

I

CRITIQUE OF DOGMATIC SERVITUDE (AND OF MYSTICISM)

By *inner experience* I understand that which one usually calls *mystical experience*: the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of meditated emotion. But I am thinking less of *confessional* experience, to which one has had to adhere up to now, than of an experience laid bare, free of ties, even of an origin, of any confession whatever. This is why I don't like the word *mystical*.¹

Nor do I like narrow definitions. Inner experience responds to the necessity in which I find myself—human existence with me—of challenging everything (of putting everything into question) without permissible rest. This necessity was at work despite religious beliefs, but it has even more far-reaching consequences if one does not have these beliefs. Dogmatic presuppositions have provided experience with undue limits: he who already knows cannot go beyond a known horizon.

I wanted experience to lead where it would, not to lead it to some end point given in advance. And I say at once that it leads to no harbor (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense). I wanted non-knowledge to be its principle—for this reason I have followed with a keener discipline a method in which Christians excelled (they engaged themselves as far along this route as dogma would permit). But this experience born of non-knowledge remains there decidedly. It is not beyond expression—one doesn't betray it if one speaks of it—but it steals from the mind the

answers it still had to the questions of knowledge. Experience reveals nothing and cannot found belief nor set out from it.

Experience is, in fever and anguish, the putting into question (to the test) of that which a man knows of being. Should he in this fever have any apprehension whatsoever, he cannot say: "I have seen God, the absolute, or the depths of the universe"; he can only say "that which I have seen eludes understanding"—and God, the absolute, the depths of the universe, are nothing if they are not categories of understanding.²

If I said decisively: "I have seen God", that which I see would change. Instead of the inconceivable unknown—wildly free before me, leaving me wild and free before it—there would be a dead object and the thing of the theologian—to which the unknown would be subjugated, for, in the form of God, the obscure unknown which ecstasy reveals *is obliged to subjugate me* (the fact that a theologian bursts the established framework after the fact simply means that the framework is useless; for experience, it is only a presupposition to be rejected).

In any case, God is tied to the salvation of the soul—at the same time as to the other *relations on the imperfect to the perfect*. Now, in experience, the feeling that I have of the unknown about which I spoke is distrustfully hostile towards the idea of perfection (servitude itself, the "must be"³).

I read in Denys l'Aréopagite: "Those who by an inward cessation of all intellectual functioning enter into an intimate union with ineffable light . . . only speak of God by negation" (*Noms divins*, 1, 5). So is it from the moment that it is experience and not presupposition which reveals (to such an extent that, in the eyes of the latter, light is "a ray of darkness"; he would go so far as to say, in the tradition of Eckhart: "God is Nothingness [néant]*"). But positive theology—founded on the revelation of the scriptures—is not in accord with this negative experience. Several pages after having evoked this God whom discourse only apprehends by negating, Denys writes, "He possesses absolute dominion over creation . . . , all things are linked to him as to their center, recognizing him as their cause, their principle and their end . . ." (*ibid.*, 1, 7).

On the subject of "visions", of "words" and of other "consolations", common in ecstasy, Saint John of the Cross evinces if not hostility, at least reserve. Experience has meaning for him only in the apprehension

*From this point on, the French *néant* is translated as "Nothingness"; *abîme* is translated as "abyss"; and the term *vide* is translated as "void."

of a God without form and without mode. Saint Theresa in the end only valued “intellectual vision”. In the same way, I hold the apprehension of God—be he without form and without mode (the “intellectual” and not the sensuous vision of him), to be an obstacle in the movement which carries us to the more obscure apprehension of the *unknown*: of a presence which is no longer in any way distinct from an absence.

God differs from the unknown, in that a profound emotion, coming from the depths of childhood, is in us bound to the evocation of Him. The unknown on the contrary leaves one cold, does not elicit our love until it overturns everything within us like a violent wind. In the same way, the unsettling images and the middle terms to which poetic emotion has recourse touch us easily. If poetry introduces the strange, it does so by means of the familiar. The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the strange, and ourselves with it. It never dispossesses us entirely, for the words, the images (once dissolved) are charged with emotions already experienced, attached to objects which link them to the known.

Divine or poetic apprehension is on the same level as the empty apparitions of the saints, in that we can, through it, still appropriate to ourselves that which exceeds us, and, without grasping it as our own possession, at least link it to us, to that which had touched us. In this way we do not die entirely: a thread—no doubt tenuous—but a thread links the apprehended to me (had I destroyed the naive notion of him, God remains the being whose role the church has determined).

