father figure one might come across in the domain of folklore. I am not even sure He belongs to what they call ‘human mythology’; nor am I convinced He can be found on the fringes of our psychological legends. And the encounters they talk about at length unfold in the dimension we have no idea of, in spite of the ever-increasing number of our fairy-tales (and string theories) infallibly linked to Him, His power and reign. St Augustine talks to Him mostly when in need to probe into the mystery of time. His infrequent encounters with God are depicted in many books, even if they are not devoted to these subjects (God, St Augustine, time, the theory of relativity). One wonders, however, why he did not take full advantage of his talks with God, inquiring about everything down to the Hereafter and the structure, the texture of the universe. In one of the books I am alluding to the saint is given a few pieces of information that skipped his mind during his work on the *Confessions*. Of course he begins his cross-examination with a series of exclamations connected to time and its connections with our way of thinking. ‘What is it? What is it?’ he exclaims, adding to these what, what, what the following request, ‘Please tell me everything about time and its mysteries. And I promise to write about your lesson in my book dedicated to your majesty.’ And obligingly God accedes to his request, to his hysterical plea. What is more, He exceeds the saint’s wildest expectations. He says about time, ‘In the light of what quantum mechanics and Einstein told us about the universe, time as such does not exist.’ ‘How does it exist?’ inquires the saint. ‘What does “as such” mean in this context?’ Well, for once God does not seem to come up to the saint’s great expectations – ‘expectations are always great,’ said David Lean – and goes or rather flies off at a tangent.

‘Do you know anything about trees?’ he asks.

‘If I see a tree, I know it is a tree. But when I see none, I don’t know anything.’

‘All right, all right,’ says God. ‘Can’t you see the birch tree growing in the centre of your garden?’

‘This garden belongs to the monastery where I live,’ says the saint.

‘All right, all right. Incidentally, both the monastery and tree are part and parcel of *my* collection. Make your way to this tree and touch it. It’s the first stage of any cognitive process.’

‘Is it?’ asks the saint. ‘Could I touch You, Thou, Thou, my Lord?’ It is little wonder that God ignores the question.

Incidentally, this digression belongs to what is defined – at least within *my* dictionary – as the second ultra-vital principle: ‘conceptual freedom’. You can also call it ‘spiritual or poetic freedom’ which is much more important than demonstrations, placards and slogans such as, ‘Bread, not dead’, and so on. You move from one concept to another, from images to images, from metaphors to metaphors instead of fighting for your rights which boil down to a few negations, self-congratulations and a lot of swear words. You fight one regime, another regime, yet another president who is wrong, wrong, wrong, according to your political or ethical views, but life goes on and, as Dostoevsky might have put it, you have already missed a lot of leaves, petals; and even one ant is more important than your placards on which only words are written, painted, printed. And a few drops of rain are enough to remove them from where they seem to proclaim some social justice or injustice. Poetry is not made up of words. It is a long sigh of relief in the life characterised by burdens of all sorts; and every sort is worse, much worse than the previous one. Or poetry consists of other words, of Rilke’s words, sighs and angels.

You move from one stage to another, but there is a constant within these stages and in between them. You may call it God, destiny, determinism or the harmony of the spheres; whereas ordinary words and reactions are just interchangeable. A woman asks you what you think about her culinary talents, and you say that your mother used to give you porridge with fruit. And you begin to talk to her about your childhood and the teeth dropping from your mouth. Or you could recount to her and her husband your last visit to one of the three-star restaurants – in Tokyo of all places, capitals and food symbols. What does this all lead to? To nothing unless you talk about angels in between the words you utter nonchalantly. You can say whatever goes through your head, as they say; and whenever they say that about their heads and words, some other words go through their heads, leading to another series of words. With what does it rhyme, as the French say? *À quoi cela rime-t-il?* Here is a multitude of rhymes obtained through this procedure:

Let me sing my song, la-la,
 Let me tell you blablabla.
 Mother says, 'Too late, too late.'
 The last supper. What we ate
 We'll be soon reduced to mud
 In the stomach, in this *ad*.

In Russian '*ad*' means 'hell'. Life is reduced to *ad* if our blablabla governs our thoughts, gestures and outward signs of wealth. At this point it does not really matter how Heidegger called this phenomenon, for you can bestow any name upon it, starting with a few four-letter words, five-letter words. And even some six-letter words might fit the bill, for instance, 'Notink'. Or some seven-letter words, for instance, 'Nothink' unless you use this word with a view to drawing everybody's attention to a philosophical concept that is current in the East and even in some parts of the West. We know how all this happens, all this blablabla and la-la. In speech, be it new or old (it is always old, by the way) air from the lungs is squeezed up and out through the mouth and the nose, while the vocal folds, the tongue and other organs of speech (old, old, old) modify the airstream in various ways to produce a sequence of speech sounds representing larger linguistic units like words and sentences. Modify, did you say? What does all this modify? Our nature? No way. No way of life, be it American or European, modifies our eternal nature. The question is – does this nature denote anything divine? No way, no way. And yet we are supposed to reflect a divine category because we are made in its image. But that image is constructed in another image about which we know next to nothing. And this next to nothing is build upon another image which resounds in the air, from time to time. We might call this last image 'Aeolian harp', and we are not forbidden from writing a poem about this harp and its sound, about the aeol:

Aeolian landforms.
 How beautiful. Quicksand.
 Do suck me in.

And what about animals, their capacity to communicate with us and other creatures, either fellow or not? It is not necessary to write haikus all the time, and animals survive without this tendency's moral support. Birds sing; crickets chirp; dolphins click; and vervet monkeys have some remarkably specific calls, 'Look out! Eagle! Idiot! What are you doing? Didn't you hear what I said? Eagle, eagle, eagle! Watch out, you moron!' What would a poem written by a cricket look like?

Chirp, chirp, chirp.

Chirp, chirp, chirp.

Chirp, chirp, chirp.

Don't these verses rhyme? And what about dolphins' haikus?

Click, click, click.

Click, click, click.

Click, click, click.

BH

Actually I have a theory that goes beyond Rousseau's conclusions and philosophical investigations; and warnings, and precepts. Incidentally, his doctrine or policy goes against common precepts of decency. (Our argumentations often get bogged down in either...or; or just in or, or, or, or.) Rousseau advocates backward movements – back to nature, to anti-culture, savagery, unsociability. No theatres, no symphonies – just a multitude of screams in some woods or other. Or in a desert – why not? It is believed that Native Americans used to trade skins. Well, you go to the United States, find a Native American, buy a skin and put it on. Then you come up with a nice idea and a wheel makes its appearance in the history of humanity. In other words, it comes or rather rolls to the fore, and you take advantage of it as you roll all along this fore – back and forth, up and down. And you scream, whenever you encounter a lion or even an innocent-looking Russian bear.

Well, I go so far as to affirm that we should get beyond the human race and its culture or non-culture; or its before-culture (BC). Walking on all fours is no problem, as many of us are prepared to conclude, but they are not willing to renounce the use of helicopters and other means of transport because they cannot get rid of what is termed the 'space urge' or 'journey urge'. They can tell you that time does not exist – they agree with your doctrine based on Einstein's and Bohr's calculations, but they adamantly affirm that space has not been abolished yet, in spite of the Berlin Wall and Soviet rules that did not allow my former fellow-countrymen – where are they now? – to cross frontiers and eat hamburgers in New York and elsewhere. And there were no hamburgers in the Soviet Union – one of the very few advantages of the Soviet regime. But there are bigger urges within our constitution or substance – these or, or, or, either seem to pursue me dramatically; or tragically – and in the midst of these urges there stands the Chomsky-consolidated 'language urge' that urges us to speak as often as unnecessary, for all the barriers we have tried to erect on this urge's path through many centuries. One of these barriers is symbolised by the saying 'Silence is golden'. Alas, only a few of our companions in misfortune believe that silence can be sold advantageously and therefore amassing, accumulating it may result (one of these days) in a huge fortune one had

better keep in Singapore or on a desert island. And if you remind the people standing all around you that silence is precious ('It is a precious stone,' you might say and repeat), they say, 'Well, it's not gold anyway. I'm broke, you know. And I protest, I protest. I protest about whatever our government decrees as it continues to ruin my family. Do you know what they say behind my back? They say something along these lines, "He keeps trying to impress on us how poor his life is – in every sense of the term. But does he protest too much?"'

Of course your discourse may influence some people who set off on their daily rounds on all fours – because they just like it; or for the fun of it, as they say with a smile. Besides, they know that human beings adore children, babes and nurslings some of whom walk on all fours as well, oddly enough. As soon as a humanist spots a child on all fours, this humanist smiles, mutters, 'tee, tee, tee, tee, tee,' bends down and strokes the child's neck, nape and cheeks. Then this representative of our species pulls out a few chocolate bars, either from his voluminous pockets or from his attaché case, and offers them to the child. So we have no alternative but to conclude that if you are bent – in every sense of the term – on achieving what is known as 'universal recognition and love', you must walk and even run on all fours; otherwise you will never be recognised, applauded and given anything, with the exception of a few worthless trinkets. All right, all right – you are walking on all fours. But what about your mouth? Are you big-mouthed or small-mouthed? Walking on all fours does not prevent you from being a chatterbox. Or does it? Does it? Now and then you sag, collapse and your mouth touches the floor around which you walk on all fours every day. For a while you cannot even move your members, let alone rise and go to the same Hemesree (Hemisphere?) that continues to trot in my head as if W. B. Yeats (or anybody else) had never written anything else in his long fruitful life. But sooner or later you are bound to resume your on-all-four walk unless you are determined to die once and for all. No resurrection, please! as some of us, some anti-karmists exclaim.

Be that as it may, we are still in the grip of a powerful emotion linked to the 'language urge' discussed in one of the earlier paragraphs. What is it, for God's sake? I know what it is, as St Augustine might have put it – when I do not think about it. This particular urge is unique to our species because no other creatures on the planet, on our planet, on our Earth, can even vaguely approach our ability to learn and use and misuse all languages, be they old or young, spoken or written. According to our books, we can speak the way birds can sing, and for the same reasons. For what reasons, may I ask? I would express the same idea differently. After all, I am well acquainted with human songs, oratorios, cantatas and can therefore sing Bruckner's *Te Deum* by heart – even without my piano's physical and moral support. Do their authors, those books' authors, think that birds warn other birds or instruct their offspring? When singing, I mean? I beg to differ – they heap praises on the Almighty when their throats open and let out chip-chip or chirruping sounds. And we can sing Bruckner's *Te Deum* instead of talking for the sake of talking. Of course we seldom acknowledge our incapacity of conveying anything vital to our fellow creatures, but our domestic animals listen to us attentively and often atone for our stupidity through their indulgent conduct.

Why is this book entitled *The Virtuous Circle*? Almost everyone knows there is nothing virtuous in our lives, and even its circles are vicious, according to our own linguistic conclusions. But we keep going in circles, even if our computers, their structures and power are constantly upgraded, thanks to their manufacturers' greed. And one of these circles (its circumference, rather) brings me back to St Augustine's predicament: he pumps God for time's mysteries and also for the details pertaining to these mysteries. If any, if any, I am tempted to say once

again. Is there anything mysterious about this second, next second? We are to die and the same fate lies in wait – fate, wait, just wait for your fate’s tale, denouement – for every phenomenon we come across in the course of our wanderings all over the Earth, through the Earth, through its underground, through its core and crust. Aghast, aghast – the rhyme I stumble upon in the course of *my* wanderings. I look at whoever I meet in the same course, within the framework of the same wonderings because I cannot do otherwise: I am not blind yet. And if I close my eyes I am likely to fall into a ravine about which Anton Chekhov wrote in one of his tales of horror that are far more horrifying than whatever came from Edgar Allan Poe’s pen.

Well, well, well, as someone says in one of the tales I read in my youth. (Did I read that in English?) I am going, rolling or flying back to the tree exposed to St Augustine’s curiosity and thirst for truth. He asks himself and God what time and trees may mean in the context we are confronted with. And God says he should touch the tree, smell its leaves, if any – after all, there is such a thing as the winter’s tale – and climb along it, up, up and up until he reaches its fruit. And this time I shall interrupt the vicious circle of my circle and will not write ‘if any’ for the simple reason that the tree I am talking about bears *a lot of fruit*. What kind of fruit you (or St Augustine) may ask? And in His turn God asks him a question, ‘What kind of fruit do you like most?’

‘I like peaches,’ says the saint. Saint the say, in other words, in other words’ order.

‘Pity,’ says the Almighty. (If you say God and need to utter his name a few seconds afterwards, you should use another of His secret names, in full accordance with French and Russian literary traditions.)

‘Why?’ asks the saint. (Should I say ‘my good man’ so as not to repeat the word ‘saint’?)

‘Because I was about to teach you the laws of gravity. But Newton used apples for the purpose. He had always dreamt of coming up with new ideas, and the tree under which he was sitting gave rise or birth only to apples, to the detriment of peaches and suchlike. Well, I suppose a peach would do in this particular case. After all, a peach can weigh as many pounds or grams as an apple. To cut a long story short, Newton’s head was exposed to a dangerous manifestation of the force he was to discover. An apple might kill you, you know. In Soviet Russia there was a man who went by the name of Michurin. This man used to cross peaches with watermelons; you might be killed by such a fruit. Well, Newton should thank his lucky stars – he was born much earlier than such apples, peaches and nuts saw the light of day.’

But most important was the teaching that encompassed all sins and their pernicious fallout, and St Augustine realised its importance even before the end of the Almighty’s speech. The saint was predisposed to sins in many ways, for in his genes one could find a lot of thefts he would have carried out, but for his conversion, his above-mentioned encounter with God who taught him a lot, a lot, a lot. One wonders what the saint would have talked about, had he questioned himself, his brain instead of trying to distance himself from his own foolishness. He said at some point, ‘I was foolish, I was so foolish I realised that the world could not be as foolish as I was. Life was prosperous within its own life, and I am sure life would have died a long time ago, had it been as foolish as some of its species and specimens. I knew that beyond mountains and seas there was a key, a huge key to the enigmas I was coming across every day. This key was a monument to both my foolishness and someone’s wisdom. My mother talked to me about Christians and their God; and also about the Old Testament and its God, its wrathful God. But I continued to play games on playgrounds as if there were no mysteries, no gods, no solutions to any problem, no problems at all, *pas de soucis*, as the French say in the 20th century. How foolish of me. And then God came to my rescue. I opened a book, the Book and God said, “That’s it.” Ever since I have been following His

paths and His ways have become my daily rounds, my thoughts, my dots and words, a myriad of gods reduced to one God only.'

Sure enough, but for God's timely intervention, the saint would never have taken notice of sins and their power over humans. He would have continued to steal fruit from his neighbours' gardens; he might have been accused of breaking and entering, over and over again. Within the space of one afternoon, however, God taught St Augustine not only the structure of time, its topography and relativity – 'All this is grave,' said God – but also Newton's (and our) gravity. 'I don't think you understand the gravity of the situation,' he said several times in a row. But semioticians are used to skipping such indications as they peruse St Augustine's writings in search of *their* clues, for the clues that might shed light on words, their significance, their insignificance, their irrelevance – on the woeful phenomena nonchalantly nicknamed 'our languages'. At some point, at some linguistic point, any child is bound to realise he opens his mouth not only for the sake of a fruit drop or humbug. (And so does she, as a matter of fact.) Of course his mother tells him almost every day, 'When you eat, you shouldn't make noises – this is not done in the high society where we live and circulate.'

'What kind of noise am I allowed to make?' asks the child.

'None,' answers his mother. 'What are you doing now, my son? Please tell me what you're doing.'

'I'm chomping away on a bar of chocolate.'

'Too much noise,' complains his mother. 'You'll never eat another bar of chocolate unless you learn how to eat it *silently*. When eating food, you should be as silent as a grave. Do you remember the tombs we saw during our last visit to the nearest cemetery?'

'I do, I do.'

'All right. Whenever you happen to sit at the dinner table, you should behave like a grave, a tomb, a cemetery, a corpse.'

'But there were birds at the cemetery, Mother. And they sang their songs, our songs.'

'What happened next? Do you recall what happened next?'

'I gave them a few crumbs.'

'And they stopped singing, if I'm not mistaken. You should behave like a bird eating a crumb. Or like a corpse rotting underground. In other words, you're not allowed to speak, even if you're far from dinner tables.'

'But my tutor imparted to me the following piece of information, "More than anything else language is what makes us human."'

'Do you really need to remain human? Don't you like your dog and the birds you see at the cemetery?'

BL

The tradition of mother-son talks was set up and firmly established by St Augustine's mother whose name resounds throughout the centuries. Actually I am not sure she really emphasised the non-importance or rather the ignominy of language, considering the number of pages written by her son and his followers. And by other Fathers of the Church. Probably we should start *ab ovo* – from the very start, in other, English words. Does language make us human? St Augustine says without making it implicitly clear, 'We are made human by Jesus Christ, through his blood, crown and cross.' As for language, it may be regarded as an instrument in our struggle with the problem chiefly associated with Michelangelo Antonioni whose invisible, incommunicable presence allows me to return to

the beginning of the circle, to the virtuosity of my circle, to the beneficent influence of eternal recurrence. What kind of instrument is language? Well, it passes on information. What kind of information can be dealt with through the medium under discussion? Have you got a light? you are asked. Not for a second do you think they ask you for God, Jesus, the circle of light, the beings of light, and so on. You just draw a lighter from your pocket – St Augustine's *Confessions* are also a lighter – and carry it towards your fellow-smoker's mouth from which there protrudes a cigarette or a pipe.

All right. What else? Language, the way we resort to it and articulate its sounds, persuades people to do things; or undo things, as the case may be. Actually humanity mostly undoes all sorts of things, even if another part of the same humanity says and insists upon saying, 'Do things, do things, do things, do things.' Sometimes it is better to add a word to your demand; not necessarily a four-letter word. You just add, 'You, moron,' hoping that the moron will do what morons are usually told to do. But morons are traditionally wide of the mark because they know neither the mark nor its whereabouts. *Passons, passons*. Thirdly, our words may convince people to believe (in) things, as they say; and we ask ourselves if it is not far more important to believe in beings, in *Seins*, in God. And people answer, 'No, no, no. Of course we believe in those who may be relied upon in the domain of races. They never lie when uttering the following words, "I've got a hot tip for you." There are remarkable women whose knowledge and skill enable them to give you a useful/helpful/valuable/practical tip about/for growing tomatoes. And you like tomatoes and peaches, don't you? Fourthly, through language and its intricacies, its intentional or unintentional puns you often entertain all others – all those who come to you in expectation of a *divertissement* worthy of the Romans and Caesars. You say to them as you shake your head, "Whatever I might say to you will never hold a candle to gladiators and their fights. So let us remain silent or listen to Mozart's *Requiem*." Fifthly, we can amuse *ourselves*, even if we believe that Buster Keaton, his silent movies, are much funnier than whatever you say either on the spur of the moment or after much soul-searching that often lasts until midnight. Sixthly, through language and mousetraps we are able to maintain and display our place in society. But more often than not we have no place to speak of or to display; within the framework of our society, I mean. And if we do occupy some place in this society of ours (of theirs, of theirs) we do our utmost to hide it on account of its low grade, its baseness and lowness. And if we are asked about this proverbial place, we just answer as follows, 'It's so low, you know, that you can't see it from where you stand, from the top of the world. It's located under the floorboards, if you see what I mean. No, sorry, no – you can't see what I mean. For the same reason. It goes without saying. Anyway, you don't want me to ruin this magnificent floor, do you?'

We can go on in this fashion for years and years, for some of us really think that not only our thinking and whatever is linked to this mode of existence, but also every gesture of ours depends upon language, derives its force and meaning from it. We turn left just because we said to ourselves a few moments ago, 'You should go left or else...' We can also add an argument, a justification to this injunction, 'You should go left unless you wish to pass away on the spot.' Is there no other way of voicing our grievances, of showing to others – to all others down to the angels – our individuality? The very fact of our going left instead of being rooted to the spot might show to what extent we are independent human beings, considering that all others go right; with the exception of Marxists and Engelsists. But you are bound to be misunderstood, for even if you go left for the sake of a landscape, its beauty and sound, as Zen Buddhists often say, they will affirm that you are a communist, a left activist or a left-handed individual. And if they come from England – or stay in England, which amounts to the same thing and

judgement – they might conclude you are keen on left-handed compliments. And even when you peacefully walk along a Moscow boulevard, they think you are about to escape from them, from humanity and also from the Earth because you think that the air your lungs constantly find during your walks is pernicious and dig you an uncomfortable tomb. And then they (devils) explain to you that comfort plays no part in the drama of the Hereafter except if you spend your eternity in flames where comfort has no room, as we all know. And we do not. We just have to walk into a fireplace whenever the fire is lit, whenever it reaches its apogee, so you can walk into it and stay inside it for quite a while, until your next incarnation.

Of course the language you possess by virtue of your virtuosity enables you to manipulate your lungs and tongue in accordance with the words you wish to communicate to your wife, children, the police and judges. And God knows everything about your tongue and lungs, about your judges, according to St Augustine and his earthly, immature judgement. Well, you express your emotions if you feel like it, here and there. But sometimes you feel no emotions whatsoever, and so you say to yourself and your nieces, ‘I have no emotions today. And I’d like to express this state of affairs, this mood or its absence. I wish to express *something*, you know. Do you think I’ve already expressed it, that, everything? Have you understood my enigmas and desires?’ People understand your desires only when you do your best to harass them, to strip them of their clothes, to put their bodies on a number of divans, to put a few parts of your body into their bodies – or into their screams, as you might put it in your diary. ‘I was making love to her. I seem to have penetrated every particle of her body, not only her sex organs, particles and atoms. I seem to have pierced, perforated her screams.’ But does all this have anything to do with languages and its pitfalls? Its falls and pits, its fouls and pouts? You can harass a woman without saying a word; you are in a position to carry out the so-called French rape, if I am not mistaken. Anyway, this silent rape is much superior – ethically and aesthetically – to what is defined as linguistic rape during which you utter a lot of four-letter words as you try to bend your victim’s will and body, enforcing a sort of discipline, ‘discipline, discipline’, you keep on repeating, muttering to yourself and herself. ‘You have no idea how you should surrender your body to your lover,’ you say to your victim, to the woman lying under you or just by your side – it depends on the stage you reached in the course of your ritual. ‘You should go to a school for love. In some of these schools, army-style drills are used to instil a sense of discipline.’ Of course you do not have to talk about these schools, which might get you involved with yet another portion of human language. You do not talk; you act. But I am not eager to describe such acts, for the simple reason that I love women and abhor both violence and harassment in any shape or sharp.

Apparently you can maintain good (or bad) relations with others only by means of language; at least semioticians seem to hold this view, bent as they are on introducing languages in all compartments of our existence. You may also look at a woman in such a way that your good intentions have no alternative but to grow more and more tangible, clear-cut and luminous. Your intentions become a huge, almost eternal caress, and the woman in question ends up realising that you will never harass her, for all your unquenchable desire to penetrate her body from one end to another. We must admit that our eyes reflect not only our souls – a series of our souls designed for numerous incarnations – but also our bodies, their desires, our eternal lust, our first lust, last lust, and so on. The point is in this domain we are inferior to cats, dogs and horses – far inferior, as a matter of fact. And we cannot circumvent this state of affairs, this injustice inflicted upon us by God, destiny, angels and the structure of the cosmos; its very texture. For instance, we cannot get round this problem by wearing many-coloured glasses. Well, I am not sure that by looking at cats and dogs we shall probe into the eternal secret of their glances: this problem

is eternal, the problem of their glances and eyes. Try as we may, we shall never understand why they are capable of taking in everything without taking anything, without shifting their gazes back and forth. Of course you are tempted to plunge into their eyes – headlong, headlong, letting your head suck in their wisdom, peaceful disposition, their eternity, immortality, eternity, immortality. A few years ago, a small cat died in my arms. For two hours at least I was looking at her eyes, at her dying glance, and I realised, as I always say (as if I had ever realised *anything* in my life) that the glance was not to die. I am writing for the sake of this glance, its immortality and eternity. As if it needed my prose to feed its immortality; as if its immortality had not always been trickled by its eternity, by eternal recurrence, by virtuous circles. This reminds me of a story I saw on television; the other day, another day, another midnight. 1941. The Nazis are on the threshold of Moscow. Stalin issues an order: ‘Put the icon of the Blessed Virgin on a plane and make it fly over Moscow.’ The plane circled for an hour before receiving permission to land. Is this story relevant to our predicament?

Instead of training our eyes and souls, we utter some syllables and construct either syntax or sentences or both. Mostly we build up both; and yet some of our utterances do not mean anything so that some of us say, ‘It lacks syntax. There are no vestiges of syntax in these utterances.’ Or we jump to the following conclusion, ‘This utterance is just an utterance, nothing else. Or just an example of syntax, if you prefer.’ Usually people prefer nothing to syntax. There are also syndromes that put spokes into our brainwaves, ideas, and our trains of thought derail instead of arriving at their destination. Actually we have no idea where their destinations are located and our trains rest and sleep on the grass somewhere; and we have no idea where this grass continues to grow, determined to bury our thoughts for ever and ever. How does this famous song go?

LES NEIGES

Where are the *blumen* (flowers) of yesteryear?

They’ve already joined the *neiges d’antan*.

Where are the soldiers killed in Stalingrad?

Where are the Moscow soldiers, officers?

Where are the Leningrad (Petersburg) cats?

Williams syndrome sufferers learn the rules all right, but their storage and look-up facility is erratic and often fails to retrieve the required item. ‘What are you looking for?’ they are asked now and then by those who witness their erratic glances and bodies. ‘We’re about to retrieve –’ they answer. And then they repeat and keep repeating endlessly, ‘Retrieve, retrieve, retrieve,’ as if waiting for someone to retrieve their minds from their heads. Why? They might hope their minds would be replaced with other syndrome-less minds. Instead of replacing anything inside their heads and the rests or remains – whatever remains of their bodies and minds, I mean – we just put them in front of computers, saying, ‘Computers are used to store and retrieve information efficiently.’ **Sli** sufferers (sli, fli, tli, mli sufferers) never learn the rules and must therefore proceed by trying to memorise just about everything with complicated consequences. Suppose I cannot learn rules because our society and its structure, its mixtures, satisfy neither my aesthetic senses nor ethical conviction. In short, today’s (and probably yesterday’s) humanity does not satisfy me at all, with a few exceptions I shall be unable to enumerate, if asked to do so for some obscure reason. Or for some obvious reason: if you belong to this society you are duty bound to love it, if only superficially;

otherwise they (all its members) are likely to boycott you mercilessly. You go out, they spot you and nod their heads, and every nod condemns you to a mini-death, to a partial disappearance. All right, I promise to get out of the way and never touch the spokes of your wheels, but please let me enjoy your humanist élans, your meals on wheels.

