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POSSIBILITY

The dominant philosophical traditions of the century agree that philosophy, as a discipline, is no longer really what it used to be. It must be said that Carnap's critique of metaphysics as nonsense is very different from Heidegger's announcement of the supersession of metaphysics. It is also very different from the Marxist dream of a concrete realization of philosophy. Very different as well from what Freud ferrets out as illusion, indeed paranoia, from speculative systematicity. But the fact remains that German hermeneutics like Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, revolutionary Marxism and psychoanalytical interpretation concur to declare the 'end' of a millennial régime of thought.¹ No further question of imagining a *philosophia perennis* perpetuating itself.

In this sense, the philosophers of today should rather call themselves 'philosophers'. Most of them say in fact that philosophy is impossible, completed, assigned to something other than itself.

In this respect let us cite the most well-known French philosophers. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, for

example: "One must no longer be in desire of philosophy."¹ And almost at the same time, Jean-François Lyotard: "Philosophy as architecture is ruined."² Is it however possible to imagine a philosophy that is not in the least architectonic? Is a "writing of ruins", a "micrologia", a diligence for "graffiti" (which Lyotard considers as metaphors for the style of contemporary thought) still connected to 'philosophy', however we understand it, in any relation other than a simple homonymic one? What is more: was not the greatest of our dead, Jacques Lacan, an 'anti-philosopher'? And how should we interpret the fact that Lyotard can only evoke the destiny of Presence in commentaries on painters, that Gilles Deleuze's last great book had cinema as its topic, that Lacoue-Labarthe (like Gadamer in Germany) devotes his energies to Celan's poetic anticipation, or that Jacques Derrida calls upon Genet? Almost all our 'philosophers' are in search of a diverted writing, indirect supports, oblique referents, so that the evasive transition of a site's occupation may befall to philosophy's presumably uninhabitable place. And at the heart of this diversion—the anxious dream of someone who is neither poet, nor believer nor "Jew"—we find the following, whetted by the brutal summons of Heidegger's National-Socialist involvement: in face of the proceedings instituted by our epoch against us and upon reading the records of this trial, the major evidence of which is Kolyma and Auschwitz, our philosophers, taking on the burden of the century and, when it comes down to it, all of the centuries since Plato, have decided to *plead guilty*. Neither scientists, a good many times in the dock, nor the military, nor even politicians have considered that the massacres of the century affected them as a body. Sociologists, historians, psychologists, all prosper in innocence. Only phi-

losophers have interiorized the notion that thought, *their* thought, encountered the historic^u and political crimes of this century and of all those leading up to it, both as the obstacle to all continuation and as the tribunal of a collective and historic intellectual forfeiture.

It could of course be thought that there is in this philosophical singularization of the intellectuality of the crime, a great deal of conceit. When Lyotard credits Lacoue-Labarthe with the “first philosophical determination of Nazism”, he takes it for granted that such a determination can be the concern of philosophy. Now, this is by no means obvious. We know for example that on no account does the “determination” of the laws of movement fall within the category of philosophy. I personally maintain that even the ancient question of being *qua* being does not exclusively fall within it: it concerns the field of mathematics. It is thus entirely conceivable that the determination of Nazism—for example, of Nazism as political—be removed *de jure* from the specific form of thinking which, since Plato, has deserved the name of philosophy. Our modest partisans of the impasse of philosophy could well maintain—or detain—persistence in the idea that ‘everything’ is the concern of philosophy. From this speculative totalitarianism, it must indeed be recognized that Heidegger’s National-Socialist involvement was one of its outcomes. What in fact did Heidegger do other than presume that the “firm resolve” of the German people as embodied by the Nazis was transitive to his thinking as a professor and hermeneutician? To posit that philosophy—and philosophy alone—is accountable for the sublime or repugnant avatars of the politicalⁱⁱⁱ in the century is somewhat similar to the Hegelian ruse of Reason lurking in the most intimate corners of our anti-dialecticians’ apparatuses. It is to postulate an

essential determination, namely that a *Zeitgeist* exists, of which philosophy is the principle of capture and concentration. Instead, let us begin by imagining that, for example, Nazism is not as such a possible object for philosophy, that it is not part of the conditions which philosophical thought is authentically able to configure within its own order. That it is not an event addressed by this thinking. Which does not in any way suggest it is unthinkable.

For conceit turns into a dangerous deficiency when our philosophers, from the axiom putting the accusation of the crimes of the century at philosophy's door, draw the joint conclusions of philosophy's impasse and the unthinkable nature of the crime. For whoever supposes that the extermination of European Jews must be philosophically evaluated from the standpoint of Heidegger's thinking, the impasse is in fact blatant. One can get out of this impasse by exposing that, here, there is some unthinkable, some inexplicable, some rubble for any concept. One will be ready to sacrifice philosophy itself to preserve this conceit: since philosophy must think Nazism and that it has not the means to do so. What it must think is unthinkable, namely that philosophy is in the pass of an impasse.

I suggest we sacrifice the imperative and declare that: if philosophy is incapable of conceptualizing the extermination of European Jews, it is the fact that it is neither its duty nor within its power to conceptualize it. It is up to an *other order of thought* to render *this* thinking actual. For example, the thinking of historicity, that is, of History examined from the standpoint of the political.

It is never really modest to declare an 'end', a completion, a radical impasse. The announcement of the 'End of the Grand Narratives' is as immodest as the

Grand Narrative itself, the certainty of the 'end of metaphysics' proceeds within the metaphysical element of certainty, the deconstruction of the concept of subject requires a central category—being, for example—the historical prescription of which is even more decisive, etc. Overcome by the tragic nature of its supposed object—the extermination, the camps—philosophy transfigures its own impossibility into a prophetic posture. It adopts the somber colors of the time, heedless that this aesthetization is *also* an offense against the victims. The contrite prosopopoeia of abjection is as much a posture, an imposture, as the bugle blaring cavalry of the Spirit's second coming. The end of the End of History is cut from the same cloth as this End.

Once philosophy's stakes have been delimited, the pathos of its 'end' gives way to quite another question, which is the one of its conditions. I do not claim that philosophy is possible at every moment. I propose a general examination of the conditions under which it is possible, in accordance with its destination. That history's violence can interrupt it is an idea which cannot be given credence without closer examination. It would be to concede a strange victory to Hitler and his henchmen to declare outright that they had managed to introduce the unthinkable into thought and so terminated its 'architected' exercise. Must we grant the fanatical anti-intellectualism of the Nazis this vengeance following its crushing military defeat, namely that thought itself, be it philosophical or political, is in effect incapable of taking stock of the force which intended to annihilate it? Let me make myself clear: it would be tantamount to making the Jews die a second time if their death brought about the end of the fields to which they decisively contributed, revolutionary politics on the one hand, rationalist philosophy on the other. The most essential

reverence toward the victims cannot reside in the mind's stupor, in its self-accusatory vacillation in face of the crime. It always resides in the *continuation* of what designated them as representatives of Humanity in the eyes of their murderers.

I postulate not only that philosophy is possible today, but that this possibility does not take the form of a final stage. On the contrary, the crux of the matter is to know what the following means: taking *one more step*. A single step. A step within the modern configuration, the one that since Descartes has bound the three nodal concepts of being, truth and the subject to the conditions of philosophy.