We are only totally laid bare by proceeding without trickery to the unknown. It is the measure of the unknown which leads to the experience of God—or of the poetic—their great authority. But the unknown demands in the end sovereignty without partition.⁴

II

EXPERIENCE, SOLE AUTHORITY, SOLE VALUE

The opposition to the idea of project—which takes up an essential part of this book—is so necessary within me that having written the detailed plan for this introduction, I can no longer hold myself to it. Having abandoned for a time its realization, having passed to the post-scriptum (which was not foreseen), I can only change it. I keep to project in secondary things: in what counts for me, it quickly appears to be what it is: contrary to myself being project.

I am anxious to explain myself on this matter, thus interrupting the exposé: I must do it, not being able to guarantee the homogeneity of the whole. Perhaps this is negligence. Nevertheless, I wish to say that I in no way oppose to project a negative mood (an ailing listlessness), but the spirit of decision.

The expression of inner experience must in some way respond to its movement—cannot be a dry verbal tradition to be executed on command.¹

I will give the chapter titles of the plan which I had stopped, which were:

- critique of dogmatic servitude (alone written)*
- critique of the scientific attitude*
- critique of an experimental attitude*
- position of experience itself as value and authority*
- principle of a method*
- principle of a community*

I will now try to set in motion that which was to arise from the whole.

Inner experience not being able to have principles either in a dogma (a moral attitude), or in science (knowledge can be neither its goal nor its origin), or in a search for enriching states (an experimental, aesthetic attitude), it cannot have any other concern nor other goal than itself. Opening myself to inner experience, I have placed in it all value and authority. Henceforth I can have no other value, no other authority*. Value and authority imply the discipline of a method, the existence of a community.

I call experience a voyage to the end of the possible of man. Anyone may not embark on this voyage, but if he does embark on it, this supposes the negation of the authorities, the existing values which limit the possible. By virtue of the fact that it is negation of other values, other authorities, experience, having a positive existence, becomes itself positively value *and authority***.

Inner experience has always had objectives other than itself wherein one placed value and authority—God in Islam or in the Christian Church; in the Buddhist Church this negative goal: the suppression of pain (it was also possible to subordinate it to knowledge as does the ontology of Heidegger***). But were God, knowledge, the suppression of pain to cease to be in my eyes convincing objectives, if the pleasure to be drawn from a rapture were to annoy me, even shock me, must inner experience from that moment seem empty to me, henceforth impossible, without justification?

The question is in no way idle. The absence of a formal response (which up to that point I had gone without) finished by leaving me with a great uneasiness. Experience itself had torn me to shreds, and my powerlessness to respond finished tearing them. I received the answer of others: it requires a solidity which at that moment I had lost. I asked the question of several friends, letting them see part of my disarray: one of them**** stated simply this principle, that experience itself is authority (but that authority expiates itself).

*To be understood in the realm of the mind, as one says the authority of science, of the Church, of the Scriptures.

**The paradox in the authority of experience: based on challenge, it is the challenging of authority; positive challenge, man's authority defined as the challenging of himself.

***At least the manner in which he has exposed his thought, before a community of men, of knowledge.

****Maurice Blanchot. Later I refer on two occasions to this conversation.

From that moment, this answer calmed me, barely leaving me (like the scar of a wound long in closing) a residue of anguish. I measured the extent of it the day that I worked out the plan for an introduction. I then saw that it put an end to the entire debate on religious existence, that it even had the galilean effect of a reversal in the exercise of thought, that it substituted itself—for philosophies as well as for the tradition of the Churches.

For some time now, the only philosophy which lives—that of the German school—tended to make of the highest knowledge an extension of inner experience. But this *phenomenology* lends to knowledge the value of a goal which one attains through experience. This is an ill-assorted match: the measure given to experience is at once too much and not great enough. Those who provide this place for it must feel that it overflows, by an immense “possible”, the use to which they limit themselves. What appears to preserve philosophy is the little acuity of the experience from which the phenomenologists set out. This lack of balance does not weather the putting into play of experience proceeding to the end the possible, when going to the end means at least this: that the limit, which is knowledge as a goal, be crossed.

On the philosophical side, it is a matter of putting to rest the analytic division of operations, of escaping by this from the feeling of the emptiness of intelligent questions. On the religious side, the solved problem is weightier. Traditional authorities and values have for a long time no longer had meaning for a good many. And those whose interest is the extreme limit of the possible cannot be indifferent to the criticism to which tradition has succumbed. It is tied to movements of intelligence wanting to extend its limits. But—it is undeniable—the advance of intelligence diminished, as a secondary consequence, the “possible” in a realm which appeared foreign to intelligence: *that of inner experience*.

To say “diminished” is even to say too little. The development of intelligence leads to a drying up of life which, in return, has narrowed intelligence. It is only if I state this principle: “inner experience itself is authority”, that I emerge from this impotence. Intelligence had destroyed the authority necessary for experience: by deciding the issue in this way, man has once again at his disposal his “possible” and what is no longer the old, the limited, but the extreme limit of the possible.