Apparently Derrida's mother was ill at the end of her life. It does not always happen like that: you can die on the spur of the moment, without any preludes or preparations or announcements. You do not say upon awakening, 'My dear, today I'll die – as a matter of course, if you wish. Even if you don't wish anything of the kind, I'll die because I feel the approach of death in every fibre of my body.' No, you do not say anything along these lines or even *beside* these lines, and then you die, as a matter of course, as a matter of fact. Derrida's mother was in a coma or out of a coma; anyway, she was lying on her deathbed, but her death was dragging his feet and so she continued to die on the same bed, her mouth shut, her eyes either open or shut, depending on her son's appearances and disappearances. Her son enters her room and she opens her eyes, although it is not worth her while to open them: she no longer recognises her son. She might think the man she sees with her half-open eyes is someone's son because there are sons and daughters in the world where she stays against all odds, oddly enough. Yes, she might recall her status, her motherly status, even if she is not sure she has ever taken advantage of her being a woman. Actually she might hesitate as to her status and gender, although she is not likely to ask herself the following question, 'Am I a woman or a man? Am I herself or himself?' Before dying (once and for all, not once and for all) Derrida's mother spent one or two years in bed – motionless and almost speechless. I hope that no one remembers Donald Trump; I hope that everyone remembers Derrida and probably his mother. Well, she was lying in her bed, in her death's arms, so to speak; and her son, Jacques Derrida, asked her the following question, 'What are you thinking about?' (*À quoi penses-tu?*) No answer, no batting of an eyelid. '*À qui penses-tu?*' He must have hoped she was thinking about him, of all people; on her deathbed, of all places. No answer. A batting of an eyelid. '*À personne.*' 'Nobody,' she answered at last.

UNIT

I must admit I think about death more often than many people, than the people who do not read books whose authors died many years or centuries ago. After reading a few words, I begin to wonder how long the author I am engrossed in lived and how he died; and what were his last words or last sounds, moans, groans. And the ones before last, naturally enough, for his last illness matters even more than his last groans which may not be linked to his physical suffering. (Anyway, let us leave the female of the species out of it. Women are immortal anyway.) Russell continued to live in spite of the multiplication table to which his body and soul were paying their tribute; for all his efforts, one might add. He befriended – more than that – one Schoenman who became his mouthpiece instead of replacing his mentor's ears: at the end of his life Russell was practically (and spiritually) deaf. I have no idea whether he was still capable of enjoying quartets, quintets and motets, but the communication cord one needs to reach out to local and international communities was broken, torn to pieces or even burnt to a cinder, one might say and conjecture. Of course he could talk to others, even if his mouthpiece was far away; the point is he heard nothing and you need to know what others think about your words. And it is not enough to see their nodding or shaking heads. All he could do at that stage of his life was confined to papers (not only to his own sheets of paper) and their fake or authentic news. For instance, one day he read in *The Times* upon awakening, 'Russell was

imprisoned for inciting a breach of the peace'. Russell raised his head – not the rest of his body, mind you – and saw his own bedroom; his bed's canopy, among other things. And he said to himself, 'Life is a prison, a real prison, the real thing. I'd better leave at the earliest opportunity.' Why should *I* grasp every opportunity of getting back on my feet again? Well, I could listen to Schoenberg's quartets, if I had nothing else to do either today or tomorrow. Is that enough? Russell took care of the whole world which, but for his indefatigable intervention – an interventionist role – would already have gone down the drain. At least according to his own assessment of the role he had played in our disgraceful history. Incidentally, 'drain' was his last word. Drain or rain. Others – Nabokov, among other intellectuals – thought that our history had grown disgraceful on account of Russell's pigheaded meddling with it. (Newspapers often put the head of a pig on his shoulders.) I have always left them to their own devices, demises. And I have no children so I cannot quarrel with them. They do not commit suicide or suffer from debilitating diseases such as schizophrenia. Russell did have children. How many? Doesn't matter. What counts is schizophrenia, quarrels, prodigal sons and suicides. Perish the thought.

They would never forgive you if you say to them you do not like people, human beings, their ways, their no-ways. (I leave them in peace about which Bertrand Russell talked in vain.) They might even ask you several times what you mean because, according to their mentality, you cannot and should not be allergic to humans who represent the top of the world, of Creation as such. To them the world has no meaning without humans and their languages, their ideas, tendencies and rituals. The rest just boils down to a cow looking at a train. And they add there is no one in the train at which the cow is looking; and according to them this is the worst situation one can face in this world created either by chemical formulas or by a supreme judge, a supreme court. In short, humans are at the centre of the world, on the world stage, centre stage. Why? you may and should ask. Because they, those humans, think and talk and express their communist or capitalist ideas. And the world goes around the sun; and around God's finger, according to church authorities. Yes, everything starts with a few meaningful sounds analysed, dissected in the books devoted to our mouths from which there issues what they and Hamlet call 'words'; as if no one else, no other actor had ever uttered the word 'word'. As soon as you say 'words' someone echoes your thoughts and mental disposition by saying 'Hamlet'. And then you can talk of ghosts, fathers and mothers. And even Turgenev is not always excluded from your fruitless discussions.

That is why it is important to say and think 'Nobody', as Derrida's mother did on her deathbed, in her son's ubiquitous presence. 'Why do you always say "Nobody"?' they might ask you; and they do. And you are often despised by the rest of humanity if you do not love humans, if you do not stroke their children's cheeks and necks. Without going any further – otherwise they might accuse you of being a member of one of the so-called paedophile rings. What *are* they, those paedophile rings? Vicious rings, vicious circles – that is what they are. But you are not part and parcel of those rings; you are not fond of humanity, to put it mildly. You prefer animals and leaves of grass, the grass itself; even if you are not allowed to have a gorgeous lunch in the midst of it. But humans and their languages pursue you wherever you can hide yourself. They find you, find you, find you and you hear their sounds which are often reduced to texts, to language-adorned, language-perverted thoughts.

There are also secondary media, in which language is transferred from a primary medium to another one. Most familiar here is *writing*, in which a spoken or signed language is converted into permanent marks on a solid surface.

(On a solid surface, did you say? And what if I destroy all these solid surfaces you have in mind and often in front of your body, within your reach, within your ballpoint's reach? There is a sheet of paper under your eyes, under your scrutiny. Alas, you have no fear of blank sheets of paper. So I pick it up and tear it to pieces; and I continue to tear it, them and you, while I am at it. I tear every piece to pieces in the hope of stopping this nonsense once and for all. No language, only *tabulae rasae*.) But no language can be written down until its speakers have first analysed it into certain recurrent units, for each of which a written symbol can be provided. (You analyse it or them rather stubbornly, sometimes persuasively, and there spring into existence a multitude of units that can be drawn on a sheet of paper thus, 'Unit, unit, unit, unit.' Or thus:

(Unit

Unit

Unit

(And they begin to juggle with these units. And they call it philosophy, a poem, a manifesto, the *Internationale*. And other humans listen to them and rise, sit down, rise again. They march, set fire to one building, another building, and some *vita nuova* comes into existence that becomes non-existence in no time at all.)

So you cannot blame human beings for having distorted the image of God and His world unless you are dangerously ill; unless everyone thinks you are about to die and purify the surface of the Earth – to the detriment of whatever lies *beneath* this surface. But they let you corrupt other tombs and corpses, provided you leave them in peace; and their peace is made up of sunny, rosy convictions such as, 'We are the only species capable of thinking, playing chess, producing atomic bombs, producing the sounds that remind a few specialists of Mahler's symphonies.' They believe they are as clever as the Allclever in Whose image they must have created themselves, otherwise they would not repeat round the clock, 'In God's image, in His image, in the image of God and the Holy Trinity.' And women repeat (round the same clock) 'In the image of the Blessed Virgin.' Even whores repeat these words, and no one says to them, 'You're created in your own image – in the image of the Blessed Whore, in other words.' Yes, you can say 'Nobody' only if you are Ulysses or a dying person. In the meantime (and this time, human time is really mean) you are supposed to love everyone and occasionally yourself – on condition that you say, now and then, eager to justify your self-love by fair means and foul – 'You know, I love myself only because I need to keep my hand in. If I didn't train myself to be more sensitive to human charms by caressing myself day and night, I wouldn't love anybody.'

Every spoken language contains a small number of basic sound units, or phonemes. Among the phonemes of English are /w/, /e/ and /l/. If we produce these phonemes in the order /wel/ we get the word 'well'. Well, so what? What could we do with this well? And with other wells as well? Give birth to the writer going by the name of Wells? We could also create a Russian animal called '*lev*', which means 'lion' in English. And we could talk about lions for hours on end, after saying, 'We emphasise that our conversation is only meant as a starting point for the peace conference related to the Earth and all climatic changes.'

'The lion loped across the grass,' said one human.

'The lion is a member of the cat family,' said another human.

'The girl stood gazing in pity at the old lion in the cage,' said another human.

BESIDE

For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. (Well, I must confess – as St Augustine used to say – that I do not quite understand this verse. All right, I am in myself and someone can say I am *beside* myself because there are sadistic, English-speaking humans either in my room or outside it; at least within my field of vision; and outside it, I am tempted to point out. There might be a point somewhere where there is someone whose glance could judge my conduct and whereabouts. And this person might talk to himself as follows, ‘Is this man beside himself or not? And if he is, is he far from himself or not? Is he standing by his own side? Does he usually have a lot of meals on the grass, while his own self sits on a sofa? If I can walk in my garden while sitting in my living room, I can be to God, not to the Devil, contrary to what one might think. Perhaps one of my I’s is to God, whereas the other one is to the Devil. Which one? The one walking in the garden, in my opinion. As I walk in this garden of mine I look at myself through one of my window panes. And I am under the impression I am not alone – in the garden, in the neighbourhood of my trees, of my blades of grass. And some people might say I am in the Devil’s company, for the Devil likes both trees and grass, judging from the Bible, from the narrative dedicated to Eve and the spell our Devil casts on men and women alike. One might wonder, however, whether I am sober or not. But why should I be stone cold sober? I don’t have to drive either this afternoon or even after dinner, which happens rather seldom anyway, given my incapacity to see in the dark. The point is you see much more when in a drunken state. In ordinary circumstances both God and the Devil are just words on which you can rely in a conversation, not in the intimacy of your life, of your personal existentialism. However, when you empty one glass after another, your vision grow crystal clear to the point of revealing to you the things known only to Alan Turing and his imitators. You break a number of codes as you advance on the way of secret lore and even the secret name of God lands eventually on your writing desk. But you cannot decide whether you should drink, in accordance with St Paul’s precepts, for the saint seems to change his mind, to change heart rather frequently in the domain of alcohol. Sometimes he advises us to drink ‘a modicum of truth’ as he puts it, as if paying homage to the well-known saying ‘*in vino veritas*’. Sometimes, however, he stops in his tracks, a glass of wine shivering in his hand, and says to himself, ‘Enough is enough. Now I hear the Almighty rather clearly, but if I empty this glass, I’ll hear only my own drunkenness. I’ll be pissed, in other words. And I don’t like this word. I don’t.’ So one should know when to stop because you are likely to switch from God to the Devil – in the process, as drunkards point out. Now you seem to see God with all His attributes. You empty another glass and see a tail, and you have no idea to whom this tail belongs. Of course you recall the fact that in French the word ‘tail’ (*queue*) denotes the organ thanks to which children come into existence, grow old and go into non-existence. The penis, in another word; in this world. So you set about studying the tail you see in front of your feet. You cannot help wondering why this tail can be found *near* your feet, almost *under* them. And you say to yourself that this tail does not really resemble any penis you have seen in the course of your not-too-short life. Inevitably you jump to the following conclusion – incidentally, my legs no longer allow me to *jump* to conclusions – that the tail you see is just a tail, nothing more. What is more, it must belong to the Devil in whose care you were put thanks to a fabulous quantity of vodka at the end of the previous month. Out of politeness you strike up a conversation with the Devil whose tail you seem to have spotted in the early afternoon, after emptying yet another glass. You ask the Devil whether he is really the Devil and not the Almighty in disguise. ‘I am the Almighty,’ says the Devil.

‘In disguise?’ you ask.

‘No, no, not in disguise.’

‘But where does your tail come from? From the Devil?’

‘From an ape. Don’t you know that humans descend from apes? That’s why they go ape-shit so frequently – whenever you say to them they descend from apes, as a matter of fact. As soon as you utter the word “ape” they begin to strike you either with their fists or their walking sticks. Actually they don’t really have to go ape-shit because they *are* apes – there’s nowhere to go, you know, as some Dostoevsky hero puts it.’

‘Are you real?’

‘Of course I am.’

‘How strange, how strange. I’m stone cold sober and yet I see you distinctly.’

‘It is for your cause that you’re sober, my dear. And I happen to be your cause. This is the course, this is the course, oh heaven!’

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then we’re all dead. (Once again I don’t seem to understand what St Paul and his commentators talk about. They ask, ‘What puzzles you, old man? The love of Christ sticks out a mile, two miles, millions of miles. Can’t you see it, feel it in your breast and even in your toes?’ What does constraineth mean, I wonder? When asked about ‘the standstill period’, as they call the Brezhnev era, the Russians usually say, ‘The country’s progress was constrained by a leader who refused to look forward.’ But Brezhnev looked neither forward nor backward: he did not look at all, which becomes evident when you study his photographs. ((Does anybody recall Brezhnev today? Just picture to yourself nobody, once again, once more.)) Of course both Buddhists and Taoists recommend this mood, this state of affairs: you are supposed *not* to look at the world. Or do they look at trees and lakes? Both human categories are at one with nature. Does that mean you have to *look* at it? Can’t you worship it from afar, from beyond visibility? Just listen to it, for God’s sake. To the *Waldweben*, among other things. Besides, Jesus advised us against looking at the members of our families. We are always looking forward to the Summer Ball, to the Winter Ball. And then we get disappointed, if we believe Schopenhauer’s theory centred upon wishes and their fulfilments. And we always look back at the halcyon days of youth, at some moments cautiously extracted from maturity. Didn’t we eventually compose a mature symphony, a mature poem or essay or ecstasy? Some of us look back at the golden age of this and that; or at the golden age, generally speaking, whatever it might be in the context of generalities. And Christ covers our eyes with his hands and says, ‘Look no more, otherwise you won’t see anything.’ We are constrained, confined – within the framework or framedestruction of coronavirus number 19. Number 19, number 19, number 19. We are forced to wear masks, hoping thereby to bar the virus from making its way into our lungs and other vital organs. But there are people who resist the order and wear no masks whatsoever, either on their face or on their hands. When asked by their neighbours or police officers, ‘Why don’t you protect yourself from death?’ they answer, ‘If Jesus finds it necessary he’ll put his right hand on my mouth to keep it shut. I hope you don’t entertain the possibility of contamination through Jesus’s fingers?’ But jokers are sure to answer as follows, ‘I’m not sure he washes his hands every five minutes.’ ‘Because we thus judge...’ And Spinoza warns us against all sorts of judgement, and I cannot help asking myself whether the judgment referred to in St Paul’s epistle is one of the judgements we are not supposed to indulge in. In this case we do not thus judge; nor do we judge thus. To cut a long story short, we do not judge at all. Apparently that is what Alexander the Great said as he dealt a fatal blow

to the Gordian knot. And considering our determination not to judge at all, we do not judge this piece of information. I am alluding to 'that if one died for all'. For *all*? Down to the *dead*? Aren't we duty bound to resurrect them? All right, all right: they were all dead. So we are dead too; yet we go on living as if it were not only possible but also feasible. 'That if one died for all...' The point is we cannot stop; we should go on, even if we are not artists included in a show which goes on because it cannot die. And if we are not attached, imprisoned or duty bound, still we have to see what happens at the end of the verse, of the Bible which teaches us how to live, die, survive, go to Hell and Heaven, even if Blake (for once) speaks neither of their marriage nor even of their friendship.

What kind of relationships link, ensure the beatitude of Heaven and Earth? Of course their love is of a different kind, if they are not honoured with capital letters: heaven and earth. What could you do with such a conjunction? If you cannot boast about being honourably connected with Capital Letters (you are nobody) once and for all. Once – at the beginning of this definition, this denomination – you can be *somebody* (once in a while there appears on the surface of the Earth an Alexander the Great or a Napoleon) – but then everything degenerates because you cannot be great if you are for all (or not at all). Even Alexander the Great was not for all, as our specialists say now. He wrote a lot of poems, and only a happy few relished them in their spare time. They said to each other, 'Have you heard about Alexander's newest poem? It's about the Tree of Life, you know. Writing it in the midst of a battle, fight or dispute is quite a feat – in itself, you know.'

That if one died for all, then we are all dead. That if two died for all, then we are all dead, all minus one. That if three died for all, then were all dead, all minus two. That is God's mathematics for you, you know. So you put a sort of multiplication table in front of you and begin to count, fearing you might discount everything – on the threshold of death. One died, two were saved. When? Doesn't matter. No, it does matter because if you were saved 200 years ago, you are no longer alive, let alone kicking. I wonder if you could be kicking without being alive. You kick, you kick, you kick; frankly speaking, you do not even know *what* you kick, but you do kick something and this fact does not fail to rejoice your heart: the dead do not kick anything, not even their worms or coffins; or their earth, the part under which, inside which, they are buried. They kick nothing and professional footballers despise them for their incapacity to kick anything, for that is how footballers train themselves 11 hours a day. They just liberate their feet which are often imprisoned – trousers, uniforms, evening dress – and set about kicking everything, even Newton's apple, for they have to regain their form before a very important match. I have no idea what championship they are involved in because, whenever you try to find out what championship they are talking about, they say something along the lines of, 'An involved reason/excuse/argument,' and you instantly relinquish the idea of describing this intricacy in your report and even in an innocent conversation with your girlfriend, boyfriend and so on. And then you ask yourself point-blank, 'Am I dead or not?' But if you confirm to your mind and general feelings that you are not dead, not at all, they might ask you the following question, 'Are you aware that your "no" sounds like "knot", considering that you voice your grievances in the language of Shakespeare? Well and good. So what? So that, my dear sir. If you're not dead, buried and sentenced to death in Hell or Purgatory, you should confront the Gordian knot which is, in your case, just the denial of your eternal sojourn (sic!) in the Hereafter.'

That if one died for all, then were all dead. Let us walk away from the Golgotha to figure out what figures are standing over there: out, in, down, in the sky. If we extraterrestrials whose visits to the Earth are spontaneous, sporadic and, taking all the unknown factors into account, insignificant, we might write in our notebooks, 'There

are figures standing on the surface of the planet we have encountered in the course of our wanderings. Well, these figures seem to be alive, although their lives, if any, have nothing to do with our lives and vitalities. So we are not quite sure they are alive: they are not kicking, that's for sure. But even their postures are suspicious, given their wood-inspired tenseness. Or tenacity – it is no easy task coping with their languages which are so abstruse we can't understand ourselves, whenever we endeavour to speak their tongues. So we speak our tongues, most of the time, especially when there are no humans either outside or in sight or inside our brains and bodies. Could you picture to yourselves the following? These humans did their utmost – and their utmost is horrible, believe me and us – to penetrate our bodies by fair means and foul. By foul means, by foul, as our scientists point out. Well and good. So what? What happens is we do not really know whether they are dead or alive. Of course, judging by the skill they demonstrate during their attempts to penetrate our substance, they are quite alive, even if they do not kick anything. They are quick, in other words, even if they do not quicken anything, not even their own organs, members and penises, let alone their vaginas. 'That if one died for all, then were all dead,' they repeat all the time, showing us the Book, as they call it. All right, all right. But who is one? we ask, following in their wake, although we do not really like this wake; not particularly. Why should we pay attention to the wake we do not really like? No love surges into the lead, whenever we begin studying and anatomising their wakes and also their 'in the wakes'. If one dies for all. Someone died for them, there is no denying this fact and matter. During the Second World War many soldiers thrust their substances in front of tanks and the latter came to a standstill, oddly enough, strangely enough. But such facts are recorded in the books you can consult in the Library of Congress or in any congress, in any library worthy of this name. Who is dead? Who could achieve such an exploit? Extraterrestrials know that nothing can die because of this formula or equation, call it what you wish: poi ju liu gyijgt cfdytrdxxytrdf =====,n b hbv bv vb ghv n. That's it, that's it.'

Humans are very naive, aren't they? They think that if they can wrap someone around their little finger, they are alive. All right, all right. You wrap this someone around your little finger, and you congratulate yourself upon your victory, your universal triumph. And then you find out that whatever or whoever you were wrapping around your little finger is nothing, nobody, not even Ulysses, as I always point out. And what about your little finger? All right, all right – you did not say it was your *big* finger: you are not as self-important as all that.

That is what human history looks like – and feels like, if we take into consideration both parties. One party or group sticks out their members' fingers; the other may resist for a while, but its members end up being wrapped and squeezed by the fingers where they wriggle and squirm like worms. And we feel like comparing this state of affairs to worms that execute exactly the same contortions as if training themselves for their next, human incarnation. Actually they do not have to train themselves day in day out and even a few hours per night: even now, today, in the 21st century, they behave like human beings, and sometimes no one can really see any differences between these social animals. (Aren't worms anti-social? When they eat us alive, so to speak?) You look at a worm – Tolstoy liked observing ants' behaviour in his childhood and youth – and say to yourself, 'My life unfolds in the same manner, and I can't really spot any difference between this worm and my soul, my state of mind, my angst and my dread of death. My death of dread. I wish my dread could die on the spot, on this very spot, in my room, on my bed. Am I dead? Am I dead?'

Worms are an important subject matter and one might even say that what matters is the absence of worms, of their multitudes and overwhelming presence. But let us concentrate on death himself; not for once – for many

times and forever. ‘When a person dies in a cheerful and optimistic mood,’ said Thomas More in the presence of his fateful axe, ‘nobody mourns for him.’ I have no idea how many people mourned for him at the time of his death: all these people and many other people were concerned about the King’s ideas and attitudes. And so they might have decided not to mourn for Thomas More so as not to be duty bound to mourn for themselves. But here is what he says, Thomas More, played by a famous English actor whose name slips my mind whenever I focus my mind and even my body upon his name: ‘They sing for joy at his funeral (Paul Scofield? Scotfield?) and lovingly commend his soul to God. Finally, more in a spirit of reverence than of grief, they cremate the body, and mark the spot by a column engraved with an epitaph. (What kind of epitaph did he have in mind, when writing these lines and utopian ideas? ‘What a joy it is to be dead and be offered an incredible chance of going to heaven where Socrates awaits everybody. What are we doing down here, on this Earth of ours or theirs? Theirs, theirs, theirs, theirs. Let us go to heaven at once, while listening to the songs of joy, innocence and anti-dissonance. His soul to God, her soul to God. Thomas More had no idea what political correctness meant and should mean forever.) Then they go home and discuss the dead man’s character and career, and there’s nothing in his life (and her life, her life) that they dwell on with such pleasure as on the happy state of mind in which he left it. (They mean the deceased did not shout, ‘Shit, shit, shit, I’m dying, help me, you morons. Give me a few tablets, an aspirin. I’ll kill all of you in my afterlife if you don’t supply me with painkillers until my dying day.’)

URINE

What is more, the whole of human history looks like a group of worms – let us return to them for God’s sake – that are about to set upon a corpse, a lot of corpses. Then these worms, their group, does set upon the corpse under discussion and begin to devour it. We devour almost everything, and I would be hard put to single out an exception from this rule. We devour our past, all our golden ages – gold is indigestible, as a matter of fact – our radiant future, our radiant smiles obliterated by our and their angsts. We look at our fellow creatures and compare them – unwillingly, willy-nilly – to worms, and our angst and also dread of death grow palpably so we can feel all of them, all our angst, fears, deaths and so on. I wonder why ‘so on’, at least in my interpretation, always sounds like the bell in John Donne’s famous sermon where he asks us a very important question, ‘For whom tolls this bell?’ Actually we are not supposed to ask this question because the answer continues to resound in the air, ‘For everybody, for everybody.’ When listening to Mussorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*, we hear ‘for everybody’ even during Boris’ coronation. The Russian nation whose representatives can be seen on many world-renowned stages, in many opera houses shout, sing and exclaim, ‘Three cheers for our new tsar Boris Ivanovich,’ but what we hear boils down or amounts to the above-quoted remark, ‘For everybody, for everybody.’ The Russians gathered in front of the Kremlin think that, in spite of everything, this particular tsar gave them bread, butter, marmalade and a few slices of ham, of *okorok*, in their language. Why don’t they hear something more pertinent, more appropriate to their miserable lives? They are all doomed, and instead of shouting, ‘Three cheers,’ they should recite multiplication tables as they think about their families, friends, about all those corpses one can see in documentaries pitilessly focused upon purges, condemnations, wars and peaces, peaces, peaces. Wars and faeces, as someone put it. What did this person mean, when uttering this prophetic remark? Does our life feature only wars and lavatories? Are we always going from battlefields to toilets? And back again, to battlefields? Is there nothing else in our so-called, so-cursed lives?

The report I perused last week shows that faeces have penetrated every stratum of human society. It is pointless to speak of different strata, of epochs and signs. But there are many reports in our history, and the history of these reports proves once and for all that we are wrong, fundamentally wrong if we believe that there is something else (apart from faeces) in our society. For instance, you read the following sentence, ‘If the *spiritualis intellectus* springs from the letter of the Old and New Testaments, then history itself must culminate in a final age of the spirit that proceeds from both the previous ages.’ And what if it doesn’t? What if there is no such thing as *spiritualis*; nor will *intellectus* ever spring into existence. (Cancelled: full of the joys of spring.) Of course there is such a thing as ‘spring’; what is more, there are many springs in the existence of those who speak English fluently. ‘The children have jumped on the couch so much that they’ve ruined the springs,’ says one English-speaking person to another. The latter sits down on the couch and questions the declaration issued by the former, saying, ‘I don’t think the springs you alluded to are really ruined because I feel a lot of comfort stemming from these springs’ tenderness.’ The latter rises from the couch and begins to dance on it, jumping higher and higher. After a while he asks his interlocutor and friend to judge the state in which the springs in question find themselves after the aforementioned dance. The former submits his body to the latter’s desire and realises to what extent the springs and the divan itself are ruined.

I have no idea why I compare humans to worms – not all the time, as might be expected, considering out tendencies, habits and rottenness-orientated mentality. I must have done it many times, sometimes without knowing it, unconsciously and perhaps unwillingly. Of course one has to emphasise our capacity, our yearning to devour whatever we see, hear and think about; our voracity, to put the matter in a nutshell. Or our greediness; we can put this declaration in the same nutshell where there is enough room for a number of suchlike declarations. Of course you could say, ‘This man or woman worships Beethoven because these people are necrophiliacs.’ All right – let us compare our humans to grasshoppers, which is quite understandable in the light of our attachment to springs, jumps and hops. And leaps: we should forget neither Kierkegaard nor Mao. They leaped a lot and are still under the influence of their hopping, jumping and leaping in the dark. Oddly enough, both thinkers actually leapt in the light; at least they thought they were heading for the light. Let us drop the light at the end of the tunnel – if only for once. It is true that you cannot leap in the light on the spur of the moment: you are still in the dark, according to the idiom I resorted to; on the spur of the moment. You are in the dark, in the dark, in the dark – even if you do not even *try* to leap. Then you make a tremendous effort, trying your utmost to leap if only for the sake of leaping. As if you were talking to Kierkegaard in person who says to your persona, ‘You don’t even try to leap, you lazybones.’

‘I beg to differ,’ you answer. ‘Can’t you see I’m doing my best to leap, but I don’t succeed, unfortunately, unluckily for me and my family?’

‘Leapfrog. Are you acquainted with this word and game?’

‘Of course I am,’ you answer boldly; or bodily – by nodding and stamping your right foot. ‘A children’s game in which a number of children bend down and another child jumps over them one at a time.’

‘Can’t you see where your error, your unforgivable error lies?’

‘I can’t.’

‘You need others for this metaphysical, spiritual leap. You’re unable to jump over yourself. You need other backs, other humans to carry out this Loyola-conceived, soul-cleansing exercise.’

‘Thus was born his trinitarian philosophy of history in which the three Persons are, as it were, built into the time structure in the three ages or *status* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ according to Joachim of Fiore. Thus you have no alternative but to come to the following, quite logical conclusion, ‘Even in heaven do they need one or two others, for the Father needs the Son, and the Son can’t shift for himself either, leaning upon the Holy Spirit.’ Well, I am afraid of losing the One, the Oneness, and no amount of pep talk can make me change my mind; my soul, frankly speaking. But do I have to be *frank*, when speaking, writing and thinking? Actually, talking about faeces is not my cup of tea – is it more appropriate to use this idiom, when talking about urine? – because I do my best to eschew vulgarity, even if it is closer to the truth than refinements and prevarication, equivocation. I am very fond of Fellini, although I am not sure I am in love with him, with his films. And I just cannot bear all those pedestrians or anti-heroes who break wind (and some of my nerves), even if this is the only way for them to hammer it in. They do hammer it in and they say, by way of explanation, ‘You know, I’ve just farted.’ If submitted to such an argument I would leave the scene of the wind – quite different from what one hears in Wagner’s *Fliegende Hollander* – and, upon my return to my barracks or den, I might listen to this opera conducted by Klemperer. Fellini might have said at this point, ‘All right, you seem to prefer Wagner’s wind to my characters. But do you know that the Dutch ship was driven through the ocean by the wind broken by its sailors?’

Speaking about the dead, about the Flying Dutchman about whom I wrote a book, hoping I would have enough time to touch upon him in my future books, during yet another eternal recurrence, eternal return. Even grasshoppers die and we may pray for them because they deserve our caress, our verbal and physical caresses – if only for the way they hop in our world, like Rudolf Nureyev. Frankly speaking, I would not mind caressing humans, on the condition that they are dead or rather unborn. You may caress the dead if you wish, but the point is you have to unearth them, and if you content yourself with airy caresses, your libido will never be satisfied to the utmost. And an unsatisfied libido may lead to a nervous breakdown and other predicaments known to medical science and nonsense. Well, you may caress them (the dead) spiritually, as they say; or poetically – as the whim takes you, in fits and starts. There is something filthy in the domain I am touching upon – without really touching it, thank God: I am not fond of coffins and nails and my aversion to worms is well known among my Russian friends. But there is a kingdom which offers you a kind of purity that is seldom if ever found in the real, earthly world. This purity is offered by the unborn, by those who freeze in their tracks, and I must confess that even within this unborn-fashioned purity you may light upon a purer purity which is the privilege of those who never set off on their journeys to the world or even to the cosmos, if I am not mistaken. I hope there is a realm from which the cosmos is excluded once and for all; and I am almost sure that the realm I am talking about abounds in the creatures I am alluding to as I try to imagine an unearthly Rilke-surmised harmony, mystery.

How to squeeze through our crust, through the world’s thick skin, which might permit us to reach the invisible kingdom of Oneness upon which I have always pinned my hopes? There are fissures everywhere, and we should not discard them lightly, on the grounds that our trains and planes are mighty enough to allow us to escape these numerous pitfalls. That’s right – we might fall into these cracks and crevasses if we do not pay attention to the topography of our walks and expeditions. Let us once again return to the leaps I enlarged upon – I will never enlarge upon the fissures I am talking about, otherwise I shall never be able to leap over them – and I have just realised I have already returned to them in this sentence so I do not have to touch upon them once again. I wonder if it is better to touch these crevasses – their sides, to be exact – for the sake of the information one usually gets

when touching objects, subjects and even ideas, provided they are tangible enough and therefore accessible to the sense of touch. Well, there are fissures under my feet and I leap all the time in my endeavour to avoid the bottom I can see whenever my glance penetrates the fissures' lugubrious entrails. These fissures represent or demonstrate whatever we call our border situations, breakable toys of life, our odds and ends, our ends and so on. Or is it just the void we hear about whenever a lecture on Kierkegaard or Heidegger is given in a huge, academic hall? Actually, I am weary of both thinkers, and I speak of them only because of the fissures that do not fail to remind me of existentialism, of my existence, of the dead, of the wounded. According to these philosophers, you had better leap or fly, but first you have to fall into one of these crevasses. Well, if you wish to conduct Tchaikovsky's *La Pathétique* you can and indeed should fall into four crevasses at least. (Four movements.) Indeed there are people who come to a standstill in the immediate vicinity of a crevasse and look into, look into, look into it until a sort of vertigo drags them down, all along the sides of the crevasse which might be called vase, if you are keen on alchemy. You fall into this vase and become a rose, and roses are illuminations and salvations in their own right. But if your final destination is heaven, the One, God and the Holy Trinity, you begin to float over yourself, first in thought, then in your deeds, and then you will find your body on the top of the Tree of Life – far, far, far from humans and their beings. And their times.

THE THREE AGES

The third *status* was to be won by the church only after arduous pilgrimage and great tribulation, like the Israelites marching through the wilderness and crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. As guides through this crucial stage, Joachim prophesied the advent of two new orders of spiritual men, one of hermits to agonize for the world on the mountaintop and one a mediating order to lead men on to the new spiritual plane. Although the third age belongs par excellence to contemplatives, secular clergy and laymen are not shut out of it. In a strange diagram, a 'ground plan' of the New Jerusalem, various categories of monks are grouped around the seat of God, but below, secular clergy and tertiaries (lay members) live according to their rule.

Joachim of Fiore or Buster Keaton

Some of us are weary of prophecies; others are not as if they were still hoping to find either the Oneness or the Twoness or Threeness. You often find them in holes, in receptacles of all kinds where, mentally, spiritually, delusionally they cross the Jordan River – into the Promised Land; it goes without saying. Sometimes you can hear their cries, their calls for help, 'Could you please pour some water into this hole, into my initiation-ceremony vase?' 'Warum?' asks someone. 'Because the river I'm swimming in no longer resembles the Jordan River. It's just a puddle, you know. Looks like a hipbath.' But let us not forget that I am sitting on the mountaintop, but leading both men and women on to the new spiritual plane is a useless undertaking. Rings hollow, you know. There are historic figures in the world and their words stick out a mile and consequently can be found in many books, on television screens. Do they sit on mountaintops? Do they walk around the Promised Land? During Hitler's onslaught on Moscow, at the crucial moment of the horror of horrors, Stalin said to Beria, 'The Blessed Virgin of Kazan. Are you aware of the fact that this is the most precious icon in the world?' Beria said, 'Yes' because he was not in the habit of saying 'no' to Stalin. (Nobody was, as a matter of fact. Hitler might have said

‘no’ to Stalin, but they never met; nor did they ever speak on the phone.) ‘You should take this icon, put it on a plane and fly with it over Moscow, several times, as if it was a Moscow satellite, you know. Or a sputnik. Have you ever heard about sputniks?’ And Nero sang while Rome was burning. These so-called heroes were born for the sake of history, not with the intention of making us happier, more heavenly. Not for the sake of the Promised Land were they conceived and materialised. ‘In a strange diagram, a “ground plan” of the New Jerusalem, various categories of monks are grouped around the seat of God, but below, secular clergy and tertiaries (lay members) live according to their rule.’ Looks like the Georgievsky Hall; looks like a session of the Communist Party Congress.

Of course it is not enough to say, ‘The die is cast,’ for you should get a move on and cross the Rubicon, and become the greatest man in Rome which, in those days, was as big as the cosmos. But Stalin was wrong in 1941 and the Germans penetrated the Soviet territory with panache, on account of Stalin’s errors, intuitions, guesswork and other consequences of his attitude towards the forthcoming war. And Nero was wrong in 123 B. C. and also in A. C. – in 78, in 345, in 1256. Such criminals are always wrong, throughout human history, because one hears their echoes, and one bursts into song, saying to idle observers, ‘You know, a city or a country is burning right now. Do you know why? I’m signing, am I not? That’s why, you morons.’ And what about Julius Caesar and his saying, his *beaux mots*, his slogans and commands? And what about the following remark I often repeat both mentally and orally, ‘I’d rather enjoy a sudden death, a surprise attack of the grim reaper.’ Why do I repeat this nonchalant remark? Because I am loath to confess my sins, on my deathbed or even under the wheels of a posh, English car. (Why did I choose an English car on this occasion? Because a posh Italian car does not sound so resonant. Why not a Porsche?) That’s right – I am loath to confess my sins; and I would loathe to encounter any priest, any idle pedestrian whose ears might capture my delirium. (Fever accompanied by delirium, you know.) I often picture to myself such a horrified eavesdropper, ‘What? What? What did he say? Can this horror and terror be true? O my God, O my God!’ No, no. N O spells no.

What do they say about death? Why do they talk about everything as if they could understand the structure of the mind that leads them astray all the time; and even beyond, beyond the time and all. What pleases in this newborn structure of the modern world – our ancestors knew it is not unbound; bound, bound, bound, not infinite – is Poincaré’s theory according to which our world must have a sort of shape. The point is that even a *sort* of shape confers on our world the title ‘Finished’ – quite unlike Schubert’s most famous symphony. If we talk endlessly about the afterlife, about a series of afters that line the cosmic streets to watch the angelic and divine procession pass by, our present life does not mean much; perhaps just a little, a little bit. We opt for, and for, and for, and they say to us, ‘This is the option of life or death’; not of both, that is the point. You opt for this and hope you will not die on the spur of the moment, and you rejoice when both the moment and its spur pass away; or onto something that is none of your business. But if your life is infinite, being highly influenced by an impressive number of afterlives or metempsychoses, you can choose this or that, assured as you are that all other options await you somewhere, not far from your tomb and tombstone. You rise from your tomb upon hearing the trumpet of your personal resurrection, dust your tombstone and head for the option you disregarded in your youth or childhood, if you please. Is that how all our creation functions? I wish to kill somebody, but I have no revolver on my writing desk, or in one of the drawers about which my chest of drawers seems to boast all the time; the time I have spoken about many times, if I am not mistaken. (As a matter of fact, I might have boasted about it only three

times, not even in a row, you know; given my memory's fundamental deficiency. Actually I don't even remember the last time, the last boast; let alone the first toast.) But suppose you are a lobster now, in your new incarnation which succeeded to your human substance; and nonsense, as I always say, when talking half-seriously about humans. Suppose you yearned after a woman, a Russian beauty in your human incarnation. As a lobster, however, you do not care a damn, as far as women are concerned. In point of fact, you also hate the male representatives of the human species because some of them love lobsters to the point of eating them, whenever they have enough money for such a feast. So you are a lobster and a lot of women come and go in front of your eyes; and some of them wish to buy you, in spite of their vegetarian convictions. You hate all human beings, not only those who handled you on your way to the counter where you are lying now. Well, you cannot even say to yourself you missed a multitude of opportunities in your human, superior life when you could pick and choose among both women and men; and also cars, villas and helicopters. Our efforts availed us nothing, as they used to say. So did or did not your thoughts, your human desires; the ones you entirely missed in the course of your human incarnation.

But let us come to a standstill (as I always say) for a moment; if only for a moment. There are so many loose ends everywhere (not only in my writings) that I do not know where to start and from which point the happy ending beckons to me, brandishing a few glasses of beer, as the Germans always point out, their tankards and mugs sticking out a mile or just a few kilometres. There is a text – and this text is sacred no doubt – that must have slipped my mind some time ago. I remember the slip but the moment to which it sticks in spite of the passage of time eludes me: I cannot pinpoint anything with the exception of my habitual anxiety or dread or whatever. This is the text I am alluding to: 'And that he died for all (down to myself) that they (up to myself) which live (Do I? as I usually ask and say) should not henceforth (Helsingfors? Is that the former name of the Finnish capital?) live unto themselves.' I think I have *always* lived unto myself, and for once I am not even tempted to say I have always *died* unto myself: I am not a *Christian* thinker; at least not to *this* point. Or do they say, 'I've always died *unto* Christ?' Unto, into, onto, up to. I don't know, no idea. No feeling either.

'But unto him.' I seem to have anticipated this notion. Yet I don't know how to live unto him unless it is the imitation they quote and enlarge upon all the time, missing no time, no instant, as it were. How do they imitate our Jesus Christ? (Is 'our' blasphemous in this context?) They utter a few sentences recorded by his followers; or by their tape recorders. There must have been a lot of tape recorders all around the mountain from which (from its top, I suppose) he talked to his followers or rather to those who doubted his future wounds and also his teaching. Well, they doubt everything and he removes their doubts from where they have been embedded for centuries and millennia; one by one, one by one. Here is a doubt and he removes it, according to the Scriptures. Here is another doubt; but not another book, mind you: there is only one book in the universe, as they affirm and write almost everywhere, on every boulder, rock and mountain; as if he had spoken to them from all the mountains you can find on the surface of the Earth. And even on the Moon.

Let me come to the last – or one before last – verse of text I have already commented upon rather abundantly. 'Which died for them, and rose again.' All right, all right: this is not the verse I had in mind when talking about verses, trinkets and death. 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, (suppose I *am* in Christ) he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become(ing?) new.' You are perhaps a new creature but neither your shape nor size contradicts human laws which do not allow you to live a dog's life in the course of your superior incarnation. But humans are always the same, for the simple reason that they are humans; and nothing

human repels them, as the saying goes. Foucault said in his books and interviews, 'There are archaeological strata in human existence. Lunatics spent their lives in the streets until our earthlings, alias normal people, put them in lunatic asylums. And this fact dates back to...' What do I care about dates and brave new worlds? They are always old, even if they happen to be brave, as brave as Julius Caesar. Not only does Oedipus and his myth pursue us through centuries and sleepless nights – everything and everybody stand in front of us and live in our entrails. Some of them hanker after another variety of existence, even within this rotten, human incarnation. But we stick to our guns, to our Kalashnikovs, because we cannot do otherwise. Even another society, a new world or life reflect our present condition, our present mind, our present and past in general. We think that there is such a thing as newspeak, and so we might speak differently if crushed to death in the crowd of tyrants. Let us not forget that we always come up with stupid words, ideas and forms that constantly inhabit our minds or what passes for such. We always look for good or lame excuses when doing our worst to justify our actions and miseries. We think that utopias are imposed upon us either from on high or from down below. And we conclude – upon reading Orwell, Huxley and Zamyatin – that our rulers, whoever they are, preclude our pastime from making us more poetic and intelligent through Rilke's poetry and Kant's treatises. But their books drop from our hands as soon as we open them, although no one stands in front of us and no whip hangs over our heads.

We think only in terms of power, the utter sterility of which we might mistake for cornucopia. But we can also insist upon the necessity, vitality of sterility. We say to each other, 'Yes, we are sterile and we are proud of this state of affairs, of this non-state, if you wish. (Just the opposite of affairs of state. Even if you wish for these affairs.) Nothing doing, nothing doing, doing nothing.' Perhaps it is my interior monologue and in the second part of this interminable monologue I shall hear praise addressed to the unborn, to those who will never be born, for all the efforts directed towards their conception and appearance. No, they *can* appear somewhere, within the Oneness which might be the leitmotif of my existence, if any. If any, as I stated earlier, is also a leitmotif because of its affinities with the unborn, with whoever are behind the scene; not even in the wings, though. Not waiting in the wings, which would be a betrayal, in my opinion. And in this text at least my opinions do count, even if they are discounted everywhere else. Music is unborn, even if you listen to Beethoven – last year was his year – day in day out. Actually his *Ninth* depicts its birth, its own birth, or the birth of humanity and its paradise. But once the symphony is over, you realise that, if translated into earthly terms and notions, these sounds are irrelevant on account of their *otherness*. They do not sound like our bodies and even our souls, addicted as they are to our petty preoccupations, are foreign to them; and vice versa. They might say that music is ideal, but what those people say bears no approximation whatsoever to the truth. And music is the truth we often allude to, especially when speaking of our business deals and numerous elections. Whatever truth we are talking about, alluding to and feeling in our entrails has nothing to do with music which is beyond, beyond, perhaps in the Greatest Beyond of all. Beyond the Greatest of the Beyonds. It is not a vision either. What is more (what is less, in the context) it is not even 'ni, ni, ni'; their way of speaking about God. You cannot even say 'ni' about music; and I have written many books and essays about it. It is not silence, it is not the Absolute Truth, it is not God (in any shape or form or formlessness). It is not created in our image. Where does it come from? From algorithms? From nanoisms? From megabytes of the outer cosmos, whatever that is?

Let me worship the unborn because they are not a number of nothingnesses, contrary to what might be presumed. They are there, somewhere, nowhere, but you can hear their music, provided you have enough ears for this kind of music. Or just for music. The unborn are not in any way linked to Duchamp's last work (one before last?). It is not located in the space to which we have limited access via a keyhole or just a hole, a tiny hole. Music is a tremendous pause which fills you from head to foot, provided you are prepared for such reception, emotion. You think you *are* prepared; you are waiting for Bach, cantatas, for Schubert and sonatas. You think there is a hole which might enable you to partake of their (Bach's, Schubert's, Beethoven's) pauses – their space, in other words, in other sounds. You think you might understand a piece of music – Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, for instance – by watching Tarkovsky's *A Mirror* where grass and wind (if I remember rightly) are accompanied by this piece of music, assuming it is a *piece* of music I am talking about. A man or a woman walks around. As soon as you spot this human you understand that the monument you are hearing is beside the point, beside their point, beside the point you see on the screen. Humans are just points or marks, and music is always off the mark, off, off, off. And what about the grass and trees and clouds and stars? They are also beside our human points, marks and signs. But they are *not* beside music, not *quite*. They are not music, but they are not really beside it. Perhaps there is a hole through which they can hear music from time to time, and we call this phenomenon 'the music of the spheres'.

As soon as we are born we set about spoiling everything, our immaculate nappy, among other things. We would even spoil our immaculate birth if God could bestow upon us such an honour. Music is a harbinger of something that is doomed to come elsewhere or nowhere. It is a harbinger of nothing with the exception of itself. It is a multitude of presentiments, of premonitions, of invisible, unsound visions. You must be of unsound mind to feel, if only vaguely, uncertainly, a statue of music. You can talk about its statue – that is what I have done many times – but even a pianist, an artist cannot feel the statue of music, when performing intermezzi and ballads and mazurkas. You can dance a mazurka, but you will never embody a Chopin mazurka. Perhaps it is somehow embedded in my substance. I cannot say it is embedded in my body or soul or psyche. Let me be modest for once, and substance is the right word in this domain, in the domain of false modesty. When you utter or write the word 'substance', they do not take you seriously, saying you are behind the times. The times, our times (there are no other times for most human beings) are right here, whereas you are walking around the Middle Ages or along the 18th century, to put it mildly. I realise to what extent our mind, our human mind is important within the overall structure of the world. Let it be present by proxy, through the agency of the unborn. I hope they will agree to act as an intermediary between us and the world; both the inner and outside worlds. You might say that neither grass nor trees have any meaning without our human presence whose waves, palpitations and instinct are supposed to impregnate visibility, tangibility – all those leaves we might caress if no domestic animals enliven our lives. Let us glance out of the window to observe the behaviour of nature, its stance and present mood. Everything is motionless, at least within this moment that seems to be rooted to the spot, as I always say when alluding to my roots, immobility and Parmenides. And then they begin to move, all of them, almost in unison as if submitted to our love, our pulse and its syncopes. No human beings, I beg of you. Even if they are your characters, your mother's doubles and triples. Even if they remind you of your aunts and their daughters. Let them remain in the limbo where they can sustain our music-oriented meditation; from where they can help us without interfering with the statue we are listening to. The fruitful human presence is like a breeze that now and then (not all the time) cools our

faces, ripples the water, stirs the leaves lying on the death path, life path. They amount to the same path and death, don't they? All our presences are nothing but the forbidden fruit.

A mutual appreciation of genetics –do we really need genetics? To become immortal by replacing this and that in our body? Why not replace genetics by music? –animal communication studies and linguistics may lead to a full understanding of the dynamics of semiosis, and this may, in the last analysis, turn out to be no less than the definition of life. (Animal communication. I wholeheartedly agree with this part of the overall statement. It is too overall, in my opinion. Let us limit our ambitions to animals and music. No words, no movements, no signs, breeze and breath – no linguistics, in other words. The definition of life. Should I comment upon the above definition of life? There is no such thing as the last analysis. The first analysis, the first analysis, the first analysis. And then our faces grow cool, cooler, cooler, cooler. The air was so still there was hardly a ripple on the pond's surface.)

Thomas Sebeok

We are always the same. They say, 'He threw a tantrum.' And so did she, *entre parenthèses*. But this tantrum is always within the light of day and you may call it 'will to might, power or life', and all these nominations and denominations will never change anything because nothing can change anything. Chomsky thinks we live within the framework of structures and mixtures where language presides over other languages so that we have only one language, one structure, one mixture. That's right except that he speaks only about languages as if we were motionless, paralysed, deprived of other means of expression. We just must express ourselves, otherwise we do not live, according to our gurus and other thinkers. We should express ourselves either by driving luxurious cars or swimming in our pools. And Rilke speaks about the Oneness to which we must direct our steps so as not to miss the point, the point, one point. You call it what you wish, but there is no denying – what, what, what? The fact that something stirs inside your body and you may forget about your soul and psyche which do not count under the circumstances. Something stirs and you become the prime minister of a country you have never heard about. You become the president of this country or any other country and you fall in love with the most beautiful woman or man in the world. If they ask you to be more explicit, you begin to picture to yourself and to them the structure of human life and its aspiration, its winding paths and goals. You say that human life looks like a city, not necessarily the city called "Jerusalem" and situated in the heavens, in the future and on the top of the world'. First you see its ramparts and you ask yourself, 'Should I *ramp* over these ramparts in order to enter the city? Would that be in order?' According to Chomsky, you have always known French as well as all other languages – even before your birth, in your unborn state; in your unborn state of mind and body. So you use the verb '*ramp*', when talking to yourself about the walls of the city you are talking about (to yourself, to yourself). A linguist might point out that this verb could be replaced by the identical verb that English-speaking countries used, when surrounded by walls. They say, 'The spider crept up the wall. This event took place yesterday, if I remember rightly. I see a number of walls all around my body. I like freedom as do all other citizens of free countries. So I must follow the spider's example because I'm certainly not inferior to a mere spider. This spider of mine aspires to breathe the air of freedom so I must breathe the same air as well except that my air of freedom will be human, not spiderish.' And

this English-speaking person begins to creep up the walls, one wall after another. This person creeps up one wall, plummets down (God sends this human plummeting down the wall) and then begins to creep up another wall, determined to prove he/she has a certain amount of willpower or mightpower to achieve the result he is dreaming about for some obscure reason. ‘No, no, no – the reason isn’t obscure,’ we hear. ‘I’m longing to breathe the air of freedom, the freeair, so to speak. And no tyrant will ever prevent me from doing so, even if I plummet down three times a day.’

All right, you are beyond all these walls; it is always all, all and all. One phenomenon gives rise to an identical phenomenon, to a series of identical phenomena – and you find a woman or rather a pair of legs. You look at these legs and feel a sort of wave inside your organ – inside your sex, as the Russians put it, after putting everything aside; everything with the exception of their libidos. This wave engulfs all other organs, all of them, and you begin your conquest of the legs you set your heart (not only your heart) upon. Upon, upon, upon, upon, you say to yourself as you seek to accommodate the legs in question within the context of your life. But then, for no reason at all, the legs disappear and you become more spiritual – far more spiritual than the creatures whose lives are centred upon legs, tits and other implements of libidos and other Freudian gadgets. What this means may be defined thus, ‘I’m going further and further in my endeavour to reach other walls, other stages of life and death. I may call them “the death instinct” or “the life instinct”, but let me call them “whatever”, just “whatever”. I’m sure this definition will fill the bill, at least for the time being.’

Before going on, any further, we should ask ourselves the following question, ‘Is the number of walls infinite or not?’ Of course the best answer to any question is ‘not’ – not ‘no’, mind you; not, not, not. In the long run you might realise, if you go on in this fashion, that ‘not’ concerns everything, is related to all relatives including uncles, aunts (but not ants, mind you; animals and insects are sacred). The universe, according to Poincaré and Perelman, is bounded, not infinite, not anyhow and all and sundry. It is bounded, encircled and its boundaries are our boundaries, our human impotence which should forget about Giordano Bruno; but not about his stake, our stakes, his all-consuming fire. All right, we should go on – as much as any show worthy of its name. Our name is doubtless ‘show’ and so we must go on at all cost; at least at some cost, at its greater part. What is this cost about? What is anything and everything about? Of course one could object that it is too easy to encompass everything at the earliest opportunity, but I can protest; I can remove this point of view from our human, intellectual maps by saying that Kant, arguably the greatest philosopher of all times, did exactly the same by introducing, establishing and imposing the theory called ‘antinomies’. You say, ‘You’re right. Let’s drink three bottles of beer together.’ And then – not always in the same breath – you say just the opposite of what you said before drinking these bottles of beer, ‘You’re wrong, my dear fellow.’ What next? Do you vomit to make things clear, obvious and just? You consumed these bottles when firmly believing your comrade was right. Now you are convinced he is wrong *sur toutes les lignes*, on all the lines. What is more and less, according to Kant, this comrade of yours is no longer a comrade, either of yours or otherwise. You discard him by flinging a few bottles in his direction, in the direction of his face and the muscles you hate so much. You have no muscles, but he is abundantly furnished with muscles and consequently one might say, ‘He needs no old furniture, no Louis XV or XVI or XVII. He has his muscles, and these muscles can’t be bought either at auction sales or in antique shops/markets/fairs.’

We are going on and our steps can be heard almost everywhere – at least within spirituality and mystical approaches to world-enigmas. There are other walls, and it is pointless to point out there are only walls in our

woolly existence. We scale one wall and find the legs about which I talked at length – this morning, while watching the final defeat of Trump and the death of five people killed in the course of the Trump-instigated insurrection. Do they know what I am talking about? In the 26th century? The United States of America. Candidates, presidency, the Capitol Hill or Capital Mountain. Trump or trumpets that proclaim some victory or other. There is a defeat, but the trumpets shout from the rooftops – from the roof of the Capitol Hill, if you please – that Trump has won along all the lines you can see down below and up there, up there; mostly up there, as it is. That is what you find beyond the wall you have scaled in the hope of finding God or a sort of relief; or Paradise; either on earth or on anything, on anything whatsoever. You must have searched for this paradise for years, years, years, centuries and so on. For a while the United States of America was your paradise, your personal paradise shared (with you) by so many people, so many, so grandiose, as they say. And now? Where is this ideal democracy, the oldest democracy we can boast about on the surface of the Earth? Let us look for democracy in a breath of fresh air or in a poem; or in both.

This is a breath of fresh air.

How fresh it is! How free and good.

This breath of air is not evil,

Not at all. You have either not

Or all. No alternative but

There are legs and your libido does not give a damn about these legs, contrary to what might be expected, considering your age and general fatigue. But you yearn for other treats, delicious bits of reality and unreality, and the walls you are seeing in front of you begin to crumble, slowly but surely. ‘Sure, sure, sure,’ you hear all around you and finally something last, the very last something crumbles and without a shred of clothing on you step into the space where a music box stands as if on its own. You hear no music, no trills, no frills; there is some atmosphere, another atmosphere, and all these atmospheres converge on the box from which there comes the paradise you have been waiting for all your life. Paradisiacal waves, inaudible sounds and pauses. And you know you should on no account get closer to this box, otherwise everything will disappear once and for all, if once could be repeated a thousand times in a row. You see this row, you see a number of onces, ounces, and once again the problem of oneness comes to the fore, and you see many fores on one oneness only. How could you put all these fores together to create, recreate the Absolute about which so many Bradleys talked at length in their interminable books? ‘The connection between the signifier (the material notation) and the signified (mental concept engendered by the signifier) is so comprehensively learned at an early age by sign users that virtually no separation between the two is ever experienced’ (Émile Benveniste). But what if you happen to signify God in spite of all the nos you experience as you continue your march towards His Majesty? There are people who can no longer hear the word God – they are weary of both the word and God (and also of yourself), of both the signifier and signified. What if there is no separation between them, between you and the Almighty? You put your hand somewhere and ask yourself what you feel. The Signifier? The Signified? Yourself, Himself? “‘I’ is surely a sign which contains an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified’ (Saussure). The word ‘God’ for English speakers provokes a mental concept of ‘Godliness’ or ‘Godlessness’ – it depends on your ‘I’, on your weariness, clumsiness and

insignificance. But there is such immediacy – I am talking about the above provocation, about the mental concept and the word – that you assure yourself and your assuredness accompanies you through thick and thin, through fair weather and foul. You are assured, ensured that the process of connecting a signifier (you) to a signified (God) has not even happened. So you begin to strike out unnecessary, unwieldy, bulky words such as signifier, signified, God, happening. Soon you reach the stage which enables you to live with the strokes of your pen, with lines that exclude, annihilate both concepts and nonsense. Only lines, only lines. Is that what Buddhists speak of so arduously and convincingly. Of course they also get rid of these lines, of this network (no relations, links) of spider's web where you might be caught unless you burn all this, burn, burn, burn, by means of the Buddha's famous fire-dedicated sermon. 'Everywhere,' it says, 'there are fires, fires, fires. Birnham Wood is a burning wood, as a matter of fact. The world is on fire. In Tarkovsky's *A Mirror* there's also a burning hut – the burning past, in other words. Let it burn, as Julius Caesar said about the Library of Alexandria. Your sleeve is burning. Let it burn. They say, "This fabric burns very easily, so keep it well away from heat." But I tell you, "Do not keep it well away from heat. Go to flames, wherever you see them within walking distance, and cross this distance, traverse this desert. Bathe in the flames you discovered in days of yore and your consciousness or rather its ashes will liberate you from your libido, will-to-power and the power itself. Go to Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* and swim for a while in the flames – not in the Rhine, mind you.'

DIARRHOEA

Chomsky maintains that we are born with a number of highly specific grammatical rules; they are in-built and no matter how hard we try to remove them from our brain and tongue, they remain in-built, built-in, rooted to the spot. We say to ourselves that languages lead us and others astray, that it is much easier to show everybody a gold ingot, avoiding thereby both incontinence and grammatical errors which may expose us to ridicule, making a laughing stock of our mental capacities. Our interlocutor is about to sign an important contract with us and we have already said to him or her, 'It's a deal,' and you have never omitted to put an exclamation mark at the end of your statement. Of course you reminded the big dealer you have been talking to for hours that your firm could lose a lot of money if the deal is unsuccessful, but he assured you doubly and triply. 'I assure you doubly and triply that the deal will be more than successful. It'll be sensational.' And then, all of a sudden, you make a mistake, a linguistic mistake, and your would-be partner says to himself, 'No way, no way. This man can't speak English properly. By the way, women always speak English correctly, beautifully, gracefully and delicately. But this man is a boor, a Russian bear. No deal – either big or small – is advisable in this context where he stubbornly talks nonsense peppered with faults of all kinds. But Chomsky thinks – he continues to think so in spite of his political condemnations and anti-Trumpian stance – that in our mother's womb we swallow a lot of rules, especially if our mother consumes the right sort of food; a lot of vegetables, fruit and so on. Once upon a time, someone said to your mother, 'If you ate more fibre you wouldn't get constipated,' and your mother began to eat a lot of fibre, a prodigious quantity of fibre. And once upon the same time, at another once of the same time, she confessed to you that during a sixth-month period, many years ago, she suffered dramatically from constipation. 'You were already in my womb, my dear. And I thought, "My baby might suffer from this constipation of mine, which would reduce his or her life expectancy rather drastically, not to say tragically.' You were quite young on the day of this

confession and so you asked your mother a stupid question, unworthy of a grown-up human being, ‘Weren’t you afraid of your diarrhoea?’

‘Why should I have been afraid of it?’ she asked.

‘Because the constipation you touched upon enabled me to keep my embryo within your womb – your belly, if you wish.’

‘I don’t wish anything of the kind,’ your mother replied. ‘You’re talking rubbish, and I’m rather weary of your rubbish and immature behaviour.’

‘Unless you receive these rules through your mother’s milk,’ Noam Chomsky went on.

‘Wouldn’t it be too late?’ asked one of his opponents.

‘No, no, not all. But you should acquire these rules before being weaned.’

‘And what about youngsters, our youngsters?’

‘What *about* them?’ asked Chomsky.

‘This generation has been weaned on computer games,’ answered yet another opponent.

What if you do not receive any information, when enjoying the warmth and hospitality of your mother’s womb? No information comes with the exception of all these juices you cannot recognise because you are not even acquainted (not yet) with other human juices: orange juice, tomato juice. By the way, as I enlarged upon the circular walls at the core of which there is a kind of music box from which there issue inaudible sounds, I forgot to tell you about a multitude of orange trees overloaded with oranges and other fruit. That section might be called ‘The Health Department’ on account of its preoccupation with our physical wellbeing. True enough, many of our fellow-creatures think only in terms of their health, saying to all and sundry, ‘There’s nothing more important in human life than health, than organic food and the total absence of viruses, and the normal quantity of cholesterol. Why read your philosophers who knew nothing about cholesterol, if we’re not mistaken? Did Plato ever talk about cholesterol? And even the prostate was beyond his ken, his ideas and caverns.’ There are many layers in our circular, encircled world, and you may risk your life a few thousand times before you accede to the inaudible music which spreads its harmonies everywhere, unexpectedly flooding the audible, cacophonic, horrible world. This flood is the opposite of The Flood we are acquainted with, and the storm of the American Senate is also situated at the opposite pole of the musical, inaudible phenomenon. Once again I am preoccupied with the information you can count upon, when talking about Trump and even the Senate invaded by the Trump-infatuated mob. Sure enough, mobs come and go, and for all its protection and self-sufficiency, the American Senate may suffer from yet another series of mobs and wounds in the not-too-distant future: Trump’s capacity to grow almost everywhere is comparable to mushrooms and their genes. At first our go-getters content themselves with status symbols such as posh cars, restaurants and cruises. Then they begin to think in terms of power, real power, the power talking to crowds from rostrums, from television screens. And then the Senate is invaded by those whose ears and eyebrows are cocked. ‘Steal, steal, stop the steal!’ they shout because your will-to-power overreaches itself, whenever somebody (arguably) takes something from you or from your buddy. You run towards the stolen object, you overrun it, run back, you circle around the stolen goods, and suddenly it dawns upon you that the stolen goods are not as good as all that. So you turn back definitively, saying to yourself, ‘Well, let them (these bads) remain in the hands of those bastards.’ That is how human history unfolds itself.

But let us return to the nourishment I light-heartedly abandoned some time ago, eager as I was to explore the territory of stolen goods, bads and mediocrities. Once I gave shelter to my neighbours who think only in terms of money, and I am not even sure these terms are identical to the power dissected by Nietzsche's anatomical writings. These neighbours of mine acknowledge their involvement with the financial structures of the world as follows, 'My father talked to me only about money. What a pity I didn't study the piano in my childhood and youth.'

I said to this woman, 'I wouldn't mind devoting my life to money, on the condition that the money we're talking about doesn't limit their demographics to a few millions euros. I wouldn't sacrifice my life for the sake of a few million. What a waste! Living in a spiritual, artistic wasteland for the sake of a few roubles (kopecks, rather) isn't worth our while, in my opinion. You can slog your guts out for the sake of a few billion – not millions, mind you. And judging from your achievements, your bank accounts aren't located within the realms I've just described in my answer to your standpoint, to the will-to-power you gave us an account of at the beginning of our dinner.'

I propose to return once again to the food we get all along our lives. This time I had rather discuss the food somehow connected to the perennial problem created by our languages and their uses (should I add the word 'abuse' or does that go without saying, without adding?). Suppose our mother or rather her womb conveys the following piece of advice (or prophecy) to us: 'My son will have a billion dollars after our family's celebration of his 25th birthday.' Of course, at the womb-confined stage of your human development, your wits are not in perfect running order so your mother repeats her prediction in a slightly different form, hoping you might eventually get her meaning, 'After my son drank a bottle of champagne I'd given him for his 25th birthday, he got a billion dollars from my husband.' What makes us (and all other humanists) happy about this method of teaching eternal truths is the fact that, while acquiring the knowledge centred upon the significance of money in our existence, our child also learns his native tongue – along with all other tongues, according to Noam Chomsky. Their structures are similar to whatever we say either in our bathrooms or at any dinner table, and so the child we coddle and pamper as he lies peacefully in his mother's womb learns the ways of the world without raising a finger. One afternoon, the mother says to her by tapping a few signs, a few rhythms and algorithms on her belly (or by word of mouth):

'I want you to learn a few languages. Apart from your native language, you'd better learn English, while you're at it. I mean you should learn foreign languages in your cradle, otherwise you might have a lot of problems during your business talks and walks.'

Contrary to all expectations and calculations, the child begins to speak instead of crying and biting human tendons and nerves: 'What are you talking about? English is my native language.'

'All right, all right,' says the mother. 'In that case, you should learn French, German, Spanish, Italian and Chinese. They all have the same roots. If you succeed in this undertaking, you'll get three billion dollars. As Kathy did.'

'What? What?'

'For her 20th birthday.'

'What did you say about Kathy?' asks the child. 'Who *is* she, in the first place?'

'I'm glad you didn't say, "In the second place", which means that Chomsky's universal grammar is not a load of claptrap.'

'Don't try and obfuscate the main issue,' says the child. 'Who is Kathy? In the second place.'

What do you learn in your mother's uterus which commonly called her belly or *ventre* (in French: there are people who do not know the first thing about the French language; and all other languages, come to think of it; in English)? Structures, some languages or other, some syllables, and grammar, the universal grammar; or just the local grammar, which is quite enough for your shopping list, your visits to shops and markets. You may point to a fish without saying anything, not even 'that' and they deliver this fish to your hands, provided the same hands are capable of handing them a number of banknotes or a credit card. You can also learn something about music and its divine simplicity, as common commoners say (as professional musicians define them). They always speak of simplicity, those simpletons; but every tone is rather complex, to tell the truth. I wonder, in the first and also in the second place, why Ramanujan knew so much about the world and also about infinity, as they affirm in a recent film devoted and dedicated (I always combine and often mix these adjectives) to his short-lived and much-achieved existence. Did his mother expose his embryo – for once, I do not have to add her – to a divine intervention, for he did talk about a goddess; not Kundalini whom I knew almost by heart at some point. What goddess *did* he mention in his dialogues with Hardy? I think sometimes and always it is enough to touch upon either the Almighty or a localmighty – to become a great mathematician or writer or poet or philosopher. You say, 'I listen to Katumatumi the First' and everyone reads your notes, poems and what not. What about writing a poem entitled *What Not*?

What is not is Not,
 Either in English or in
 German or any other language.
 Are there other languages outside
 Not? I do Not think so. And even if I did
 Think so, nothing would ever happen. Not even
 Did, not, out, are, side, is and

The point is I would like to pinpoint the problem about which, as usual, I know next to nothing. I wonder where this next – if scrutinised within this context – comes from; perhaps from 'from'; run to think of it; run to intuit it. He intuited that I was worried about the situation, as they usually say, when thinking about the way their neighbours, friends and colleagues spy upon them and their doings, turning them into their undoings. What I am preoccupied with actually boils down to the sentence pronounced by Ramanujan – not on his deathbed, if I remember rightly. It is true that, given his premature death, his deathbed was always not only within his body's reach, but also within his body, as it were. It is as if he had been carrying his death about, in his body's vicinity or proximity; or just in his attaché case, assuming there were many attaché cases in the world where he lived and died. In India, among other places.

Why, why, why did he say at some point? No equation makes sense within my field of vision unless it expresses a thought of God. I might think – if I allow myself to have such thoughts – that anything you do or meditate upon is linked to God's thoughts; and intentions; it goes without saying or writing. This means that even the gibberish expressed either by my thoughts and bouts of inspiration or a mere demonstration of my ignorance of mathematics – 9897867Y656579878YY=8888888888 – comes from God about Whom I speak indefinitely, definitely and eternally. When Ramanujan spoke about Him or even What, almost everyone took him seriously,

saying, 'He's right because what he says can't be fabricated in our lie-flooded laboratories.' (Are lies fluid? Are they liquids, in their own right; or not? I think I am vague, indefinable, no pigeonholing, you know. I am neither a pigeon nor a hole. How could you pigeonhole me? I should take up this subject after leaving it off right now, somewhere; on my writing desk perhaps.) Whatever I say is a sort of expression, just the expression of a thought which belongs to a divinity, if we stay in India for a while, or the Holy Trinity, if we move towards the West. And even in Russia where they mix everything including the East and the West, they might say to you, 'You're not God's messenger because you're talking rubbish.' Of course you can answer thus, as they often do, whatever the circumstances and countries, 'It's rubbish that talks through me.'

'Of course,' they usually answer. 'But why do you allow all this rubbish to talk through your being?'

'Because I can't do otherwise.'

'Because you can't immobilise the rubbish coming from your mouth, lungs and soul?'

'Because I can't say "No" to God.'

That is how the Russians mostly talk, even if no one listens to them, which happens rather often.

But what about Ramanujan? What *around* him, I am tempted to ask? What is *around* him at this date and age, at this space and tomb? What did Hardy say at his (Ramanujan's) funeral? (It is no easy task writing his name in full. So I will never do it.) He said, 'His equations are right because no one could ever have invented them either on the spur of the moment or on the spur of eternity.' Do I think their Hardy was right? Why should I think in the realm where everything happens if God constantly opens His and Her mouth? What rises from the depth where nothing remains forever except our personal eternity? And where is my personal eternity? may I ask. Not in the world where slogans and dirt are scattered around on a daily basis; and this basis grows smaller and smaller. And if you say, 'It's growing narrower and narrower,' they (me included) might object that narrower is a long word so it is better to say, 'Not, no, not, no, go, go, go, hell.'

SPIRITS ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN BEER, BUT THEY GET YOU DRUNK FASTER

And then, in his courtesy, our Lord answered me, by giving me the mysterious and wonderful illustration of the lord who had a servant. And he helped me to understand the significance of each of them. In the lord and in the servant alike I saw a twofold truth expressed; I saw it first in my spirit in physical outline, and then it was shown more spiritually without any such outline.

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of *Divine Love*

I wonder if the lives of those whose questions remain somewhere on the surface, being unable to reach the very core of their beings, are really happy? All right, they *are* happy, according to the stories I read in my youth. (They don't give a damn and they are happy, to all intents and purposes.) But will they obtain what they call a train/bus/plane ticket, enabling them to reach Paradise in no time at all? Or after a few thousand years spent elsewhere; in one of Dostoevsky's novels, for instance? I remember, I still recall, for all the deficiencies displayed by my memory, that Richard Feynman said, 'I'm not afraid of the universe's global and unfathomable mysteries. I welcome them, moreover, moreover, moreover.' Are our answers error-ridden to *this* point? Morelesser, morelesser, morelesser, morelesser. We are molested by almost everybody, even by insects, let alone by our fathers

or stepfathers who take a step in our direction as if to remind us they are not really our fathers and begin to molest us physically, chemically, biologically. Lest, lest, lest, as if you we could not survive unmolested, as if it were the principal trend, trait of our lives that does not care about us. And if we lodge a plaint, a complaint, if a lawsuit is somewhere in the vicinity of our quarrels and bodies, they (all circumstances, all our buddies and bodies) say to us, 'God can't love you. He's got other fish to fry.' 'But does He fry this fish or leave it somewhere on the floor, unattended? We're on the floor, unattended. Are you aware of our material envelope subjected to weathers and feathers that float in the sky, in the air and land upon our nostrils to preclude our communication with the air?

At some point or at some circle, some square I spoke about the unborn whose very shadows make no appearances in the world where there are only suns, moons and rains. Perhaps the world began thus: there was a shadow somewhere and some dinosaur or other loved (lived with) this shadow to distraction – to such a degree of distraction that he could not walk by it, by its side, without plunging his claws into it as if to honour its darkness and coolness. And hunters, invisible hunters, noticed his deviation from the trajectory established by a sunny disposition of the universe, and they realised they could capture and kill this dinosaur, provided they lay in wait for him within this shadow or just within its whereabouts. That is probably how the human race began – in the shadow, lying in wait for its victims. Or near this shadow; lying in wait for yet another murder. I said already that only the unborn could satisfy my trend, tendency, my aesthetic vision because you must feel something if you realise there is something unborn; and the unborn are far superior to whatever or whoever are born, for the simple reason that all their potentialities are still within their substances: they do not lie scattered around the numerous floors of the skyscrapers we always admire from afar, seldom from inside. (I lived in such a skyscraper for more than 20 years.) This morning I was asking myself the following question, 'Is it better to think about the unborn in the abstract or think they will overstep their bounds sooner or later and we shall find ourselves in their obstinate presence (how obstinate these newborn are)? You know something, even if your aversion to knowledge and discoveries is great (and my fear is great). But (in the first place) you should know what you might be confronted with in the near future: the unborn who will never be born, whatever their midwives' qualities and qualifications; or the unborn who will never be offered an opportunity to be born either on Earth or on Venus. We know there is something you might talk about if you feel like it, but you do not feel like anything because you do not like anything. So you neither talk nor smoke; you remain in your corner, as they say, to humiliate you even more than what has been achieved so far. They humiliate you day and night, and if you say to them, 'Please stop humiliating me. You've been doing this for the last twelve hours. Do you really have to go on? Do you really have to humiliate me at night?' And they answer you, 'We have yet another humiliation session in the morning so we're training ourselves for this exam, otherwise we might fail it and our boss might be disappointed. And we think we might be fired because in the 21st century there was an actor called Donald Trump. From time to time, this actor used to say, 'You're fired, you're fire, you're fire.' First we thought he was speaking of the fire burning in the grate, but then we realised there were people all around him. That's why you keep talking about the born, we suppose.' 'You suppose right,' I say. 'The unborn may be created in God's image because they're invisible, they're just an idea. So is God. You can neither describe him nor attribute to him any attributes. And what would you do with the unborn? How would you *conceive* them? Would you conceive them at all? Should you conceive them with regard to their unborn, unregistered condition? Do you know they're unborn and consequently exist somewhere, whatever their states of mind and body? Suppose there is a plain somewhere and you know this plain does exist, although

you cannot see it either properly or improperly. Does anything happen on this plain? – the question you ask yourself from time to time. Does this plain exist for the sake of anything, *aussi moche soit-elle*, as the French put it, not only when speaking about plains? We could also speak of subterranean nations who are slaves like those described by H. G. Wells in one of his anti-clerical novels. They crawl through the bowels of the Moon and no priest ever worms information out of them. What kind of information? The priest longs to hear a long account focused upon their sins, and given that only the unborn are my subject matter, I cannot see (for the life of me) why I should take care of anybody else. What I have in mind has nothing in common with human beings, God forbid. Humans forbid: there are humans who have no wish to be reborn. When you broach the subject they say in unison (in my books characters and ordinary people often speak in unison: I do not have a myriad nonsenses in my chest of drawers): ‘I hope the multitude of projects and missions you harbour in your mind will never come to fruition, God forbid, God forbid, God forbid. And if God forbids you nothing, we’ll forbid you everything.’

What do I have on my music rest? I always have something on it. This time it is the history of humankind viewed by a priest or an ordinary man who believes in progress, in the path you are bound to follow so as to reach mountains, rivers, milk, fruit such as oranges or even lemons. As usual, they say to you, ‘You’re a *homo aesthetcus* at this stage of your growth. Do you know what that is?’ You pick up a statuette and say, ‘This might be exhibited as a characteristic of my attitude towards life. I like beauty, design and even the taste of beauty in my mouth. No, I think I must have confused two trends that mark the development and growth of humankind. One is devoted to aesthetics, to bibelots. At the beginning of your race, of its birth and cumbersome development, you find all sorts of jewels that you waste no time in hanging on your wives’ and boys’ necks. They hang there and you ask yourself if you could or could not hang yourself from them once and for all, leaving all your karmas behind. Of course these karmas are very good runners so they catch up with you at the first opportunity, at the second opportunity, at the third opportunity. Now you have three karmas in your body, out of it – in your room, in your garden. You might even have *five* karmas in your present life, but you are weary of counting karmas and the Marfas you see in Mussorgsky’s operas. And even an ordinary harp raises a lot of suspicions in your ill-treated mind.

They are unborn, but we know something about their existence; not too much, not too much. They are more or less like a piece of music you are unlikely to hear one day or another. You know this music resounds without evincing any wish to resound. And if this music were about to come to the fore, as I say, it might at first refuse to resound – it is too vulgar, you know, as they say. The unborn, the never-to-be-born, as I call them cannot even be discussed during a colloquium where they are likely to speak of architecture and creatures. They are unborn and you know about them only because you are sure they have been created in the image of God. And God is invisible, although He is born; or unborn. You know there is something, somebody or God whose prerogatives are far superior to all your prerogatives, qualities, and whatever else you can harbour in your mind. Your harbour of peace. If you think they might be born one day or one night – they are often born at night – you say, ‘These unborn entities should never be born; that’s the main rule we must follow unless we collapse and bleed until the end, until a number of tombstones appear. But if we know that the unborn will never be born, not even virtually, we can sleep like Sleeping Beauty; provided we are never awakened by a prince or a priest. The unborn exist as a concept; and the human race does not even exist as a concept. Perhaps, perhaps. There are beings we know nothing about and whose capacity to ape both classical traditions and our modern behaviour is remarkable except that I do not like either; I do not like anything, as a matter of fact. What could I like in this world of ours that I browse through on

the Internet? You insert the name of an actress into it, you add 'legs' or 'breasts' or 'nude' and they work, all of them; all chips and internets work to show you what you are aspiring to see, if only for a second. You get an eyeful of this. You get an eyeful of that. Your eye seems to be full; yet you go on filling it to the brim, to the brain.

And what if everything could stop, not only births, deaths, Covids? What if life could stop in spite of its bombastic announcements? Life has a stop, life has a stop. What informs you of this death? Twitter? He's such a twit! You stupid twit! You mediocre twit! You acceptable twit! Ramanujan said something else when showing his equations, numbers and figures to his wife. He said, at least according to my recollection, that they were paintings without colours, and the colours should be added to them by the figments of her imagination. And whenever I speak about the unborn and the role they play in the monument to God's creation I mean somewhat comparable, not to say identical. The world is like Plato's Academy, like his esoteric teaching which was not accessible to nincompoops among whom I can be found at this stage of my development, of my gradual degradation. The world may be found in Ramanujan's notebooks and we look at them all the time, even if we are unaware of their presence, of the world's colourful absence. The world does not feature humans, in its ideal form and shape; only its shape features these creatures, those run-getters. See how they run, see how. Do you see colours, Ramanujan's colours and paintings? You see only figures, numbers, counts, accounts that do not account for the beauty of the world. So the unborn are colourful in spite of their chronic absence. They must suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome. They probably dream of being included, sucked into the world, instead of being continuously sacked from it. They must be weary of their own sterile dreams. They might think the world is better than their non-being. In other words, *Sein* is better than *Nein*. They might think that the amount of time spent by Heidegger – when, where? In his book *Sein und Zeit* – was highly justified by the vital significance of *Sein*, by its vitality, *vita nuova*, *olda*, *presenta*, *balda* and so on. They might think that a think of such magnitude would never have devoted so many hours of his life to the subject entirely unworthy of his attention and dignity. So they repeat, I suppose, the following slogan, day and night, '*Sein – Heil, Sein – Heil!*' Is that what they used to shout during their parades? Or did they just scream, 'Love from Sophie. PS Say hi to Gemma. Hi, Lewis. How are you? Oh hi, Ben. Hey! What are you doing with my car? Hey, are you guys coming to Angela's party?'

Let them remain unborn; for God's sake; otherwise one might conclude there is no God; either on the surface of the Earth or in heaven; or under the surface of the Earth, God forbid. God is neither dead nor buried, we might conclude upon looking at the specimens of his creational élan and nostalgia. (For what? For another *Sein*? For another *Heil*?) They neither think nor feel nor touch. They are just the colours you cannot see, whenever you peruse Ramanujan's notebooks, notes, figures, equations; his =====. 'And then, in his courtesy, our Lord answered me, by giving me the mysterious and wonderful illustration of the lord who had a servant.' Ramanujan was his servant; so was I, so am I; at least I hope so: it is not enough to kneel down and pray all day long, spending even your night on all fours, without adding anything to these fours. There are insects that spend their lives on all thousand, and some of my fellow creatures vie with them as they run from here to there, from counts to accounts. *Sein – Vie, Sein – Vie*. Nothing to do with *my* life. *Sein – My, Sein – Mine*. 'And he helped me to understand the significance of each of them' – on condition that all of them are unborn. 'In the lord and in the servant alike I saw a twofold truth expressed; I saw it first in my spirit, in physical outline, and then it was shown more spiritually without any such outline.' That is how you penetrate the world of the unborn, the world of the world's eternal beauty. They are there, in spirits, in figments, in filaments; invisible filaments. They are there and

you know they are created in God's image, if any, if some, if there and where. My pretty maid, my pretty. What is a physical outline? Ramanujan's equations, notebooks, notes, music. And then there come colours and suddenly all outlines disappear as if there were only colours, colourless colours. Without any such outlines, without any such outlines. The world *is* beautiful – without any such outlines; without any outlines; at all, at all, at all.

As if I'd known what would come
 And stay and be. Once in a while.
 And they all stay, for there are no
 Stays or done, only remains and all,
 As if there were only all, nothing else.

We have already paid homage to aesthetics and their domination of the human race at some point of its development; in some of its areas. A savage, perhaps one of Rousseau's glorified savages, was at one with nature and trees, bushes and other implements of the original creation, which often patted all these savages on the shoulders, saying or rather intimating, 'Friend, friend, friend.' And the savages answered invariably, 'Friend, friend, friend,' and apparently this is the only word they were acquainted with, although some scientists affirm they also knew and even used, resorted to, the word 'love'. But one may rightfully ask if the word 'love' and the notion corresponding to this word are identical to each other, if they are conjoined or identical twins. They might be friends, for all I know, calling each other 'friend, friend, friend' at every opportunity, however flimsy, unreliable.

The next stage described by our scientists refers to religion as if something in this awfully profane world did not refer to the gods and all other almighties. What I am talking about amounts to the rather current expression among the specialists who split our history into periods and end of stories, drawing a lot of frontiers on their maps which do not always coincide with *my* map, *my* truth. They talk about *homo religiosus* and their definitions of this human category do not radically differ from savages, their categories, because their *homo* spends its time on its knees. (At this stage of human development, our species does not deserve either he or she, contrary to what humanists declare in their declarations.) Yes, this *homo* kneels down as soon as it gets up; and sometimes this *homo* sleeps in a sitting position so as not to have to kneel down. It wakes, opens its eyes and slips to the ground without activating its knees and other joints. Then it begins to while away its mornings, afternoons and evenings, which are spent rather peacefully one after another, accompanied by a lot of prayers; or just one endless prayer coming from the savage and the bushes you can find in its vicinity and company. Sometimes (and this happens rather often) you cannot really tell a savage from a bush as if Dante were back, depicting one of his torments, the torments he inflicted on his inhabitants of Hell, of his diabolical kingdom. So you say to yourself, 'I'm almost certain it is a bush I see, although I'm not quite sure it belongs to what they call flora.' Whenever using the word 'they' those ists (as I call them) thought about the future and its generations – about civilised people, in other words.

Historians often wonder how this sapiens came up with the idea called 'wheel' or 'meals on wheels'. Why should we call it 'meals on wheels'? Because our wheel, the one we are acquainted with thanks to our cars and wheelbarrows, originated in our needs, in our appetites that may actually come before meals, whatever the French

say on the subject. So their (its) appetite would come – out of the blue or out of a bush – and frantically they began to move around in search of food: they did not like the taste of bushes, of their leaves and stems. They preferred flower stems, to tell the truth, but flowers were not always within walking (kneeling) distance. So they had to content themselves with bushes or grains of sand, as the case might be. But they liked neither and slowly but surely their appetites drove them towards physics, inventions and differential calculus. That is how the wheel came or rather rolled to the fore, becoming an unavoidable feature of our lives. Of course we could try and avoid wheels' presence within our daily routine, but we do not see why we should decline this offer of the world's immovable structure. There are wheels and meals in the world, and we should not envisage other solutions to our problems. After all, neither wheels nor meals necessarily distract us from our main, vital duty – praying to God and worshipping His angels. Of course there are people who forget both whenever a tin of caviar makes its appearance on their tables; let alone a bottle of vodka. But they are exceptions to the rule we honour in order not to catch a multitude of viruses and other deadly particles, atoms and electrons.

Anyway, exceptions count, even if rules are confirmed, whenever they crop up, often unexpectedly. And that is why – on account of this confirmation – religious persons are outmatched by technology-minded ones, and we have no alternative but to attribute to the latter category a sort of title. We call them '*homo technologicus*', and they proudly put forth their theories, their vision of our world and its goals. They say, for instance, that a washing machine is far more important than a prayer; and icons, in their opinion, are precious only because you can sell them and buy computers and helicopters. (Helicopters, the latest fad.) Apparently, this trend began to take off in Ancient Rome where they built many constructions which had only functional functions, so to speak: no artistry involved, in other terms. A Russian poet put it as follows, 'Are Apollo and the statues dedicated to his memory inferior to chamber pots?' And when you speak to those people about light and its prerogatives – a manifestation of divine elements in our universe – they say that light does not stream from angels and archangels. It is actually a physical phenomenon based on the behaviour of electrons that fidget, fudge and hop all the time. And whenever they dance – as they do in the *Paradiso* – you can see a ray in the sky or elsewhere. And this ray of light – or any other ray, for that matter – has nothing to do with the light highly praised by poets and mystics. An electron jumps, meets another electron or quark, and the light about which the Bible informed us many centuries ago comes into existence. No room for God, anyway. But we talk about their baths, bridges, canals, channels, and we write about them and other characteristics associated in our mind with the Roman Empire. And we compare this spirit with the RomanCatholic Church and the churches built on its spiritual initiative. These churches have nothing in common with baths, bathrooms and saunas unless you bring in the rite of baptism in the course of which you might experience whatever our body enjoys in our bathrooms. And of course these *technologicuses* do not fail to touch upon the political structure invented by those Romans. What is more, they seem to have put those proposals into practice. One cannot help wondering, however, *warum* those practices did not prevent the Roman Empire from decline, fall and utter collapse.

SPIRITS ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN BEER, BUT THEY GET YOU DRUNK FASTER (II)

And in the *lord* was shown his compassion and pity for Adam's distress, and in the *lord* again was shown the exalted nobility and eternal honour to which humanity has attained by virtue of the passion and death of his beloved Son. For this reason he rejoices tremendously over his *falling* into the Virgin's womb, because of man's subsequent

exaltation and utter happiness beyond anything we should have known if he had not fallen. I was led by God to understand this surpassing nobility at the very moment I saw the servant fall.

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

It does not really matter whether we understand this excerpt either fully or truly, for all our attachment to the values unequivocally proclaimed by it. What counts is its unquestionable superiority in the domain where it successfully struggles with high technology and also low technology exemplified by washing machines and so on. In the first place, we find the word (and the world) of love in the very title of the work, which speaks volumes about its luminous context; let alone the word 'divine': its beneficent ramifications are beyond any doubt. And let me remind you that only a facetious, artificial aspect of love can be found in technological contraptions. For instance, in Tokyo you might take a bus and go to the airport called 'Narita'. This bus is called 'Friendly Limousine', which might remind you of love or friendship – facetiously. And the seriousness of our love, its obstacles, goals and perspectives are not on the same wavelength with jokes and childlike demonstrations of playfulness. There are other words in the above-quoted text and they attract our attention not only on account of their seriousness; and yet they are serious enough to arouse admiration in our mind, psyche and memory related to what they call 'lifelong experience'. These words are 'compassion and pity', and even if we do not agree with the attribution of these words to Adam whom we should despise for his inconsiderate behaviour in Paradise that we seem to have lost alongside Milton and his heroes; or anti-heroes, rather. For some time I have been asking myself if I should really take pity on Trump in spite of his numerous faults, shortcomings and downright crimes. Of course he will have been forgotten in the days where I optimistically situate the publication of my book, but the question I put forward may concern all those whose ambitions overreach themselves (both the ambitions and their sources) so that they (those ambitions) come crashing down on the heads of their owners and victims; at some point or other, at some stage on the path of their mutual existences. What happens next? ask both the victims and the authors of their biographies. They grow desperate, make a lot of phone calls to the people they hardly know, hop across the grass like rabbits or birds. They say, 'The election was rigged (let me remind you that Trump was the president of the United for four years) and no one seems to come to my rescue. And yet everything just seems to happen and therefore everything and everybody – friends and foes alike – are just delusions, delusions, delusions of grandeur, decadence. Dust, dust, dust, dust, dust and ashes.' And we experience a modicum of pity for the creatures that emit these sounds, groans, moans and so on. And if we do, we might count on the only path leading to Paradise and its luxuries, its fundamental luxuriousness.

According to the same text and ideas, in days of yore humanity must have attained the nobility and eternal honour that comes only from our fruitful contact with humility and the eyes of needles, if I remember rightly the sacred texts to which the text alludes profusely – not only in the above excerpt. But how, by what means, may I ask did they attain this nobility, this eternal honour? By virtue of the passion and death of His beloved Son. All this is clear, as clear as day instead of being as clear as mud. What follows, however, sheds no light whatsoever on what precedes, at the beginning of the passage. 'For this reason he rejoices tremendously over his *falling* into the Virgin's womb.' Of course an army of blasphemers would miss no opportunity to mock our everlasting harmony by saying you never *fall* into the Virgin's womb: you grow *inside* it, as it were. The Virgin's womb is

the soul where the Tree of Life, set in motion by a dozen seeds, grows studiously, determined to vie with the trees one sees in your garden. Utter happiness, utter happiness. We grow suspicious – and for all its growth, the Tree of Life never grows suspicious – as we light upon this definition of our existence, even if only a tiny portion of it deserves such a hymn, such an oratorio. We have no alternative but to believe in what we read in sacred books, be they of Christian or Buddhist origin. So we accept this judgment, this observation and say to others, ‘I was led by God to understand this surpassing nobility at the very moment I saw the servant fall.’ And we hope that the people we are talking to will never question us on the subject, saying, ‘Whose fall have you described so eloquently and brilliantly, pray? Whose servant are you talking about? *Your* servant? You can’t speak about God’s Son in this fashion, considering that the Holy Trinity is made up of three superior substances among whom there are no servants, no masters. There are only masters in their midst, as a matter of fact.’

Let us return to the unborn, to their space where you can finally encounter God’s bounty: He allowed his subjects not to participate in the game of life, however exciting (life, life, speaking about life) from Trump’s point of view. He frequently played golf instead of repeating day in day out, ‘In the line of duty, in the line of duty.’ Don’t you think they expand our universe, all those unborn individuals, those humans spending their eternity somewhere, in some some, in some where? They *are* created in God’s image, and the image they proclaim from their rooftops – from nowhere, from nowhere – is an authentic image of God: he is also nowhere or somewhere, out of reach: *nì, nì, nì*, as they say. But we intuit His (and their) presence; for a while, during the space of an intuition, we live in their space. And we know they exist, in spite of their non-existence and other non, non, non. Their light – I don’t really have to speak of illuminations and revelations – takes care of itself within and without our reach, understanding, mind and feelings. Just outside; just inside. Just, just, just. A friendly just, an ominous and wonderful presence. Hidden and revealed, relevant. What can be done does not really matter. You stand there or sit there or lie there and somewhere else, at the same time; they speak of this phenomenon in their lectures about many worlds which I shall reach in due course. And this course is due, this course is due – not overdue, I hope quite sincerely. They are held outside crimes and misdemeanours. What can you do outside of Creation? Knock on its doors? Knock, knock, knock, as they have always been saying after Shakespeare’s contribution to the subject.

Apparently death is the most frightful aspect of life on Earth and on any other planet or contraption of this kind; or other. But if you die without quitting your status, according to which you are an incurable atheist, you might not feel *His* death in your veins and sinews. So you die alone, and it is pointless to think about your relatives and their ends, their deathbeds; or about the hospitals where they welcomed your last contribution to their earthly happiness. But if you do feel it (or rather *Him*) you are not alone, although you are not one of the thieves who accompanied Him on the day we all read about in some book or other, not necessarily in the Gospels. You are not alone as if you could unmistakably give Him a big bear hug or just a small bear hug – any bear hug, any hug at all; in spite of the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus, our vigilance and wisdom. (Unlike Trump, the coronavirus is still on the agenda, I suppose.) The unborn are there and the mind which may coincide with God’s presence, of the idea we have of Him. That is what counts, I suppose – the mind that presides over whatever we step upon, see with our own eyes, with our mind’s eyes. Perhaps we are unborn ourselves, but the mind is there, up there, down there, in the middle of everything. Only birth has been held back, restrained, cancelled – for centuries and millennia. Yes, this space is vital for the mechanism to which life is submitted so as not to disappear from the surface we can talk about for centuries; from the surfaces and also from the centre of the Earth, from the volcanoes

and their bottoms. They erupt and the mind turns into fire as if it had ever been anything else. You fly, you come down and bury Pompeii or rather the virtual life of human bodies, members, their aptitude for making love and creating children, a number of individual lives that might destroy the universe – just for the fun of it. All this may happen in the background, in the wings, in some non-existent wings. But it should be there, otherwise there is no point anywhere, not even if you pick up your ballpoint and set about drawing dots everywhere as if proclaiming the following truth, ‘This is the point.’ And you doodle something in between several points and say, ‘This is beside the point.’ Human life should be located behind existence.

SPIRITS ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN BEER, BUT THEY GET YOU DRUNK FASTER (TRIPLE,
SQUARED)

Of the two right-angled triangles, the isosceles has but one nature, while the scalene has infinitely many. Now we have to select the most excellent one from among the infinitely many, if we are to get a proper start. So if anyone can say that he has picked out another one that is more excellent for the construction of these bodies, his victory will be that of a friend, not an enemy. Of the many scalene right-angled triangles, then, we posit as the one most excellent, surpassing the others, that one from a pair of which the equilateral triangle is constructed as a third figure. Why this is so is too long a story to tell now. But if anyone put the claim to the test and discovers that it isn’t so, his be the prize with our congratulations. So much, then, for the selection of the two triangles out of which the bodies of fire and the other bodies are constructed – the right-angled isosceles, and the right-angled scalene whose longer side squared is always triple its shorter side squared i.e., the half-equilateral.

Plato, *Timaeus*

I am not sure that up to now I have tackled only the problem of destruction, for it is not really a problem: there is the second law of thermodynamics which does the job much better than any shrew depicted either by Shakespeare or by an angry man. And even if whatever seems to be under construction, even if an inscription or a placard informs you of such a case, of such an abnormality, you might rightfully inquire if the stage you denote by the word ‘construction’ has not been lost among the so-called lost wor(l)ds where there are discarded drafts, amateurish inspirations or just the victims of tsunamis at the core of which there lie many thousand humans. Every word, *quels que soient ses titres de noblesse*, is lost – even before being found. Often you hear in the streets of your native city, along its boulevards, a dialogue such as, ‘Are you aware of the fact that we are lost?’

‘Where? Why?’

‘Because everything is lost, you know. It is our lot, apparently.’

‘The Loth family? What are you talking about?’

‘How do you spell it, him, his family? Loth, Lot, Ott? And his family? What about Niobe? Did she turn into a stone after hearing about her son’s death?’

‘Not at all, not at all. She did turn into a stone in the twinkling of an eye –’

‘Can you say “in the twinkling of a stone”?’

‘You can’t.’

‘Why?’

‘Because stones don’t twinkle. (They do if they contain specks of quartz.) You must be confusing them with the stars observed by children who point their fingers, not their walking sticks, mind you, at the stars and say to them, ‘Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, otherwise I’ll kill you in no time. By the way, that’s how they learn the duration, time and whatever is conjoined to time, you know.’

‘Conjoined twins?’

‘We’re talking at cross purposes.’

‘Let us use these purposes and their crosses for a new creation of triangles and suchlike.’

‘We’d probably better create a few crosses for Christ-imitators. Are you aware of the fact they’re not Spartacus-imitators? They also need crosses and the number of crosses they need is even higher, believe it or not. And there are also Crass-imitators. The latter attack Spartacus’ crosses and topple them in the wake of the demonstrators whose efforts and ideologies were directed against Stalin, Dzerzhinsky and other communist torturers. Do you understand what I’m talking about?’

You seldom understand what these people and other people talk about; even if they do not talk about anything. But you hear a few words that disturb you during the operation you are engaged in with the triangles you found in Plato’s works; his solids, as they call them. All this reminds me of my childhood, although I am not sure within which childhood I can be found, even if someone will take the trouble to seek my whereabouts studiously, without coffee breaks, tea breaks and Russian cakes. But what if someone does find me, for the simple reason that this someone has not relinquished the Platonic idea where humanity is called ‘humanity’ and prosper, in spite of its obnoxious name? (Names are not always vicious and poisonous and linked to paedophilia.) What exactly reminds me of my childhood? The game I’m playing with triangles and what I call ‘beside the points’: I described it after quoting Plato’s solids or unsolids or whatever they are. They *are* solid, but they filter through your skin, your head’s and brain’s sinks, and become unsolid; what is more, you cannot do anything about their unsolidness. Of course you can apply Erwin Schrödinger’s conclusion or premise to them, ‘Is the cat dead or not?’ Instead of reading a new story about an old spy, you feel duty bound to absorb triangles, cats, their deaths and even Erwin Schrödinger who must have loved cats beyond any well-known measure. (It is amusing to find that many people use the word, notion and axiom ‘love’ in the following fashion, ‘I love dunking my bread in hot chocolate.’)

Everyone has his, her and their children’s cross – that is the verdict pronounced by the crowd made up of workers, merchants, oligarchs, Bill Gates and Trump Towers. Trump carries his cross proudly and his admirers bow before his cross and shed many drops as they study this cross minutely. The Republican Guards interfere immediately and say to all these teardrops, ‘Where do you come from?’

‘We come from blood.’

‘Whose blood do you come from?’

‘We come from Christ’s blood, whether you wish it or not.’

In the 33^d century they will certainly know that Christ’s precious blood continued to flow from his wounds for centuries, even if there were neither bodies nor crosses along which it could have flown. But now you ask yourself the following question, ‘Along which cross does our blood flow?’ Just forget about Trump whom you obviously do not know, not surprisingly: There are many crosses around you, even in the 55th century. On some of them you hang your washing as if these were clothes lines put at your disposal by a washing society, by a ‘Clean Slip Society’.

I don't mind speaking about cats and other animals until the very end of my earthly existence – on my deathbed, in my bedroom. But the point is my menagerie is all around me, even at this critical, late hour of my path to death. Late hour, late instant. At this particular instant I should rather think in terms of triangles to avoid their scrutiny, their aid – all those faces that bend over you, offering either a glass of water or an aspirin. Let us construct our world where only figures, triangles, parallelepipeds and spheres triumph over Nero and Caesar, over the Rubicons and over the ribbons given to all those girls you learn about in the songs. They will never be overdue, these songs, and they will sing them to their hearts' and voices' content, while you are ensconced in your grave as if the word 'ensconced' were the most important slogan in your life. Ensconced in one's grave. 'Bravo, bravo, bravo, bravo,' as they used to shout during Diaghilev's *Saisons Russes*. And Nijinsky went on masturbating over a nymph's foulard. Life, isn't it?

You seek your salvation everywhere – not in the midst of humans, needless to say – and even the word 'right', one isolated word, be it 'right' or 'triumph' or 'praise', can boost your ego. Suppose your ego is as non-existent as humanity, but somehow you hear praise coming from nowhere as if a human voice were talking to you in spite of everything: in this life of ours there is only 'in spite of *everything*', not just in spite of *one* thing, whatever the thing we are talking about. How come we cannot stop talking about one thing, about another thing? Inevitably, fatally, sooner or later we are thus likely to resume our discourse on our humans and their methods. Well, you hear two words: 'Right angle,' and your mood soars towards the most distant star as if to show the amplitude of your happiness. You know you will not be disturbed by mouths, teeth, busybodies, and sure enough the celestial bodies you contemplate during this break put on display neither hands that might pat you on the shoulders nor the lips prepared to kiss any part of your body, in spite of the numerous protections you provided for them in expectation of all forthcoming onslaughts. Right-angled triangles do not murmur into your ears, veins and nerves the words associated with brothers and sisters whose insistence on their overall presence in your life seems to be dictated by your state of mind, your state of health, your kidneys and prostate. They find a few cancers inside your body and scrutinise your skin in search of yet another cancer – an outside one, so to speak; although this outside cancer is far viler than any insiders, tenants, intruders. You pick up a line, a triangle, a square and begin a new life, as usual, in the wake of Dante's love – as if capable of loving a human creature and nature, words, gestures and dances admired in Paris and London at the beginning of the 20th century: *Les ballets russes*, as they used to say. I might accept these words, even if a ballerina dares make her appearance (Tumanova, for instance) in my life, prepared to enliven my days and nights, my leisure hours, my passionate, bodily monologues.

Let us construct another world where a ballerina appears for the sake of appearing, appearances as if they were mere triangles, figures in the carpet. You spot such a figure and here you are, there you are – you are already by this figure's side, on the same carpet, in the same dimension. 'The isosceles has but one nature,' you say to this figure. 'But I suppose you're the scalene and so you have infinitely many features, natures. Instead of inviting the Bolshoi Company, which might be unpleasant, given the cumbersome character of human bodies and minds, I'll make do with your slender body, with the pirouettes you execute so graciously that one might mistake you for a butterfly caught by Nabokov as if there were no other butterflies in the world. All right, all right – you find Nabokov too abstruse. In that case let us assume it is I who caught you somewhere – in the fields, in the mountains, in the fountains, as Nabokov might have put it. I seem to have selected the most excellent representative of human triangles I might have seen at the beginning of their centuries in Paris where I lived 33 years, *ne vous en deplaie*.

However, I'll ask you not to be too human, which might elicit unpleasant remarks and reactions on my part – quite unwillingly, I can assure you. Alas, my nature – it is no longer human, I'm afraid – is quite capable of throwing a tantrum in the presence of what I define as a human creature. So let us content ourselves with triangles – you do look like one, you know – and I may try and construct something out of the material you offer me (willy-nilly) so bountifully. There is no denying that imagination is entangled in what they call human fantasy, perversity and paedophilia; and yet I've never been attracted by a young boy or girl. But as soon as they see a poet, they point their index finger at him – or their stick and cane – saying, 'He's a notorious paedophile. Can't you see that ring on his index finger?'

What could I construct in this world I see and acknowledge as I stroll among historic monuments, fragments of the past? As usual I acknowledge all composers and Dante, Shakespeare – even in translations, mind you. Even if they are encapsulated in *human* minds, I accept them; instead of being scattered amidst the bushes in their midsummers, dreams and ouvertures. One triangle surpasses another and so you put it on another triangle, on yet another triangle; and then you turn your attention to squares. And suddenly you realise you are the prize 'with our congratulations', even if you do not know what they are talking about. They might be talking about anything on Earth, in heaven, in the haven where you would like to spend the rest of your existence. The chief thing(k) is to remain at peace with yourself or rather at peace with peace – this is what minimalism is about both in music and in literature. You are there – on your bed, carpet, in your garden, in the clouds; like daffodils, no less. And all of a sudden, in spite of all your thoughts oriented around another pole of your existence, you become as minimal as conceivable, led by an urge you know nothing about. That is the best definition of whatever you undertake – you know nothing about it. In the twinkling of an eye you thereby become a Buddhist, a Dadaist, an automatic writer except that you do not note down whatever comes or rather runs into your head. You make a minimal gesture, draw a triangle and say to yourself, 'Tri, tri, tri.' But this utterance might lead you astray if you are not aware of the linguistic implications of this utterance of yours or theirs. (Sometimes you have no idea who is talking or smoking. You say, 'I detect cigar fumes in the air.' And they answer rather maliciously, 'No wonder – you're smoking a cigar, our jolly good fellow.')

The construction of the world, be it brave or silly, depends on your instruments; and if you rely too much on poems and music in the course of your construction, in the midst of your scaffoldings, you can overshoot the mark, which often results in yet another human history with all its Caesars, Hitlers, Lenins and their interpretations of Marxism. Suppose you are a Marxist and you talk about the oppressed day in day out, day out day in. You also talk about what they call 'production' and 'alienation'. Why do they continue to carry out Adam's assignment? Do they really have to give names to their chores or even to their loves? You just touch somebody and that is enough, in my opinion. I touch cats, saying nothing. This procedure does me a lot of good: I can put as many triangles as I wish all around me – for once I can use the word 'all' without fearing shots, firing squads – and put some of them on others in order to create a 'spiritual Tower of Babel'; or just the Eiffel Tower: I miss Paris most painfully. In another century I might have talked about my life in Versailles and in Paris where I spent 33 years. But now it is all over and by fair means or foul I try to prove the theory, according to which you eternally return to where you lived once, or twice, or thrice. And these thrices go on and on: that is how our eternal recurrence works, believe it or not. Some people say, 'I could believe in God, but I can't believe in both God and eternal recurrence. What would be better for my substance, in your opinion?'

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Why this is so is too long a story to tell now, as Plato and his translators put it. What I can fiddle with may concern these triangles or the notes I play on the piano – do they know I was a pianist in the 20th and 21st centuries? Do they know these centuries took place somewhere? What kind of place did they take in, according to my report? A huge place, no doubt. Let us not forget, however, that doubt also takes up a lot of space – even more than my report, I'm sorry to say and write. (I am sorry that my report is smaller, much smaller than the centuries I have talked about for many years; for many centuries.) I play a few notes and think it is quite enough for the creation I envisage without borrowing any details from the Big-Bang accounts we are acquainted with thanks to Hopkins or Dopkins or Mopkins, as Gogol might have put it; in his *Revizor*. If I play a few Schoenberg notes, I am sure to find all the triangles and solids I need for my creation of the world deprived of humans; on account of their superabundance.

And if all were what it is? The smile of a dog,
The smile of a quark? A photographer
Knows whether you ever lived, loved. If you were
A dog in your former lives. But you can
Still lick your master's hand.

And what about my status? Is it better to have any status than no status at all? Not tus, no mus, no chocolate mousse?

What are you? Any thought
Goes to where it is. And if it's not, it's
Yes, yet, and there's a park where
Statues salute you, as if you were
A statue.

What if there were only statues, poems, syllables? A question asked by a young boy unacquainted with the world and the word. The word is 'logos' and they should die, these youngsters; on crosses or elsewhere. There are many equivalents of crosses in the world. You go on a trip and hang yourself, even if there is nothing to hang yourself from. Conscientious humans always hang themselves from something, even if this something does not exist. You can hang yourself from a right-angled triangle and many children will learn the word 'right' by looking at your corpse. And then some children say to you that the triangle does not suit this kind of execution – and they do realise what execution means in spite of their age and immaturity – and you remember that in Russia they used to punish criminals or innocents by squaring them on a square. And Plato might have been influenced in his calculus by this ritual, although he seems to have been focused upon triangles, not squares, as far as my knowledge goes in this domain. As a matter of fact I have not read the whole of this work, being negatively influenced by Bertrand Russell and other thinkers whose judgement should always be taken with a pinch of salt. You take it with a pinch

of salt, with two pinches of salt and conclude you should not read the opus in question at once, on the same evening, after talking to the members of your family and your respectable colleagues. But what do you discover afterwards? A few Russian ballerinas? That would be wonderful unless your interests are confined to an area where there are only pinches of salt and cadavers hanging from crosses, triangles, circles, ellipses and so on. And your 'so on' hangs on a tree from which you try to liberate it, often to no avail, with no tangible result. With no no or rather with no yes.

There are so many horrors in our life that you might decide not to look at it anymore as if not looking at life could provide you with the peace of mind you have been dreaming about after the first series of bad marks you got at school. What series of badness, of evil, *did* you get at this school? 'I got a rap on the knuckles for not finishing my essay on time,' you say to somebody, to your best friend, apparently. But you do not mean it metaphorically, symbolically or whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever. This whatever cannot be substituted for the pain you felt when literally (not metaphysically) exposed to the pain you cannot forget, for all your efforts. You make an oblivion-orientated effort, and you picture to yourself your guardian angel who asks you the following question, 'What are you making this effort for? Do you know that your life is rather short? If you make an additional effort that is unlikely to bring you any comfort, you'd better cancel it on the spot for the sake of other, fruitful methods which would put a lot of fruit on your dinner table, you know. And you need fruit and vegetables to feel like a million dollars; or like a million pieces of fruit and vegetables – like nature, to cut a long story short.

What was I talking about? The point is you have to look at something unless you are blind, incurably blind. Even if they insert a few things into your eyes in the hope of making you see something, something different from what you are acquainted with within your brain, you have to look at the world, at the so-called, so-named, so-disgraced world. As you look at this world you ask yourself the following question, 'Where's the cat? Is it dead?' Once again you come across Schrödinger's cat, and you are delighted to find that this cat traditionally evoked whenever death is on the agenda and even off it – the off-it death is even more terrifying than the other one, the one which is in the midst of the agenda – is alive, as much alive as you are. Then you set about questioning yourself and the cat about your relationship in the domain of death, and you might find out, at the end of your research, that the cat is far more alive than you are. He seems to play pranks on you so you say to him rather severely, austere, with authority, 'I've had enough of your childish pranks.' Why do you talk to your cat in this inappropriate manner? Because you are unable to play pranks on your cat. What is more, you are unable to play anything on your cat, either pranks or Beethoven's sonatas. What *are* you able to play on your cat? Almost nothing. You can just put your fingers on his back and move these fingers as if they were able to move unconstrained. Can they move unconstrained, your fingers? you ask yourself, assuming you can ask yourself questions; at this stage and point of your curiosity; or lack of curiosity. The more you live, the more things, thoughts and hypotheses you have to assume, often against your better judgement. And whenever you try to elicit the best solutions from God or angels, they say to you that the judgement you are currently using is the worst judgement ever. And so you close your judgement, as you might close a book; or shut it down.

The right-angled isosceles, the right-angled scalene. You phone an agency and begin your construction which grows or rather skyrockets from scaffolding as if determined to reach the sky of the Tower of Babel fame. It reaches one-fourth of this fame and you say to the master-builder, 'Does this correspond to what Plato

transmitted to us through his rays of intelligence?’ And the builder answer thus, ‘No, Plato spoke mostly of solids. And this one-fourth has nothing in common with Plato’s solids which should be much more solid than New York skyscrapers.’

‘Should they be more solid than the Earth we’re walking on?’

‘You’d better not walk on the Earth, otherwise it’s likely to collapse.’

‘Let us talk for a moment about the waves that often collapse when you look at them. I’m talking about subatomic particles, if you see what I mean.’

‘They collapse or they don’t, you know.’

‘Where should I look? Or should I look at all? Somewhere, at something? Is it better to be blind? What happens when I do look in any direction whatsoever?’

‘You just look in any direction whatsoever.’

‘But what else? What else? Does any cat die?’

‘Many cats die every day. Many naughty children drown them in rivers, ponds and bathrooms.’

‘I’m talking about myself and my immortality. Whenever I don’t look at anything, which happens rather often, I must admit, I realise that everything behaves normally, as they do in school, especially when their teacher brandishes the whip he holds in his right hand, in his left hand.’

‘Is he a left-handed teacher?’

‘Doesn’t matter, doesn’t matter. He brandishes his whip as if there were only horses in front of him, and he kills some of these horses, you know.’

‘Does he? A Nietzschean question, in my opinion.’

‘Don’t forget the famous American movie. He does.’

‘So what? By the way, what does he beat the beast with?’

‘With Plato’s solids. To death.’

THE RAILWAY WAS BUILT ON A BED OF PLATO’S SOLID

Leading the way will be the primary form the tetrahedron, the tiniest structure, whose elementary triangle is the one whose hypotenuse is twice the length of its shorter side. Now when a pair of such triangles are juxtaposed along the diagonal and this is done three times, and their diagonals and short sides converge upon a single point as centre, the result is a single equilateral triangle, composed of six such triangles. When four of these equilateral triangles are combined, a single solid angle is produced at the junction of three plane angles. This, it turns out, is the angle which comes right after the most obtuse of the plane angles. And once four such solid angles have been completed, we get the primary solid form, which is one that divides the entire circumference into equal and similar parts.

Plato, *Timaeus*

We might approach this problem from a different angle. After all, right and wrong are not definitively fixed as something right, almost virtuous; as for wrong, it is not yet tantamount to assassinations and other crimes. Let us consider these numerous triangles from a different point of view which might render them hateful – at least within

my perspective. Usually the word 'triangle' is applied to three persons who are more or less in love with each other. Mostly we deal – in this particular situation – with two men and one woman who stands in between her admirers and does not really know whom to say 'yes' to, once and for all. Of course all these onces (ounces) and foralls are not eternal, with a very few exceptions that could be listed if I had enough time for such a piece of nonsense. But let us return to the humans who are in love with each other. Not quite, not quite. The woman is in love with one man, and both men are in love with the woman, but not with themselves.

We contemplate the three persons I have just described and say to each other, 'What do you think about this pattern we're allowed to witness?'

'I think the men are far more attractive than the woman.'

'Your declaration isn't politically correct, my dear colleague.'

'Do I have to admire all women physically, sculpturally, plastically, artistically, picturesquely?'

'You'd better do exactly that, otherwise you risk being excluded from human society which is bent on paying belated homage to the female of the species.'

'In my opinion, I didn't say they were deadlier than the male, did I?'

'You didn't. But *c'est tout comme*.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'Let's carry on with what we agreed for now.'

But these people seldom agree, and if they do, their agreements do not last. So they begin to analyse the respective conducts of the triangle-entangled persons, and finally they say to each other that the only solution to the problem of libido lies in the liaisons of the men who had better fall in love with each other. This solution does not always lead to homosexual marriages, contrary to what might be assumed in the contemporary context, but they are advisable, especially if the woman in question, for all her relative, politically biased (and based, and biased) beauty is not as sexy as Linda Gray or Linda Darnell or both. (Linda Gray plus Linda Darnell equals the most beautiful woman in history; more beautiful than Venus and Aphrodite put together.) Well, now we realise to what extent such analyses are misleading, not to say dangerous; once again we find ourselves in their company, within the human swamp. Under the circumstances, one is clearly in a dilemma over how to get rid of this swamp which should not have seen the light of day in the first place, as they usually conclude. Of course you can drain the swamp, effacing the memory of humankind from the surface of the Earth (and Venus, metaphorically speaking.) But this procedure entails spending a lot of time on appropriate machines, whether they are called drainers or not. You may also try and walk out of the swamp, which is not always easy, considering our swamp's capacity to suck you in (into itself) for quite a long time; if need be. Sometimes you get swallowed by it in no time at all. Isn't it logical in the light of what I said before? If you mix with a wide variety of people in your job or elsewhere, they suck you in and you find yourself in their intestines; after a while or in no time at all. You had better, therefore, not resort to comparisons, when talking about humans. (Find another holiday resort, if you can.) If, after reading some demographic statistics, you compare them to mushrooms, you get poisoned on the spot; unless you compare them to dried/grilled/stuffed/sliced mushrooms.

This may happen even if you quit triangles, their realm, and make your way towards other structures about which you know next to nothing, even if you stand next to them. You know triangles almost by heart on account of all those men and women engaged in triangular relationships and quarrels. Of course they often kill each other:

for instance, Carmen gets killed not only in Merimée's tale, but also in Bizet's opera as if one death, two deaths, were not enough within the triangular framework. That is how it works in reality: they meet, get into a triangular framework, look at each other, talk to each other, whip up an anti-Italian (anti-Latin-lover) prejudice and draw their swords or guns or whatever they can draw on the spur of the moment, having no time for a return journey, for going home where a lot of weapons await them in their chests of drawers and on the walls. (Why can't they draw an image on a sheet of paper, contributing to art and picture galleries?) But then their structures become more complex, and Plato – being a realist in his own right – does not fail to enlarge on the subject, bringing in the tetrahedron, whatever that is. Not content with this newcomer and its complexity, he cannot help putting side by side (so-called juxtaposition) diagonals, hypotenuses and so on. And all these lines, these signs standing for humans, begin to fight with each other as if once again Donald Trump to whom I must have devoted a few paragraphs incited them to do so even far from the Capitol, their habitual target. And in the middle of this mayhem I hear a Russian pianist of Jewish origin who prays for everybody, for tyrants and victims alike, as she plays a Mozart concerto that Stalin heard on his deathbed or rather on his death floor; and I am not even sure he heard it on his death carpet. This is a famous story used by the English in one of their comedies where both victims and tyrants are mocked viciously – because they are just humans, I suppose. On the other hand you just look right instead of looking left, as you usually do when annoyed by a dull ache characteristic of your right shoulder, and the picture on which you unconsciously counted grows blurred – just because you are looking at it now.

For years and years I have been confusing these quantum notions that enable us to change the world without resorting to Trump's fiery moods and speech. You look, turn your head and the mayhem you have not even envisaged, for all your bellicose disposition, turns into reality and begins to get under your skin with its noise, including shots and cries, 'Hang him up, this so-called secretary of state.' This takes place anywhere, almost everywhere: in the Capitol which is the symbol of American democracy, tolerance, intolerance, anti-mayhem, provided neither Trump nor Pence nor Dollar are among the visitors, let alone speakers. But you prefer cats and Erwin Schrödinger, as everybody knows unless everybody forgets everything in the twinkling of an eye. For many years I have been reading about the collapse of waves and I am still perfectly aware that they are talking about magnetic or invisible waves – not about tsunamis and the problems experienced by the Japanese on many occasions. What really does happen? As usual our humans to whom I might belong, after much-soul searching (it is better not to search in such cases – not *those* souls anyway) wreak havoc upon an innocent collection of objects and cats. These are sleeping tenderly, touchingly in their boxes, waiting for a wave or a particle. The former strokes their cheeks, whiskers and tails; the latter may cause an unpleasant surprise, making them turn their heads and produce a few angry sounds at the end of which some of their paws might cause a few drops of blood to leave a number of veins, precious human veins exposed on the top of our so-called Creation.

I might be an inveterate, incorrigible dreamer and unconditionally, unhesitatingly vote for order, harmony and even Schoenberg's twelve-tone system which elicit an ecstatic response on my part unless it is massacred by a clumsy pianist or orchestra or conductor, violinist and whoever. The point is that the cosmos is at peace with itself until the moment when a human, led astray by his spirit of adventure and her curiosity ventures into the world, putting at risk the world into which they rush. (Some of them are Russians; not all of them.) They venture, venture, venture as a result of which a lot of waves collapse and so do the structures that correspond either to these waves or to nothing. It is true you might say you are not really worried about the things that do not seem to

correspond to what you call ‘things’, ‘objects’, ‘monuments of primary importance’. They are so curious, however, these or those humans. They look everywhere; they inspect every nook, cranny and nanny – in spite of her age, mind you. For once, they do not accuse them of paedophilia, but the accusations are anyway both thundering and booming, and they go to the same jails, paedophiles and nannies or whoever is accused in relation to nannies. Oddly enough, there are men who prefer old women to bathing beauties, to Bolshoi dancers. To cut a long story short, the world is chaotic unless you leave it in peace without calling secretaries and representatives of the United Nations about whose failures we heard so many stories that our Scheherazade is unable to memorise them, let alone offer them to her sultans and presidents of something united or disunited; and so she refuses to collaborate with us, believe it or not.

What kind of tale could I tell now, after trying in vain to catch 40 winks, 30 winks, 20 winks? The long and the short of it is I cannot even catch *ten* winks thanks to which I might spend a few hours in my bed without having an urge to rise from it – no W. B. Yeats this time, no W. no B.I catch no winks at all and the cat I am dreaming about is still in what they call ‘her undecided state’; in other words, she does not know whether she is dead or not. Actually she does not care, being unaware of the complexities their reason and analytical power and also their glances submit her to. (Her attitude is beyond compare, if I may say so.) Let her become *he* during this séance of quantum metamorphoses. At this point I must make a speech specifically angled at feminists and their huge audiences. Whenever speaking about cats, I have in mind *my* cats, and I cannot overlook their membership, adherence, membership, adherence to the party called ‘male cats’. At least I decided to refer to this party in this fashion, even if it is no longer fashionable, given the fragility of any fashion on display. Why should I overlook their tendency to produce their offspring differently from their female partners? I could accept their reluctance to exchange their organs, structures and textures with their female counterparts – without inflicting any trauma on the latter; I vouch for this peaceful transition. Well, leaving aside the consideration centred on the gender problem so current in the human milieu, I must say I am much more preoccupied with my death, either in the form of a particle that I feel inside and also outside my body, and also, also, also, (there are so many alsos everywhere, not enough Oslos, considering their living standards) that I wonder nowadays why I am still alive in spite of all the experiences, hidden or unbidden? Why am I exposed to another president, vaccine, another pharmaceutical giant? Is that how they talk about themselves? They say, ‘We’re pharmaceutical dwarfs, but we produce 9 billion vaccines. So you’ll be saved for another eternity at least. And considering our small size, we’re reliable and so are in a position to save you from death, from false immortalities, from erroneous eternities, and from yourself and your pernicious sponsors.’

QUANTUM (KIERKEGAARDIAN) LEAP

What did Plato know about quantum mechanics? (And what about Kierkegaard?) ‘When four of these equilateral triangles are combined, a single solid angle is produced at the junction of three plane angles. This, it turns out, is the angle which comes right after the most obtuse of the plane angles.’ You listen to this nonsense – you, you, not me, myself and my brain – and alongside my words and declarations your judgement resounds in the cosmos, louder, louder. What angles are you talking about? The cat is either dead or alive. And we have to save this cat to the best of our abilities, our masterstrokes, skill, university degrees. You turn your head this way and that and cats perish because of your twists and turns. Is it fair? Is it fair play? It is a play, but it is not fair, whatever you say. All

right, it is fair because on account of this fairness you can save as many as one million lives. And I say to you, 'The lives you're speaking of do not justify one tear dropping from a cat's eye.' And they say, 'We can replace the eye you're talking about in no time at all. And we'll wipe off the tear, it goes without saying.' At this point you rise and say, 'Nothing goes without saying. You must say something in defence of your policy, standpoint and lifelong conviction. Nothing will ever justify unlawful imprisonment, a lunatic asylum where they put their cats.' 'Wouldn't their cats prefer the moon to the Earth, if conveyed up there for free?'

There are many geometrical figures around us, on our writing desks. And we construct both equations and their contraptions or refutations – world-oriented, life-oriented, universe-oriented. And the universe rejects both our orientations and the instruments that scan, search and scrutinise everything. I often write 'everything', but this operation could content itself with 'everything minus one or two or three or four or millions, millions, millions.' That would amount to the same insurrections, rejections, and other abnormalities or normalities or this kind of unkind. But there is another way I must have missed (I deviated) when I was living in the Soviet Union where you could donate anything to anybody, with the exception of party members. How to become a Christian? You go to the Soviet Union, even if you are far from it, being stuck in the 21st century. But actually you are not stuck anywhere unless you wish to get stuck, stuck, stuck – this is your state of things, according to you and your most intimate desires. But you are neither stuck, nor stock, not *stuk* (knocking in Russian, very popular in the Soviet Union, knocking on the door at five in the morning). Do you know what happened in Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union in the Thirties, in the Twenties, in the Fifties? They knocked at your doors, you know. You do not know, so much the better. You do not know anything. You are worried about climate change, and you are right as usual. The climate undergoes a notorious change and islands heads towards the continent or whatever they call it. They always call something something, otherwise something would be nothing, they assume; along with semiotics and even with otics. Well, what was I talking about? About my house and its climate constancy that depends on domestic oil. Recently my gardener phoned their agency, asking them to fill up my tubes, cisterns and other underground installations to provide me with the warmth I need – not for my heart, I am sorry to say: This warmth (heart, heart) comes only from music, poems, tone poems, poems, poems – there is nothing else in the world. And what is there in the world? Perhaps what you leave on your deathbed, according to Leibniz, according to the *accordéon du bal musette*.

When four of these equilateral triangles are combined. You pin your hopes on this combination, and even if you do not say 'these equilateral triangles' you know that some amount of happiness lies within them, notwithstanding the overall misery.

What have I done? At some point you are likely to meet this question and even to shake hands with it, although it does not have hands. You say, 'When four of these equilateral triangles are combined,' but you have no idea, no ideas; you just live and within this life of yours you encounter neither equilateral triangles nor triangles at all: you are interested neither in men nor in women. What *are* you interested in? Good question, as they always say and do, sometimes. Well, well, well – there are no good questions, no good answers. There is only 'well, well, well, well, well, well, well, well,' or rather 'bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad, bad.' 'Or rather' is a good word. Or is it an expression, an idiom? At some point you no longer take the trouble to disentangle words, idioms and notions. So if someone utters an idiom, you answer, 'Idiot', thereby rounding off a lot of conversations, for this person heads

for the door, slams it and you can be assured of his everlasting absence. (The situation is far more delicate if a woman happens to be involved.)

What did I say about a glance you can direct in many directions, provided you are neither paralysed nor blind? And if you are both, you just do not give a damn; or you give one damn, two damns, three damns. Their quantity and quality depends on the amount of damns you have at your disposal: in your pockets, on your writing desk and in your chest of drawers, as usual, as usual. Actually you are supposed to do just the opposite of what I am describing to no avail: you do not give a damn, even if you have plenty of damns in your attic, among other places. Suppose someone – a man, for the same delicate reason – descends upon your house and asks you for a damn; not for a dime, let alone for a diamond. He asks you for a damn; he begs for a damn – on his bended knees, mind you. But you refuse point-black and add that even if you had a million damns in your bathroom, you would not give anything to this man. ‘Even if you bend a thousand knees, I won’t give you a damn,’ you might add, if it is really necessary. Is it necessary, vital, essential to go on with this discourse either for the fun of it or just with a view to filling a few pages?

Well, I began a discourse, an interior monologue dedicated to the human glance which turns this way and that as it endeavours to disentangle the components of the world contained within its field of vision. If you restrain yourself, withholding all your impulses without exception, reining them in, as the saying goes, you might leave the world in peace. This peace ties in with what our classical physicists – down to Newton – taught us about our habitat. By the way (I wonder what kind of way this is), with so many areas of woodland being cut down, a lot of wildlife is losing its natural habitat. I admit that at some point I wished to become fire or the god of fire, borrowing Wagner’s terminology; at another point I was afraid of the fire one might land up in within the realm of Purgatory, within its kingdom. But let us put both Purgatory and all its flames aside – traditionally this Purgatory takes centre stage in my room – and draw everyone’s attention to the habitat to which I devoted a few words in this very paragraph. (I hope it will not be too long: I am rather sleepy, which does not mean I will spend a sleepful night.) The habitat I am talking about is located on the spot where the glance in question continues to make its discoveries; unless it is blind, as blind as a bat. If you really dare cast your eye over that spot, you will destroy the order reigning in it in the absence of humans, of their busybodies, busy glances. You cast nothing at all, neither glances nor your line – to the middle of the river. You could also cast your sword far out into the lake, as a famous knight did in days of yore, but not really once upon a time: many knights enacted this ritual throughout our legends, through many ages, days and moments. (A momentous rite, as they say.) Be that as it may, the world is enjoying both peace and quiet – in the light of what I have just said: humans have kept away from the world since last night. So this morning everything is spick and span, which happens only once in a blue moon. And the blue moon makes its appearance only once in ten thousand centuries.

All right, all right. You are blind, deaf and your paralysis is known to your neighbours and also to a dozen journalists who are still interested in your poetry, for some obscure reason. So you cannot toy with triangles and suchlike unless someone (your wife, for instance) says to you affectionately, melodiously, ‘My dear husband! Don’t you think it is time for you to construct a world or two?’

‘My dear wife,’ you answer tenderly, ‘I wish to ask you one question only.’

‘Please do,’ she answers. ‘By all means,’ she adds.

‘Here’s my question. How come you haven’t realised, not yet, that I’m building universes, not just a world or two worlds, as you seem to have suggested?’

Well, after yet another exchange of niceties you begin your work that you call ‘My Mission’ as if you were the only missionary in the world where you build your own worlds. Your wife hands you a pair of triangles and you fiddle with them to your heart’s content. From time to time your wife asks you the following question, ‘Is your heart content, my dear husband?’ ‘Not yet, not yet,’ you answer as you go on fiddling with triangles or squares or what not. And then you ask your magnificent wife, ‘Are these triangles juxtaposed along the diagonal?’ She assures you that they *are* juxtaposed along the diagonal. Of course you ask her if she knows what the diagonal – the one you are talking about – means in the context of your universal game. She answers, ‘Yes, of course.’ And after much memory-searching, vocabulary-searching, she adds, ‘A diagonal line is straight and sloping, not horizontal or vertical, for example joining two opposite corners of a square or other flat shape with four sides.’ Of course the husband does not fail to explain to his wife – he has never respected the rules, according to which women are always there, in every particle of the universe (he/she, his/her), but his knowledge of Simone de Beauvoir’s magnum opus is so insignificant he cannot even say what this lady, Mr Sartre’s companion in fortune, dissected and killed in her novel; sorry, in her sociological book which has nothing to do either with the nouveau-roman or with the old-roman; or romance, for that matter. So he says to his wife that she has no idea what the diagonal he is talking about looks like, for it is not an ordinary diagonal he tackles in his profound, almost esoteric studies – not just anything you attribute, put down to Pythagoras’s ignorance, crass error of judgment, crass error of non-judgment. So he says to her, ‘I realise you’re not fully and wholly and holy acquainted with quantum mechanics that turn our diagonals or rather *your* diagonals into circles and spheres because they’re not diagonals in the first place. Nor are they diagonals in the second and third place, as you might have guessed, when listening to my drawing room lecture. Everything is different in the mechanics I’m doing my best to teach you benevolently – I’m not paid for it, you know. And I need money rather badly, considering that your contribution to our household budget is so minimal that a professional mathematician might erect a formula, a series, a doctrine on this material, calling it minimalism, under-zero functions and so on. By the way, he might say your wave collapses all the time, assuming you have any wave on or around your substance except the sort of wave one can see and probably admire on top of your hair. Is it a wave or a number of particles, as they say, as my colleagues repeat day in day out? I don’t know. Well, this diagonal I’m trying to stuff into your thick skull might enable you to understand what kind of triangles I should put on top of the triangles I took care of last week. I almost finished the Tower of Babel, if my memory doesn’t slip from my skull. Or lapse from my skull. And what if it tumbles all the way down – from my skull, from my brain? From what could it tumble, *sinon* from my *cerveau*, as the French point it? I know you say I have no *cerveau* in my head; nor do I have anything of the kind within the other parts of my body. All right, All right. At least I know what a diagonal is and how to handle it, whenever it comes to the fore and inserts its value into four angles, if you see what I mean. How is our Tower of Babble coming on? Could you keep me posted on its construction, considering that you *can* see something, until further notice? Have you noticed these further notices, by the way, incidentally, so far? Nothing at all? All right, let us go on with our construction of a brand new world which on no account will be brave and new. Our world will be devious, shifty, sly. My dear wife! I hope you realise the proportions to which I invite your imagination the figments of which aren’t always prepared to welcome my ideal. And if, willy-nilly, they do welcome them, their arms not wide-open, their eyes will be wide-

shut. It's true there're open to some degree, but the degree I have in mind is much bigger, much, much bigger. To tell the truth, the degree I have in mind is bigger and consequently higher than the Tower of Bauble. Last night we went to Paris to measure it against the Eiffel Tower and we were delighted to find that the Eiffel Tower was nothing in comparison with our achievement.'

They talk endlessly, the woman and her husband, and eventually they fall asleep, forgetting about the tiniest structure – frankly speaking, they cannot even see it, been far-sighted and almost blind. Par parentheses, the word 'almost' is very helpful in a society whose members are outrageously rude. You say to them now and then, every two minutes, 'Are you blind or what?' You are almost blind and that makes all the difference, as they say in movies, when courting a beautiful lady. But your well-versed husband – he is well-versed in physics and mathematics, not in culinary experiences – says you should not look right because he is about to construct an ideal Plato-predicted world in that part of your room; or of your universe, *tant qu'à faire*. It goes without saying that, in his misogynistic opinion, his wife knows nothing, not even the word 'diagonal' – at least not its quantum version. So he says to her negligently, with a flourish of his arms, 'When four of these equilateral triangles are combined, a single solid angle is produced at the junction of three plane angles.'

'What equilateral triangles are you talking about?' asks his spouse.

'Can you see a pair of such triangles –?'

'Of what triangles?'

'This should have been done three times.'

'What? I can't follow you.'

'Follow the triangles.'

'Shouldn't I rather follow God?'

'Every triangle is god in its own right, you know. You should memorise this expression, "In its own right, in his own right, in her own right." Am I right?'

'Of course you are.'

'When four of these equilateral triangles are combined, a single solid angle is produced at the junction of three plane angles.'

'I can't see the solid angle you're talking about. Have you produced it or not?'

'Of course I have. At least in my book.'

'Where is it?'

'My book? Before you go on, my dear wife and spouse, you should make sure that when four of these equilateral triangles are combined, a single solid angle is produced at the junction of three plane angles. Between ourselves, I'll kill one of my enemies, or two of them, with the solid angle I touched upon in my old speak. Don't touch it, my dear – it's too sharp.'

And then you feel a wave which is a harbinger of your future entanglements with particles and their acolytes because you know you are the centre of the universe, but your knowledge should be consolidated, if only by your glance that may kill or invigorate a cat. You bless the cat and once more it goes without saying, even if you are tempted to say something on this occasion, on the subject. Is it a wave or a particle? What are you? Both, both. You could affirm that the whole of humanity is made up of both particles and waves, which is not true, to say the least. There are particles in human society and they jostle, shove, bustle into you and your head; and there are

waves whose speciality or tenderness, as they call it, is just to create a cloud, a sort of fog around you so you cannot budge from where you have been bewitched. That is what happens in everyday life: you first behave like an electron and so skip, jump and make love to everybody, men and women alike. But if no one looks at you – and that's the point, that's the point – you do nothing of the kind. You just count out your money. And if you need a woman for this operation, you invite her in and she counts, counts, counts, the queen was in the parlour. Only Plato can distract them from their occupation. 'When four of these equilateral triangles are combined, a single solid angle is produced at the junction of three plane angles. This, it turns out, is the angle which comes right after the most obtuse of the plane angles. And once four such solid angles have been completed, we get the primary solid form, which is one that divides the entire circumference into equal and similar part.'

And what about a lyrical wave? Call it what you wish, and suddenly you feel what you wish in all your members, limbs and in even in Dante's 'Limbo' where you could spend some time, why not? Talking to Dante occasionally. You look at the world, simple, primeval. You do not think in terms of triangles and cubes; actually you do not think in terms of anything. You just naturally find your place in this world which is probably not a world at all; just a costume. You go on, after putting on (on, on, on, on) this costume and the sun greets you by sparing your skin and furnishing enough temperature to your organs and even to your brain that usually freezes in Siberia. A few poems, a number of madrigals. And all this for nothing.

I am you to this, to that. No distance,
No distinction. Only this snow you can't
Throw anywhere. You're too close.
I wish I could throw this snowball.
Everywhere, putting it in my pocket.

And if the enquiry we are about to broach is for someone's sake, for Simenon's sake, we should be aware of what we are investigating as we plunge headlong into the Creation and say to others, 'We'll never return, we promise you.' The world is everything when a human imbecile looks at it, on it: it does not depend on this moron to look silly. That is an axiom. You look left, in expectation of order, harmony. Mozart's *Requiem* is being performed for your entertainment. What strikes you is a difference between two worlds where all depends on a glance, not even on the human brain that does not understand anything, anyway. It does understand something, if only halfway, if there is such a thing as halfway. You go halfway, somewhere, and then you hear a few voices proclaiming, 'The end of the road.' And there are many roads in front of you, roads, fields and people who do something in those fields as if hoping to find enough Russian *zakuski* there, *blinis*, for instance.

All this goes on and I wonder if I could communicate with my *semblables* by means of transport, of my psychological bicycles collected by my wife on the other side of the street. Let alone my incapacity to mount anything, not only a horse, bicycle. It is true I do not have to mount tables, all the less so that I am not requested to ride on them through Asia, Aid, Aids, and so on. I edge my way towards yet another enigma which might be defined or disfigured by my questions so I must be careful when approaching enigmas, secrets and even so on which have become a leitmotiv of my writings because it is only so on that prolongs our life, universe and whatever we rely upon, anxious to air grievances for another few minutes. You understand, you understand what happens

when you do not look at anything, not even at yourself. You forget yourself, and this is probably the best method you can learn from gurus and their likes, for they knock on your numerous doors and ask, 'Are you A?' And you answer, 'I am A,' because any deviations from the truth certified by God and his accessories bless you so one can see a few wounds on your body. And a lot of blood seeps from your body, oozes from your soul, and they ask you now and then, 'I see a sort of liquid oozing from your body. Is it oozing from your body or your soul?' And you answer as if a program of your answer were installed on your computer: 'It is oozing from my body, from my eternity, from my last book which I'll never finish, from my wife who'll never forget me in spite of her numerous future husbands.'

You must decide at this point whether order is preferable to the disorder where you could still find somebody, your soul mate who is always lost amidst democracies and Beethoven's *Ninth*. You look for your future happiness in Beethoven's *Tenth*, *Eleventh*, *Twelfth*. You insist upon his *Twelfth* symphony, hoping that something will come out of it – literally, theatrically. But where did we lose ourselves? We do not know whether harmony presides over quark, quirks and even kirks, kicks – or over the corpse we extract from the bottles of wine. Here is our account of what happens: 'We look at the world and we don't know whether this is a real world or not.' I think I believe in an overall harmony, and I stick to my guns and am prepared to fire, shoot and whatever, if this harmony of mine is threatened by a few onlookers, or rather 'awaylookers' who do not see what they look at. They construct theories, they plot, conspire and say that everyone (apart from themselves) is a paedophile, and Socrates leaves his tomb to give their opinions quite a bit of weight. What bit of weight does Socrates lend to those paedophiles? They say, 'Socrates was an adamant defender of virtues and consequently, whatever he did or thought about, was utterly virtuous. More than utterly, you know. And he was seen – many times, many times – in young men's company. Not to say boys, boys, boys. So whenever you saw a boy walking down the street or up, up, up, you thought, 'Socrates isn't far away. Socrates must be round the corner.' And then a game would see the light of day or the light of game, as they used to say in those ages and times. They said to each other, 'Where do you think is Socrates at this precise moment?'

And they answered you thus, 'Do you know his speed?'

'Do you know that *spid* means Aids in Russian?'

'I'm talking about his speed, about his relationship with light.'

'With virtue, you mean?'

'Virtue is light and light is virtue, as Keats put it, if I remember rightly.'

'All right, all right. But what about Socrates? Is he round the corner or not?'

'He's round the bend, you know.'

'No, I don't know. Why is he round the bend? And where's this bend, by the way, by the bend?'

'Can you see that bend over there?'

'I can. So what?'

'Socrates is just round that bend.'

'Is he really?'

'He is. Really.'

'Shall we go and look to see if he's really round that bend?'

They go, reach the bend and see no Socrates, no Plato; and even Aristotle seems to lodge far from the corner they are looking at. So one of them says to the other man, ‘She held the banknote up to the light and inspected it carefully.’

‘How do you mean?’ asks the other.

‘We should hold this corner up to the light to find out if Socrates isn’t hiding in this corner – in its folds, as Leibniz might have put it.’

So they both pick up this corner with a view to holding it up to the light. But there is no light within their field of vision, which might mean they have no vision, no reliable eyes that inform you about whatever happens in your body’s vicinity and also in the cosmos. You see Socrates inside your brain and even outside it; if he were standing by your side you might shake hands with him. But Socrates does not stand by your side; nor does Plato, until further notice. Who does stand by your side? What? Nobody, nothing. All right, all right. So you begin to think in terms of fairy tales or legends which suit you much better than so-called reality about which one of the recent Nobel-prize winners said, ‘I like reality.’ What reality did she mention in her speech? Her own? Was she real? Is she real? I am forced to say, ‘She is, I hope,’ although I have no hopes available in this domain, in the domain of her life, death and resurrection.

So they look at this corner, that corner, and eventually they realise they are looking at everything. And everything contains both Socrates and Plato and also Alcibiades. What doesn’t everything contain? Perhaps nothing; and even anything is not included in everything, every, every, every, every, thing.

What is this harmony I am talking about? I look at the world; I listen to it. Do I wreak havoc on everything, on everybody? I should not wreak havoc on animals, should I? Let them be ‘everything’ for the time being, until my death. Whenever I say, ‘Everybody,’ I mean human beings. And yet my cat’s body is so wonderful I cannot leave it in peace for almost half-an-hour whenever he concedes – contrary to what Trump does not do – to let me hold him in my hands, in my whole body, let alone in my soul, psyche, and all other parts of my Jungian self.

What is this harmony I am talking about?

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On another occasion I was led in imagination down on to the sea-bed (sometimes you should be led down instead of always soaring up as if in search of the only salvation, the only salvation you are worthy of), and there I saw green hills and valleys (because salvation is everywhere, provided you are everywhere; and in this case, in this maze and mess everything is so accessible you do not even have to say ‘accessible’; nor do you need to extend anything, either your arm or leg; do not stretch anything for you touch almost nothing, meaning everything) looking as though they were moss-covered, with seaweed and sand. (They *are* moss-covered. What is not, I wonder? Everybody is moss-covered and I rise, go, see a lot of sea-beds, death-beds, seaweeds in which I am certainly entangled, otherwise I would speak freely, forgetting grammar and languages, all of them.) This I understood (I don’t, I don’t, I don’t understand anything as if I were a non-understanding creature) to mean that if a man or woman were under-sea (I am a man, and I must be under sea, at sea, above sea, in the clouds, at clouds) and saw God (no comment, no comment) ever present with him (what am I doing here? as so many actors ask in their films) saw God, saw God, saw God, when? ever present, when? when? where? he would be safe in body and soul, in every sinew, in every tendon, in every nerve, in every atom, in every atom bomb. Suppose I am under water, an

underwater creature and feature. I am not under clouds or above them, contrary to what I might have said a few minutes ago. So what? There are people who listen to fish day in day out, hoping they will know what life is about and how death can be abolished. Some people – other people – think they can abolish life by plunging headlong into some ocean or other. (Some of them think that *other* oceans are better for this purpose than the one they contemplate from their windows.) And I see seaweed or just my garden when I take my walk so as not to take other walks, foreign walks that do not tie in with my ties. My God, my God – what all this means and where I direct my steps, as some of my friends shout or exclaim from time to time? I am under something – not someone, mind you – and I realise that the landscapes I see, this landscape, this manscape, this womanscape is the only image bestowed upon my mind. Let me tell this differently, or in the same way,

What is said is not done
 Because doing is nothing
 As if there were nothing
 No doing, no saying,
 Only an insect somewhere
 One (human being) does not
 Know where. What do *you*
 Know, where, were, clever.
 Nothing grows in your fields.
 ‘Clever’ means a plant in Russian.
 But even clever doesn’t grow,
 Not even in Russian. What does?
 What do? There are a few people.
 There are a few puppets. Are there?
 What are they? Puppets, people
 Or a myth I’m *raconting*
 My son. My myth, the tree you’ll
 Plant, whenever you wish to
 Plant it. This is your Tree of Life,
 Of Death, of Nest where you’ll grow
 Forever, forever and ever and ever.

because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead

But let me approach a formula, an equation, an equanimity where everything comes together. A man, a cripple, is chosen for this task because either you hang on the cross or you are a cripple, or you are an emotional cripple: an ordinary citizen of our countries cannot accomplish anything unless he cuts off some of his limbs and receives blows from the crowd. How do you assemble a crowd nowadays? You sing, you sing, and your song attracts a few people, first their ears and then their souls. Their souls are attracted like magnets or rather like the object that

rushes towards magnets as if there were a lot of gold on these magnets, a lot of Cartier jewels. (Nota bene: Neither gold nor jewels are magnetic.)

There is a letter I have already started writing to my friend to congratulate him once again on his wonderful dog. Isn't it the most gorgeous monologue one can imagine in one's sleep or just upon awakening? – 'Your dog is marvellous, you know.'

'Of course I know?'

'His eyes. I'm thinking about his eyes.'

'So am I. And I'm sure we're thinking the same thoughts.'

'About the same eyes, right?'

'Right.'

'But don't his eyes change from time to time?'

'No.'

'Do they never change?'

'No.'

'Why, do you think?'

'Because they don't see anything new.'

'You mean, they know everything.'

'Of course they do.'

'The world is undergoing –'

'It is not.'

'Is it going?'

'No;'

'Is it under?'

'It is under.'

'Under what?'

'Under not.'

'Note, note, note. You mean music.'

'If you are under a note, you take part in the mess.'

'Should I be under the note or above it?'

'You should always be under the note, under, under. But your sound will be above it, taking part in the overall harmony.'

'Am I a human being or just a note?'

'You're not everything, whatever they say. You are under a note, above a note and in millennia you'll become a note.'

'Not a chord, the Tristan Chord?'

'A note.'

Suppose I am underwater and even whatever is underwater, so to speak, is done and announced on the radio and television. What am I doing underwater? I write my watery lines, rhymes.

I see seaflowers, seacats
 And they continue to play with hands,
 Without making them bleed.
 Why not? Why not? Let me bleed to death.
 And then I'll ask my bleeding to
 Stop. Not forever, forever. Just for an hour
 So I can breathe for a while, for a while,
 Not forever, my dear, dear, dear, dear,
 Mandarin

The human hierarchy starts with poor proletarians and goes up, up, up, passing through young billionaires, through their numerous Gates, touching old trillionaires, old Rocks and Shields. Is there anything beyond? Apparently there is another level, the top of the pyramid one can see on dollars, among other things, currencies and values. This top governs the world. What for, I wonder? Is it so exciting, enticing? The power-assisted steering of the world. Apparently some of those invisible top-people live in Switzerland. One of them was asked, 'Aren't you tempted to demonstrate your might instead of staying invisible, like a Taoist sage?' In his turn, the invisible man asked the following question, 'Do you have a dog?' 'I do.' 'Do you wish to demonstrate your power in his or her presence?' I wish my cat were aware of my powers. I think he is, until further notice. Well and good – humans are just dogs for you, cold dogs, tepid dogs. Why invest your money in their history?

Anyway, a shroud has no pockets. But it owns a lot of brains.

And then we start again, all over again, and we know we should create the soul (solid) of the world, otherwise the world would be soulless, motionless, nothingness. Nothing, nothing, where you are? I am here, I'm the world. I wonder why so many criminals get away with it; and Donald Trump is of their number, of which I know nothing. Is $2+3+4 = 1/12$? I wish I could be $12/12/12/12/12/12/$ In Moscow I lived on the 12th floor. You look, you continue to look so where unless, unless, unless, unless. No, you are not blind and that is the only certainty one can say about you, saying, 'I'm sure he's not blind.'

'Could you certify your statement?' says the judge.

'Of course I can,' says the witness.

'By moving one Kalashnikov in front of his eyes.'

'But are you sure he knows what thing or rather *ding* – he speaks German, doesn't he? – you are moving in front of his muzzle?'

'I'm absolutely sure, Your Honour.'

'Can you prove it?'

'I can, Your Honour.'

'How?'

'By moving the above-mentioned Kalashnikov before his eyes.'

'Before his eyes or in front of them?'

'In front of them, Your Honour.'

'Proceed, I beg of you.'

'What do you beg of me, Your Honour?'

'I beg of you to proceed.'

'How? Where?'

'Here, for God's sake.'

'Do I have to pick up the Bible and swear?'

'Not yet, not yet. Just say, "I swear."'

'What else do I have to say?'

'Nothing but the truth.'

'And "help me God," I suppose.'

'I'm not sure God will help you.'

'I'm sure He will.'

'Could you please write your statement down? You wrote God with a capital "G". Only Judges are written this way. Besides, God's name starts with a 'G', not with a 'J'.

.....

Carn Gafall. A curious monument in the Buellt area of Wales, which consists simply of a pile of stones, the uppermost of which bears the imprint of a dog's paw. The print was left by Gafall, a dog owned by King Arthur of CAMELOT, during the hunt for the boar Trwyd. Visitors to the monument have repeatedly tried to carry off the stone bearing the print, but they have never succeeded in keeping it for more than a day and a night. The next morning, it inevitably returns to its place on top of the pile of stones.

A LOT OF WORLDS, ONE, ONE

When talking about a multitude of words, I do not allude to Giordano Bruno who talked about them even when the fire began to caress his feet. 'Many worlds, many worlds,' he kept saying as if the flames he saw at his feet were less important than some distant specks of dust you can see only if you own the most powerful telescope. Of course even this telescope would not assure you with certainty that what you see in the distance is not just one world to which, incidentally, you belong. You can say that we all belong to one creature who represents the cosmos and its numerous derivatives such as molecules and quacks (or ducks, for that matter). Are there the derivatives of this cosmos or their ingredients or their constituents? Well, all this is none of my concern and I sincerely wonder why I am writing about such things except that I wish to prove I am one world and not many atoms; or the people whom I meet occasionally, once in a while. (I wish I could meet them only once, as a matter of fact.) Not many, not any, at all.

When you ponder over Leibniz's doctrine they call 'monadology' – even he called it in the same manner – they think about one monad which reflects the whole cosmos. But there are many monads and one may ask oneself the following question, 'Are they many or one?' Let us examine an excerpt from the book I have never read, although Erwin Schrödinger praises it highly. (And I do the same with regard to Schrödinger.) 'To declare that, of

the component cells that go to make us up, each one is an individual self-centred life is no mere phrase. It is not a mere convenience for descriptive purposes. The cell as a component of the body is not only a visibly demarcated unit but a unit-life centred on itself. It leads its own life...The cell is a unit-life, and our life which in its turn is a unitary life consists utterly of the cell-lives.' I am not sure I really propose to examine this excerpt from *every* point of view – from that of my neighbour, for instance. Actually I do not care about his views, his angles of vision – this goes without saying in the light of what I have been talking about since 1990. The only question I can ask myself (not others, not others) is related to my monad, a cell which has nothing in common with prison cells. (Or even monasteries.) It is a cosmos cell to some extent – to all extents, rather, considering that I am speaking about the whole of the cosmos, not just one of its parts. Let us suppose, therefore, that I am just a cell, and I am on my own, leading my own life disconnected from whatever might be thought about *après une lecture* of today's newspapers. For instance, you can read the following piece of nonsense, 'The Georgia secretary of state is still recertifying the election results despite all of these serious unanswered questions about what happened in Fulton County, despite two separate signature verification systems,' the host went on. 'It gets worse because Georgia's election implementation manager, Gabriel Sterling, is just missing the explosive new video evidence, trying to claim that there was nothing odd at all.' Sounds strange, doesn't it? Should I wonder about that? Missing or using? Everything is odd and out of order - in this excerpt the word 'odd'. What is more, something went wrong with my computer which seems to scatter the words around the page; at least in the phrase where they talk about Fulton County. I hope this disorder, this negative anarchy (there is such a thing as *positive* anarchy) will be preserved and respected, when this manuscript appears in book form. This computer-enhanced disorder represents our world even better than my metaphors.

I think I treated this subject many years ago; perhaps last year, many times, in many worlds and incarnations. It concerns, all this concerns, Wolf Messing who is one of my heroes, as Heidegger might have put it. (What about Carlyle?) He was walking around a Jewish quarter, in Berlin or in another German city. Suddenly he saw many blood-painted bodies running in all directions – towards death, towards one afterworld. Or one afterwards. He did not understand what it meant, although it is so clear, as clear as many days, many crystal nights, many diamonds. As the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, put it, 'All poets are yids,' meaning we are the sworn enemies of all those who ignore the poetry of life. This bloodbath was horrendous because it was also related to the future, to the entire human race, its poor, miserable cosmos. Yes, I must have spoken about it many times, in my former lives, in this life of mine, in its many worlds. Because there is no other solution, no vision, for all their reassuring, hope-intoxicated words. Even the paralysis-stricken are running. All right, all right: they convey them to gas chambers in wheelchairs, in bloodbathchairs. What difference does it make? Who are they? Nurses, Nazis. What difference does it make? Beyond good and evil? Well, I know Fulton; at least I heard the name of this city or university – thanks to Churchill's famous speech which split the world into two camps, two concentration camps. What about Georgia? I know Georgia, the country which was a member of what was called 'The Soviet-Union Club'. And I also know a lot of unanswered questions and many separate verification systems. Some of them are signed; others are not. It does get worse, though; even without though. It just gets worse and worse, end of story. The point is there is no end to this story of ours, for all their predictions and clairvoyance. The end of the world, the end of the world. The Maya calendar, the Aztec calendar, the Pygmy calendar. And the Georgia secretary of state is still recertifying the election results despite all of these serious, serious, serious... Serious

what, may I ask? Everything is serious but there is no end of story. Missing the new explosive video evidence. Missing or misusing?

You look at a tree and see many trees, if you take the trouble to walk around your garden or any park you happen to explore for the sake of your failing health. You take a few steps and see yet another tree of life; and yet it is the same tree of death, as our pessimists affirm with a frown. You look at yourself in a mirror and frown – just for the sake of another picture, another self which you might call mine unless you decide not to call it anything; or to give it a bad name and kill it for the sake of your prosperity: it is easier to prosper in one universe instead of running a number of universes; instead of running towards death.

The universe of energy is we are told running down. It tends fatally towards an equilibrium which shall be final. An equilibrium in which life cannot exist. Yet life is being evolved without pause. Our planet in its surround has evolved it and is evolving it. And with it evolves mind. If mind is not an energy-system how will the running down of the universe affect it? Can it go unscathed? Always so far as we know the finite mind is attached to a running energy-system. When that energy-system ceases to run what of the mind which runs with it? Will the universe which elaborated and is elaborating the finite mind then let it perish?

Sherrington

‘Listen to Sherrington,’ says Edwin Schrödinger.

Why should we listen to anything except our nature to which we do not even have to listen: it resonates everywhere; in an empty church, for instance. There is a cloud and we can call it a ‘nebula’, for want of a better word, definition, function, feeling and mood. All right, so we have this cloud and we know that inside out – and also outside it, *natürlich* – there are many particles or waves (call them what you wish) which can be spotted, recognised and even measured; and yet we should not forget that curiosity killed the cat – Schrödinger’s cat, to all intents and purposes. (As if there were no other cats in the universe, no other intents. You just look at the universe and see a cat – I, for one, have nothing against this hypothesis or thesis. But in this case the cat should not belong to Schrödinger’s household.) The matter stands exactly like that whenever you observe yourself, assuming that you exist and that it is worth anybody’s while investigating your properties and tendencies. At least in my case – not in my *cage*, mind you, for all the respect I have always shown Kafka’s works and their ingredients – the matter stands like that, and it does not collapse, contrary to what might be expected in the light of our discussion focused on particles, waves and quantum mechanics. This does not mean I do not know myself; nor does it signify I persist in turning a deaf ear to Socrates’ injunction or friendly suggestion. This cloud contains a lot of worlds I can use in the course of my meditations, inspirations and struggles with meters, rhymes, reasons and so on. I contemplate this cloud for hours and hours, going deeper and deeper into my souls, psyches, waves and other subatomic particles. While doing so, I never neglect what happens outside – not in the outside world, mind you; in *my* outside world. Within my worlds there is no such thing as the world in general. There are no generals in my world, no Francos, no insurrections of any kind. *Tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté*. (Every English child should know this declaration in the original. It is enough to consult my books where I use it abundantly, both in the original and in

translation. After all, Joyce said that children should spend their lives looking for rivers in *Finnegans Wake*.) And then I resolve to write a phrase – a few connected or disconnected words, putting some images together; even if they do not fit anything, either themselves or their colleagues. Actually this does not go like that: there *are* links so they do fit not only my requirements, but also all the occasions you can think of.

After a while I spot a wave – I am in a wavy mood today – whereupon I begin to measure it, determined to use it sooner or later; or here and there; or on the spot. That wave grows into a beautiful fruit you can find on an exceptional tree of life that was positioned to the North and East of what I call ‘the core of my cloud’. And then I reduce it to one point only – located (among other locations) in Dante’s *Paradiso*. I measure it and find out it has no measurements, no dimensions except the fourth, the fifth and the sixth dimensions, which is quite enough; at least for the time being, in my opinion. And then I decide to let it go, and it goes up and down, to the throne of God and the pit of Satan. The Russian writer who went by the name of Bulgakov seems to have found a seventh proof of God’s existence. God exists because Satan is everywhere; and Satan’s existence needs no proofs, as we all know. The only question is: Where *is* God? He is everywhere, as all self-respecting Spinozists affirm. But if God is everywhere, Satan is nowhere, reply someone’s *Satanic Verses*. Or do we really think they embrace rather heartily? At the centre of the universe? And also all along its circumference? Well, I would not mind issuing them permits on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Issuing permits to Satan and God, authorising their embraces, their love, harmony and what not. But I would not welcome them every day, and even on Tuesday and Thursday they could not stay (slay me) forever; I mean until midnight. Enough is as good as a feast; and a feast is as good as enough. For once, I do not have to add: and vice versa.

But cats will always be there, even if some of them remind us of Satan; for instance, the cat one sees in a particular film that I don’t remember in detail. Actually I remember nothing with the exception of this cat – luckily for us, there are always exceptions to the rules; and even without rules there are exceptions almost everywhere – but that is quite enough: the cat I saw and recall reminds me of another cat, of Sergei Bulgakov’s Behemoth or Beelzebub or whatever the name of that Satan has always been, to my knowledge. And once again I turn my eyes and attention towards Erwin Schrödinger’s cat who allows me to see myself both dead and alive; thanks to the superposition (not substitution, not suppression) I operate in my mind and also in reality, whatever it is, as Nabokov might have observed. To tell the truth, I cannot remember what the exact term or rather its wording happens to be, whenever scientists enlarge upon this phenomenon; whenever they superpose, superimpose their minds upon it. Well, what happens in this case boils down to the following picture: a box, a body lying on its lid. (You should on no account attempt to get inside. God forbid! And God usually forbids it if He is bent on sparing your life and élan.) Let us suppose the body you see belongs to your puny constitution; to my puny constitution, if you prefer. This body is outside the box, as I pointed out earlier, a few seconds ago – that is why I can still recall this occurrence – and that is why we can ascertain or rather assert it is still alive; otherwise it might already have died several times in a row. All this depends on how often you open the box, driven by your cat-killing curiosity. Suppose you do open the box and see a dead cat lying hopelessly (and helplessly, as the saying goes) on its bottom, on the bottom of his (the cat’s) world. Of course you begin to cry and you do not stop crying for at least an hour or so. What happens next? You deplore your act, your murder. ‘Why did I open the box?’ you inquire as you stand in front of a mirror. But you just sit down on the picture, the cat and you are both dead and alive, which reflects the state of affairs we are involved in rather acutely. They say our tomb and cradle are identical twins; they are interchangeable,

as a matter of fact. One should not be surprised upon seeing a woman rock a coffin or even a tombstone, let alone a few flowers. ‘She picked up the corpse and gently rocked her to sleep,’ you say to yourself. No point in adding ‘eternal’ to the words ‘sleep’ and ‘death’. Actually it is better not to add this word to anything – in the light of what Schrödinger or someone else said about our running energy-system. See how it runs, you might be expected to add, although this is not necessary either. It is not vital, needless to say.

You lie on a box, superimposing your worlds upon another world, the other world; whatever, whatever, whatever. Whatever is beyond your worlds; it is just a whatever, nothing else. It does not deserve another name, earnestly speaking. That is what eternity is about, which might mean that neither predestination nor creation can offer you anything else. You are doomed to lie on this box forever, and you wonder what kind of sin you yielded to in the course of your life or death or eternity. Why aren’t you permitted to lie in an ordinary coffin where even a beggar can find enough room for his fragile body? (To handle prudently, with care.) As a matter of fact, you are not even permitted to lie or dance (in the rain) within the bounds of Hell and its suburbs. And, as we all know, this particular paradise is accessible even to Judah, judging from what Dante wrote on the subject as he galloped through his own, personal hell. Of course you do not refrain from cogitations, from a meditation focused on your state of mind and body and soul; and life, I am tempted to add, although all this goes without saying, without thinking. And the conclusions you reach are not likely to console you in the least because they just tell you all your life is identical to what you are going through now, although you do not seem to go anywhere. Some of us think there is no such thing as the lack of motion: no motion, no motion pictures, no nothing, as they say, as I said once or twice. Everything is always in motion; no wonder we are under the impression we are constantly watching a film in which we are somehow involved, either completely or incompletely. Now we are on the screen and even inside, beyond the surface on which somebody jumps or dances; now we are in the hall where some colleagues of ours always sit and watch what goes on on the screen; as if there were something inciting either on the screen or somewhere else. The New Unexciting World. Nothing doing, nothing doing, nothing saying.

So, right after your birth, they put it on a box where a cat was lying either alive or dead or merely asleep. That explains your inordinate liking for cats which we might call ‘love’ without fearing lie detectors and their verdicts. Or suppose you were born on this box, not in a maternity hospital where a number of nurses handle your body either with disgust or giggles. Or inappropriate exclamations: Te, te, te, te, tu, tu, tu. So was your mother; in other words; your mother was also born on this box; and one might suppose that some nurses are present on top of this box – just in case, just in case. And what if this proverbial case never arises? Never mind, never mind – you will not arise either, you know. Why should you? Do you think there is something exciting in this unexciting world; in spite of everything and nothing?

So your mother gives birth to you. You shout, scream, cry and your mother explains to you that you have a neighbour sleeping downstairs. ‘This neighbour is a good friend of ours, and you should always take care of your neighbour.’

‘How could I do *that*?’ you ask.

‘By not opening the box.’

‘But I’d like to play with the cat.’ Your mother must already have explained to you that cats exist in the world only for the sake of humans and their numerous games. Later on, you might question your mother’s theory, declaring that cats exist on their own and for their own sake, not for the sake of our ‘pussy, pussy, pussy, come

here!’ But for the time being you accept her explanation – just for the fun of it or for argument’s sake. What is the argument I am talking about? Doesn’t matter, doesn’t matter: there are always arguments around us, and these arguments are man-sided. Somehow you become *entangled* with the cat, as physicists put it; in the long run, in the short run – it depends on your predisposition to cats, love and touchy-feeliness. Now and then you seem to hear something; and this something differs from human speech which you hate already, although you do not hear it all the time: not many people can reach the top of the box where you are sitting. Nor can they really make themselves comfortable on its surface which is not as big as a royal suite in a five-star hotel. Yet you cannot really bear human voices, even if you are still not acquainted with the cat’s purring and producing other beautiful, brook-like sounds. Yes, this kind of sound is usually produced by brooks and by the pieces that Schubert dedicated to brooks and their murmuring. In my opinion, he also thought of cats when composing his *lieder* and even symphonies, chamber music.

One might suppose – one might do whatever one likes – that a child born in this fashion is more likely to become a music lover, listening to Schubert’s opuses day in day out, and also at night, when the cat is asleep and therefore does not purr continually. Of course a real cat, a mature, well-educated cat snores rather pleasantly, not to say delightfully, but his (the cat’s) snoring is not always audible: more often than not it is rather discreet. And what about Schubert’s music? It is not discreet, contrary to what some musicians affirm, saying that Schubert is much more ‘intimate’ (sic!) than Beethoven, for instance. Our intimacy with composers does not depend on decibels, on grandiloquence. They always whisper something in our ears, in our souls, and there are souls endowed with absolute pitch. One of my Moscow professors – I have never been offered a professor outside of my native city – used to say, ‘Dogs too have absolute pitch.’

‘But what about their souls?’ I asked him once.

‘Souls can live without this pitch,’ he answered. ‘So can humans, by the way. Neither Tchaikovsky nor Schumann had absolute pitch. Besides, animals have no souls.’

‘Do you admire Descartes so much, so passionately?’

‘He was often wrong, when tackling scientific problems,’ he answered unabashed.

‘He was also wrong in the domain where animals enjoy their lives – much more than their human counterparts. *Et pour cause, et pour cause*. Animals do have souls. What’s more, their souls are endowed with absolute pitch. So are their brains, come to think of it.’

‘Why do you think of such things?’ he asked.

Throughout my life I have been entangled with both death and cats. And the superposition they (our physicists) talk about is my favourite posture. I superpose myself upon whatever I see so one might conclude I do not see anything except myself, except my life, except my strife with alien thoughts and images. Let us recall what someone said yesterday or the day before (the eternal recurrence of the same day), ‘If mind is not an energy-system how will the running down of the universe affect it?’ After living on Earth for so many years, I am forced to conclude that my mind is *not* an energy-system, for all its inventions and inspirations. Unenergetically it captures whatever attracts its attention and fiddles with it, toys with it, plays with it to its heart’s content. (I resort to this expression quite often; and yet I have no idea which part of my body takes advantage of my toying with the universe.) ‘Can it go unscathed?’ It does go unscathed, being unenergetic, void of intents and purposes; unless they, these intents and purposes, are utterly estranged from the world they are always talking about. ‘Always so

far as we know the finite mind is attached to a running energy-system.’ You do not know far enough: there is such a thing as an unattached, infinite mind. ‘When that energy-system ceases to run what of the mind which runs with it?’ I do not run with you, end of story. I do not run at all, determined to stay on the safe side: as soon as you begin to walk, let alone run, you get engulfed by some running energy-system. And this is the real and only end of story.

Of course you must be careful when you finally settle down on the top of the box where your cat continues to enjoy himself (my cat) in spite of the poison or sleeping pill located in the same box, in the vicinity of the cat’s vulnerable skin. It is true that your cosmic mind would not accept your being cut off from the almighty universe, from a group of its elements and qualities. Adam Kadmon is one of my favourite heroes – about whom, by the way, neither Heidegger nor Carlyle speak in their works – and he *is* superposed upon the world – like God imagined and depicted by Michelangelo. It is said that sometimes one wonders if the figure one may occasionally see in the sky is not Adam Kadmon, contrary to what theologians affirm rather pigheadedly. ‘Who is it? Who is it?’ wonder ordinary people and common neophytes. But those who regard themselves as adepts of the many-worlds theory answer, ‘It is I.’ And if they are asked, ‘How come? You’re here, aren’t you?’ And the adept answers, ‘Of course I am, otherwise I wouldn’t be talking to you. I’d ignore you completely.’ This kind of discussion usually leads nowhere because people start talking about manners, about how one should behave in front of his or her or its fellow creatures. (We are all itses to some extent; everyone is just a collection of atoms.) The point is there *are* many worlds and the only difference between the categories into which they were put at the beginning of the Creation concerns interiority or exteriority. You can say, for instance, ‘Whenever I look at the sky, I realise there are many galaxies within my field of vision. I also realise there are far more galaxies *beyond* my field of vision. I wish I could have as many fields of vision as God.’ But there are people whose belief in their omnipotence and immortality is unshakeable. They think they *are* Gods and consequently contain both the visible and invisible galaxies. When asked, ‘Where are these galaxies?’ they begin to touch themselves. First they stroke their features, their eyes, noses, cheekbones. (The cheek of those people!) So they go on stroking their bodies and their fingers cover every inch of their visible substances. As for their invisible substances, they caress them with invisible fingers, according to their statements, and their statements, all their words, are so absurd and impertinent that finally they are left to their own devices. And one might see them in the light of a twilight stroking their bones, tendons, nerves and smiling, smiling, smiling as if they were already living in Paradise or at least in its suburbs. (What do the suburbs of Paradise look like, I wonder? Do they have any link with Purgatory?)

At some point I talked about superpositions, but I do not remember what I saw in those moments of bliss, for it is the best pastime one can think of: superposing yourself on the universe. Even if you happen to superpose yourself only on a blade of grass, you are allowed to avail yourself of the bliss reserved for mystics and saints who always see everything in the shape of God or the Cross, which amounts to the same thing; or to the same bliss, if you prefer. (You always prefer bliss, don’t you?) ‘Moreover he would know comfort and consolation beyond all power to tell. For God’s will is that by faith we should see him continuously, though it seems to us that we are seeing him so little.’ That is how they talk, and some of them look at themselves in many mirrors, pointing their index fingers at their own reflections and saying, ‘God, God, God, God, God.’ And often they feel it is not enough to *say* ‘God, God’: you should *sing* this word, otherwise a particle of bliss might escape your notice. So you sing, ‘God, God, God,’ and then you sing, ‘The Almighty, the Almighty.’ Last year we celebrated one of Beethoven’s anniversaries, and people talked about this composer more often than on other occasions. When asked, ‘Do you

enjoy his *Ninth*?' all mystics answered in unison, 'I sang it this morning, you know.' I often speak of this *umschlungen Millionen*, of this gigantic *embrassade*, of this universal bearhug. But I don't mind speaking of it once again – with regard to those mystics who are reluctant to embrace whoever happens to stand next to them, within their field of vision. They embrace themselves day in day out, turning their cheeks, heads, necks and kissing them feverishly as if seeing them for the last time; as if saying 'adieu' to them, in other words. In other worlds. Quantum physicists says, 'Of course you can acknowledge the existence of many particles and waves. The point is they can't communicate. Even Leibniz knew that in spite of the times where he lived.' When I hear my telephone, its call, sound and oratorio, I usually say to myself (I wish I could say that to *them*, whoever they are), 'I can't communicate with other waves because I respect the progress of science and the tenets of this progress. I'm quite willing to talk to you for hours and hours, but quantum mechanics puts a stop to this wish, to the love I might demonstrate in the sphere of human relationships.'

The quality of today's literature is so dolefully low that one wonders what could upset this rotten-apple cart. In the days of the coronavirus, a sample chapter is an obsolete business card. I'm sending you my last novel where I speak of this virus, among other viruses: degradation, debasement, the unquestionable triumph of animals over humans (a Swiftian touch). Just pick and choose or erase the whole thing on the spot, wherever this spot can be situated. No contemporary writer can hold a candle to Kafka, Proust, Musil, Beckett or even to Nabokov. There are no more writers. And my fear is great: there are no more candles.

Looking forward to nothing.

Yours truly,

Valery Aleff

They are nowhere. No answer. They, they. Not even a world. Not even a decaying nucleus.

They say, 'I don't really enjoy these conferences, but they're a good opportunity to do some networking. So I go and listen to nonsense that I don't need either for my lifestyle or for my books. But after these conferences, I meet professors, academics, first ladies and their husbands. Back to nature is my motto. Do you know how subatomic particles behave, when they're on their own? They jiggle like a key in the lock, trying to move towards their goal. They push each other, they beat each other unfair and unsquare. But some of them get what they want. If you stay at home and consequently don't bounce –' After such a prelude, they usually resort to comparisons and pictures related to sport, for 'life is a game of tennis', as the usually point out. 'In tennis you must hit the ball before its second bounce. The same goes for life, you know. And then you say to the Prime Minister, "Can I bounce a couple of ideas off you?"'

What do they talk about, my quantum mechanics? Or just my mechanics or my quantum? The point is, the point is, the point is. I can create as many points or worlds as I wish unless you no longer wish to create anything, at some point. Something decays within myself, my many selves and bodies, let alone souls. Or should we leave them alone? Anyway, a nucleus or an atomic bomb – I am a pacifist after all – decays within myself, not within other selves, and all these decays branch out into many worlds that I own in spite of their multitude. The multitude as such is of no interest to me, but the multiplicity afforded by the decay of others, of other individuals who are not individual at all, is productive, creative. And I can sleep on both ears when I have so many worlds at my

disposal, within all my fields, visions and auditions. And sadly enough, among all these decays, there is Joyce, his attitude towards the world in which I also live, in spite of my prejudices and eternal anger. I do not observe my contemporaries, their habits and prides; I do not hear their words as if they were silent, which they are not unfortunately; unfortunately for themselves, I might add. I am not nostalgic; at least I am not as nostalgic as he was, although we do have something in common: we do not accept their judgement so easily. And sometimes we do not accept it so problematically— we do not accept it at all. Luckily for us all, for men and women alike, there are women in the world, which seems to be deprived of harmony and understanding unless you look at the stars day in day out; even when they are quite invisible. Some of us say, ‘There is no such thing as invisible stars.’ But they (the some and us) might have in mind (minds) only human stars (boils down to); and I am too inhuman to think in these terms. I wish humanity were in parentheses, in brackets, in somewhere else; in nowhere.

If you branch out (not *brunch* out, mind you) you are in danger of losing yourself, as they say. Luckily for us, they do not say that because they have no idea what I am talking about. They do not even know whether I am talking or not. Well, I am talking for the sake of talking; and for the sake of the many worlds I have somewhere, perhaps out of my reach that does not really count, *my* reach. What counts is the *overall* reach; or just a reach, a small reach of no importance. Importance comes later or never; or nothing at all; or at all.

And they talk about dark matter. Actually they *never talk* about it except when the coronavirus makes its appearance in their midst. And it always makes its appearances in their midst in this day and age; in this day in particular. I am not sure this matter, its darkness, is the main subject of my works because there are white, clear, luminous (at least ‘minous’) matters within my Elysian Fields. Physicists say there is nothing except whatever we can create and so dark matter exists only theoretically because we do not create it. (What else do we create, I wonder?) Hot water circulates through the heating system. Cold water circulates through the cooling system. Icy water circulates through the icing system. The dark water circulates through the dark system.

THE WORM

Whenever I hear this word, I find myself in some maternity hospital where I fell into the dead clutches of death – a double whammy. How does it work, this particular whammy? A midwife says to the mother and her husband, ‘Well, just another representative of death on our hospitable Earth.’ And the father answers, ‘You’re wrong. I’m a sportsman, you know, and I assure you that my daughter will swim 14 kilometres every day. And she’ll eat only vegetables and fruit. No meat, no fish, nothing fishy, so to speak. Do you have any idea what my motto is? Everything fishy should be thrown out of the window. That’s why our windows are always wide open. These fishy things are often cumbersome so you have to squeeze them through whatever space is put at your disposal by a window. And however large this window I’m talking about, fishy objects are often quite superior in this domain to any window you can come across during your shopping rounds. So I spend a lot of time in my windows’ vicinity, struggling with their spaces, my spaces and so forth.’

Both your father and mother are loath to admit you are born into the world of death. They talk about funfairs, balloons, chocolate bars and champagne of which their daughter will be allowed to partake on her fifth or sixth birthday, as they assure the sneering midwife. ‘Well,’ says this midwife, without removing the sarcastic smile from her face. ‘In that case, it is a double death your daughter will always be exposed to unless she finds a pessimist, a doctor who talks only about his private cemetery.’ My private cemetery is rather small: I was cut off from many

corpses through my departure from the Soviet Union. My relatives, friends and teachers continued to die, saying to themselves, 'It is a double whammy, it is, it is. Not only am I permanently thinking about death, but I'm also dying, in earnest, physically, thermodynamically.' 'The universe of energy is we are told running down. It tends fatally towards an equilibrium which shall be final. An equilibrium in which life cannot exist.' Logically enough, you hate any equilibrium, however innocuous and even propitious it might look. Your consciousness warns you thus, 'This equilibrium may turn out to be your *final* equilibrium. All equilibriums are dangerous, not only the last one and the one before last. Beware of equilibriums. As soon as you fall into its clutches – any equilibrium is tantamount to cancers and strokes – you should lose it. What's the most important aerobic exercise? Losing equilibrium on a regular basis.'

When one sees a man whose arms and back are covered in bruises, one is tempted to jump to the following conclusion (on the spot, on the spot), 'This man must have cancer, but he struggles for life like a hero depicted by Jack London in one of his famous stories. Apparently this is the story Lenin listened to on his deathbed as he himself struggled for life for the sake of the proletariat and its dictatorship; and his own dictatorship; or rather Stalin's dictatorship, as it turned out. Just thinking about the way the wolf had touched him made her skin crawl. And London's hero began to crawl, inspired by his skin, by her thirst for adventures located on this side of his tomb.' Well, once again I seem to have been led astray by all sorts of irrelevant memories some of which *are* irrelevant, whatever Proust might have written on the subject. Well, you see a man whose arms, back, legs and other members, other tendons are covered in bruises as if he had endured a fight with one of Kassius Klee's successors. You even admitted into your mind the following thought, 'It is to the man's wife that all these bruises should be ascribed.' A frivolous, misogynistic thought. In days of yore, when we paid less attention (or rather no attention at all) to what is commonly known as 'female pride', we always pictured to ourselves an old hag or an old bag armed with a poker. This poker executes its circus-suggested exercise in the vicinity of her husband's body and then one hears 'crack, crack, crack', whereupon one realises the husband's bones have just started to crackle. (It is never too late to break.) Sometimes the woman in question punishes her husband while talking to one of her friends, another member of a famous feminist club, and this second member rightfully asks the first member, 'What are doing? What am I hearing?' And the first member answers as follows, 'The logs are crackling and popping in the fireplace.' 'Could I come and join you right now? I adore fireplaces and logs.' 'Of course you can. But don't forget your poker. Armed with two pokers we're sure to make the fire burn better, much, much better.'

No, the man you are following out of curiosity is not married, contrary to all your suppositions and the guessing games you play with yourself – twice a day at least. (Otherwise life would appear bleak, not to say drab and hopeless.) You try to guess from which illness he suffers so horribly; judging from the number of bruises you contemplate as you continue your walk. More often than not, however, you learn – after spending a few minutes with the sufferer – that the bruise-decorated man does not suffer from any illness in particular. But his dread of death knows no limit. The only piece of knowledge this dread has learnt in the course of its carrier's life is the importance of equilibrium-destruction. In his youth, this man was longing to become an acrobat. After a while – this while lasted several months – he realised his life was far more important than the applause he heard, whenever performing his tricks in a nearby circus. So he began to fall from trapezes, ropes and even ordinary ladders. 'The more I fall the longer I'll live' was his motto in those distant days. And he said to himself, 'The more disfigured I grow the longer my beauty will shine in the world. It will always shine, incidentally – I'm immortal. Their way of

describing immortals is utterly ridiculous. Homer forgot he had composed the *Iliad*, once upon a time. What does it matter? What counts is his body which must display the beauty of Achilles' shield.'

These immortals exchange a few remarks as they cross each other in the streets or in the mountains. They usually ask each other how many times they have managed to fall in the course of their journeys through time and space. And then they say to each other, 'Every bruise will get us closer to their absences, to the realm where there are no spaces, no times, no seconds, no centimetres.' Their talks often remind us of Buddhists whose calculations are centred upon the lack of calculations, upon a number of less, less, less, less, less, less, less. So they, our immortals, can also ask each other, 'How many lesses have you got after your descent from your canopy-distinguished bed?' 'My bed is bedless,' they often replay as if to intimate they sleep on the floor, on a few ceramic tiles. Immortality is the end of their journey and yet they constantly speak of continuum, using this variant of an immortal idea to the detriment of continuity, which may appear too simplistic, unworthy of either Buddhists or mathematicians. From time to time, some irrelevant questions crop up in their midst, in this mixture, and a Buddhist may say all of a sudden, 'We need to set up a meeting to discuss the proposals.'

'Which proposals?' ask a few mathematicians.

'I wonder why we persist in writing Buddhists and Buddhism with a capital B, whereas you, our brothers, remain small – to the point of vanishing either into thin air or thin water. You grow too thin, in other words.'

'Our life doesn't depend on capital letters,' someone usually retorts. 'Our grandeur has nothing to do with printers and even with computers.'

'You seem to discard the importance of continuum, my dear brother,' someone points out. (One of the brothers, presumably.) 'This word and notion largely depend on the size of the letters used by our machines and our ballpoints. Whenever I resort to capital letters, when yielding to what I call "the typographical urge", I always use capital letters which enable me to prolong my pursuance of the ideas included in the word "continuum".'

'Are you so weary of yoga-imposed meditation?'

'I find it exhausting. So I have no alternative but to fall back on letters, on capitals.'

'Not on Marx's *Das Kapital*?' someone cuts in. And everybody bursts out laughing. Some of the participants seem to cry during this laughter-ritual.

Unfortunately we cannot get rid of yoga by somehow substituting its methods and exercises, especially if the substitution boils down to capital letters; or even to Marx's *Das Kapital*. Most of the time these immortals spend on the floor, crawling along letters or ideas enclosed in their meditations, disappearing from their meditations, one by one, one by one. Then meditations begin to disappear, taking their cues from the ideas enclosed in them. I must admit that some of these immortals cannot completely rely on their mental or rather silent capacity to extricate themselves from the hustle and bustle of the marketplace, alias the universe. So they murmur, 'Hustle and bustle, hustle and bustle, go to Hell, shit, shit, shit. Are you already in Hell? You're not, you lazy scoundrels. Shit, shit, shit, hustle and bustle, shit.' And when the going gets tough, some of them open the book entitled *The Perfect Wisdom*. The title is questionable and so many hours have already been devoted to its wrong sides and aspects. Actually the book ought to have been entitled *The Imperfect Wisdom*. The perfect wisdom denotes the end of the road – or death, in other words. 'And we're supposed to bypass death and go straight to immortality,' as someone put it many years ago. All right, all right: let us just use the book instead of bickering endlessly and fruitlessly; to no point. Even if, now and then, you say, 'The point is,' there will be no point dissecting the title of

this book. Let us quote it instead: ‘Here a Bodhisattva, on account of the production of the first thought of enlightenment, does not review of any dharma the production or stopping, the decrease or increase, the coming or going, the defilement or purification. And where there is neither defilement nor purification, neither coming nor going, neither decrease nor increase, neither production nor stopping, that is not the thought of a Disciple.’ Even peaceful entities, alias humans, are apt to embark upon a boisterous discussion after reading an excerpt from the book that is bound, in the long run, to teach them the perfection of wisdom – even to the detriment of their much-vaunted immortality. One of them says, ‘I detect an error in the text of the book which is regarded as the most perfect manual of Buddhism in the world. This book mentions the thought of a Disciple, whereas a true Disciple, let alone a perfect specimen of what we are talking about, has no thoughts whatsoever. Even if asked, “Are you crawling along your continuum determined to reach immortality situated either in the Garden of Eden or nowhere?” he says, “Am I crawling? Are you sure I’m crawling? I’m not even sure I am. I’m not even sure I can be sure one of these days, one of these nights. What is a continuum? What are you talking about? Are you talking? I can see your lips going up and down, but that doesn’t mean anything. You might be thirsty, for I all know. The point is I don’t know anything at all. I don’t even know at all, I can assure you.’

‘*Can you assure me?*’ asks another disciple.

‘I can’t,’ says yet another disciple. And then we hear another quotation from the same book as if all these people had retained their mental capacities. And if you dare ask them, ‘Have you retained your mental capacities?’ they answer, ‘Mental, mental, retain, non-retained, capa, papa, mamma.’ And if you remind them of their promise to donate yet another quotation from the perfect book to us, their disciples, they say, ‘What, quote, what, quote,’ and only their youngest offspring are capable of reciting something out loud, ‘This, Sariputra, is of a Bodhisattva, a great being, the perfection of wisdom which is associated with skill in means. A Bodhisattva furthermore dwells in the trances and formless attainments by way of the vision of detachment, of emptiness, of the signless, of the wishless, and yet he does not realise the reality limit.’ After reciting this excerpt which often sounds like a W. H. Auden poem, they pose the following question, ‘Do *you* realise the reality limit?’ Your conduct depends on what you wish to answer, inclined to satisfy these children’s curiosity. (Unless you are inclined to be lazy.) For instance, you could make your way to the door and touch this door which enables you to pronounce your judgement, ‘Here’s the limit of reality.’ And if one of those children runs towards the door and kicks it, opening up a perspective of other realities and worlds, you just say, ‘Well, this limit is limitless, you know.’ And if you ask them in your turn, ‘Who is the best of the bunch?’ you are sure to see a young boy whose face does not incite you to put any question to his disappearing brain. Out of politeness, however, you ask him to show you his trances, or one of them. ‘What are you really asking for?’ he might ask in his turn, and it is pointless to explain to him that his turn may never come, not in this world anyway. ‘Do you wish me to show you a trance or a formless attainment?’

‘A formless attainment,’ you answer.

‘A formless attainment has no form. What on earth could I show you in this case?’

‘You could show me its contents.’

‘Its contents are the empty air.’

‘Please, show me the empty air,’ you say to this insolent fellow.

‘I’d rather drink them first. Its contents, I mean. Otherwise the air will be half-full.’

Drinking the air – one half of it, not more – or becoming a tree or rather one of its branches are favourite pastimes of yogi whose faithfulness to rituals is celebrated almost everywhere; at least among intellectuals who vainly endeavour to spend a few minutes on a carpet, after striking the pose lovingly nicknamed ‘lotus’. I, for one, have never been able to begin this impersonation. Often I would find myself on the floor; and I am pretty certain that, on these occasions, my outward appearance might remind my colleagues of rats and cats. Speaking about worms, I must admit it is much easier to rely on cosmic worms, on their warmth and humane attitudes, than to identify with flowers in the course of yet another expulsion of thoughts and reality in general. In a Soviet documentary I came across such a worm, although I am not sure they had actually filmed it, being confronted with death in every shape and form. One cosmonaut had suffered from food poisoning throughout his short yet fruitful life. (He must have eaten at least a dozen cosmic worms.) What is more (what is worm), neither Soviet authorities nor their generals seem to have succeeded in destroying the worm and its offspring, for the orbiting station where a score of worms used to indulge in banquets of all kinds rather prolifically was drowned in the last decade of the 20th century. But even underwater both the machines and worms continue to emit signals and occasionally one can even hear a Bruckner symphony transmitted by the ocean-harboured radio. And here are the texts our machines are fed into:

In my last email I told you we were both better than Ishiguro and many other contemporary writers. This might seem bizarre, considering that Ishiguro got the Nobel Prize. The point is I think the story or plot and message do not really count, as I said many times during our talks. Your choice of words, their intricacy, the spider web and intensity ensure *my* pleasure at least, and I am sure my attitude towards your style and literature in general is not really exceptional, unheard-of. Nabokov said that stories were important but his stories, including *Lolita*, are not very exciting except that a 21-year-old girl is raped. What is even more exciting concerns her lover – *he* is raped as matter of fact. But Henry James’ stories are much more ambiguous, mysterious and intricate. Less true to life, though. Nabokov is truer to life and closer to the common reader who enjoys his own mediocrity, whatever he does and looks at. (Let us leave the female of the species out of this sordid business.) Nabokov’s interplays between plans, surfaces, the bottoms and ingredients of our life are fascinating, and I hope I also play with the pawns and kings and queens – to my heart’s content. I just can’t understand how an uncommon reader can read this contemporary stuff that the Russians call *chitavo*. *Chitat’* means to read and *chitavo* might be translated as readovo. (Not *ris de veau*, mind you.) Or *govno* – shit, in Russian. Actually, every book is the story of its own thermodynamics: it dies its own noble death. The more realistic the novel, the clearer the image of the deathbed; but not of its occupant.

Enjoying every moment of our existence, putting it alongside our personal history and that of the world; creating a network and focusing on the nexus of the world and leisure is the delight we should hanker after. Otherwise we’ll have only Ishiguro and his doppelgängers in our midst or rather mist. Incidentally, the last Nobel Prize Winner, Peter Handke, is better than all other Nobel Prize Winners for literature in our century. Not great, though. Thomas Bernhard was much better. But neither he nor Borges nor Nabokov got the prize. Does it deserve a capital P? Now?

After hearing these messages one might conclude our worm has a friend somewhere, not underwater, though; unless he cannot swim. And I have the feeling these worms can swim. What is more, they literally fly over oceans

and continents, when fed up with typing on their machines' numerous keyboards. They are taping their innermost, utmost thoughts day in day out as if they could not leave their ocean and fly over Russia to see the demonstration that covers as many 95 cities. (What kind of demonstration? they ask in the 24th century.) The world goes on, and I have no wish to join this parade because I am weak and consequently feel like preparing the ground for my funeral; or rather for my eternal life. Apparently, instead of preparing ground, you should destroy it, layer by layer, getting access to the innermost (their, our worms') world where eternity unfolds rather calmly, without actually unfolding. And one cannot help asking the following question, 'Is eternity immobile or mobile, like a mobile phone?' Yes, it is like a mobile phone; that is why you can talk to your friends, relatives, be they dead or alive, to your immortality's content. Are you content? you ask your immortality now and then. 'I am content,' it answers, but most of the time it sings in answer to your questions. It sings either one note or three notes which sound like one note. And you listen to this note and recall Ulysses who listened to the Sirens, to their immortal, eternal, perilous song. And when you grow weary of a layer you are bent on exploring, you just remove it and reach yet another layer; and yet another, another, another, sound, another omnipresent, omniscient note. Yes, this worm of yours is not a destroyer; she is a preserver, a mother, no less. And you suck her breasts from time from time, when fearing death of starvation or just death, the ordinary arrival of death. It is strange, isn't it? Even in the realm of eternity and immortality one still fears death – just for the fun of it perhaps: death is funny, on condition that you know it does not exist. Funny, funny, funny. You break into thunderous laughter whenever they show you corpses, saying, 'This one died of hunger, this one died of cancer.' 'Which cancer?' you ask, stopping to laugh for a second. 'Lung cancer,' they answer and you resume your natural gaiety. 'And this one?' you ask, stopping again, being short of breath. 'Stroke,' they answer. 'What kind of stroke?' you ask. 'Axe,' they answer. 'On the head?' you ask. 'Not quite,' they answer. 'Could you show me blood?' 'Are you still bloodthirsty?' 'I am, unfortunately. Sorry, awfully sorry.' And they show you a bloodbath. 'Where does this blood come from?' 'From children,' they answer. 'So I might bathe in it. Apparently such blood rejuvenates your body in no time at all.' 'You don't need it,' they answer. 'Your blood is evergreen. Have you forgotten the word "continuum"?' 'Continuum, continuum. Do I still have to repeat it, from time to time? What for? Haven't I gained enough momentum?' 'Your momentum will keep you company to the very end of time, and then you'll remove another layer from your eternity.'

Leaving in a few hours. Listening to Chomsky's interviews and Trump's clownish failures. Writing about Plato, Whitehead and all this – almost in the same breath. And enjoying music in every shape or form – for instance Mendelssohn's piano pieces in my new car, played by a Russian woman in Japan. Orwell and the brave new world are organically wrong because we don't understand one simple thing: We have got everything, Dante, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Mozart, Bach and a multitude of other artists like Pushkin. No extraterrestrial will ever surpass them. I'm not even sure they more or less deserve our attention – reading them, for instance; let alone trying to come to terms with them artistically, creatively.

And what about this message? What are they talking about? Is it possible to travel when living underwater, in a sealed capsule? How come, how come? How fly? Another question. This worm has always looked extraterrestrial, if you see what I mean. And you *can* see what I mean, even if you have never seen an extraterrestrial visitor in

your life. Why does he criticise his fellow-citizens in the above-quoted email? Don't we criticise our fellow-citizens, here, on Earth? Don't we belong to the same human mythology?

You allowed him to write all this for the sake of creation, annihilation and a number of other ations that come and go as we spot them, from time to time. And then we go to nothing and lie down as if there were lying and down and whatever precedes and comes after all this inextricable filth. What do you know about it, My *Fils*? Nothing except that I am either mine or thine or tine, whatever it is. I am probably time, one of its particles or heroes. I am Ine.

Dear Adrian,

Thank you very much for your email. I've just written a few pages about the only solution to the problem of love and hate in the domain of human relations. Your dog is above all suspicion, as are most animals – what a beauty he is – but humans are not even *below* suspicion. That's why I came up with the idea of letting them stay outside both limbos and wings – in the non-existent area. But spiritually or ideally - Platonic ideas might fit the bill – they should be present; as far as possible. We need them for the mind of which we are all part, the mind of God, the mind of Adam before the Fall, the mind of Adam Kadmon or just the mind and heart of music which is the best representative of the world I'm writing about.

Thank you for making me discover Žižek of whom I'd never heard. I listened to some of his interviews, but my knowledge of what he thinks and writes about is so scanty that I shouldn't even attempt to judge him. Well, generally speaking I'm no longer interested in the sociological aspect of human existence, and even one of my favourite philosophers, Gilles Deleuze, leaves me cold when he attempts to analyse our social structures with the help of Oedipus and Gathari. (A wrong spelling?) I unconditionally opt for his folds or *les plis* to which he resorts when dissecting Leibniz's standpoint.

My trip to Moscow was (and still is) a huge disappointment. My old friends grow more and more insolent, whereas I lie to them for the sake of our common peace of mind. Instead of saying to my oldest friend, Vladimir Kalunov, 'Your brain has already dissolved into tears/laughter (my tears, my laughter)' I told him I had been moved by his latest piece of music and latest book. 'I'll never forget either of them,' I said. Is it a white lie, a grey lie, a gruesome lie? And Kalunov just said, 'Your Russian poems are really second-rate.'

My cat is by my side. It's snowing today so I can't take my ritual walk, for fear of collapsing in the middle of the road, at the end of my life. Thank you again for your email. I'm very sensitive to friendship and the eyes of animals.

Do skorogo,

Valery

Am I not and Big and Miniscule

To live such a desire, such a May

Such an amount of flowers of which

I know one, two, three, four, five

$$1=2=3=4=5=6=7=8=9=1/12$$

And if I don't go, I don't go.