These statements have an obscure theoretical appearance, and I see no remedy for this other than to say: “One must grasp the meaning from the inside.” They are not logically demonstrable. One must *live* experience.

It is not easily accessible and, viewed from the outside by intelligence, it would even be necessary to see in it a sum of distinct operations, some intellectual, others aesthetic, yet others moral, and the whole problem must be taken up again. It is only from within, lived to the point of terror, that it appears to unify that which discursive thought must separate. But it does not unite any less than do those forms—aesthetic, intellectual, moral—the various contents of past experience (like God and his passion) into a fusion leaving outside only the discourse by which one tried to separate these objects (making of them answers to the difficulties of morality).

Experience attains in the end the fusion of object and subject, being as subject non-knowledge, as object the unknown. It can let the agitation of intelligence break up on that account: repeated failures don't serve it any less than the final docility which one can expect.

This attained as an extremity of the possible, it stands to reason that philosophy properly speaking is absorbed—that being already separated from the simple attempt at the cohesion of knowledge that is the philosophy of sciences, it is dissolved. And being dissolved into this new way of thinking, it finds itself to be no longer anything but the heir to a fabulous mystical theology, but missing a God and wiping the slate clean.

It is the separation of terror from the realms of knowledge, of feeling, of moral life, which obliges one to *construct* values uniting *on the outside* the elements of these realms in the forms of authoritative entities, when it was necessary not to look afar; on the contrary, to reenter oneself in order to find there what was missing from the day when one contested the constructions. "Oneself" is not the subject isolating itself from the world, but a place of communication, of fusion of the subject and the object.

III

PRINCIPLES OF A METHOD AND A COMMUNITY

When the ravages of intelligence had dismantled the edifices of which I had spoken,¹ human life felt a lack (but not right away a total failure). It seemed that one could no longer attain this far-reaching communication, this fusion which up to then it had brought about by a meditation on objects having a history (pathetic and dramatic) like God. It was necessary therefore to choose—either to remain faithful, obstinately, to the dogmas fallen into a realm of criticism—or to renounce fusion, the only form of passionate life.

Love, poetry, in a romantic form, were the ways in which we attempted to escape isolation, the “turning in on itself” of a life deprived in a short time of its most visible outlet. But when these new outlets were of the sort to create no regrets for the old ones, the old ones became inaccessible, or believed to be so, to those whom the criticism affected: by this means their life was deprived of a measure of its possible.

In other words, one reaches the states of ecstasy or of rapture only by *dramatizing* existence in general. The belief in a God betrayed, who loves us (to the extent that he dies for us), redeems us and saves us, played this role for a long time. But one cannot say that, failing this belief, dramatization is impossible: as a matter of fact, other peoples have known it—and through it, ecstasy—not being informed of the Gospel.

One can only say this: that dramatization necessarily has a key, in the form of an uncontested (deciding) element, of a value such that without it there can exist no drama, but indifference. Thus, from the moment that the drama reaches us and at least if it is felt as affecting in us man in general, we attain authority, which causes the drama. (In the same way, if there exists in us an authority, a value, there is drama; for if it is so, one must take it seriously—totally).

In all religion dramatization is essential, but if it is purely external and mythical, it can have several independent forms at the same time. Sacrifices of differing sources and intent become combined. But each of them, at the moment when the victim is sacrificed, marks the point of intensity of a dramatization. If we didn't know how to dramatize, we wouldn't be able to leave ourselves. We would live isolated and turned in on ourselves. But a sort of rupture—in anguish—leaves us at the limit of tears: in such a case we lose ourselves, we forget ourselves and communicate with an elusive beyond.

From this way of dramatizing—often forced—emerges an element of comedy, of foolishness which turns to laughter. If we hadn't known how to dramatize, we wouldn't know how to laugh, but in us laughter is always ready which makes us stream forth into a renewed fusion, breaking us again at the mercy of errors committed in wanting to break ourselves, but without authority this time.²

Dramatization only became completely general by making itself inner, but it cannot develop without means which are commensurate to naive aspirations—like that of never dying. When it thus became inner and general, it fell into an exclusive, jealous authority (it was out of the question to laugh from that moment—dramatization became all the more forced). All this in order that being not turn in on itself too much, not finish as a miserly shop-keeper, as a debauched old man.

Between the shopkeeper, the rich debauchee and the devout individual, snug in the anticipation of salvation, there were as well many affinities, even the possibility of being united in a single person.

Another equivocation: resulting from the compromise between the positive authority of God and that, negative, of the suppression of pain. In the will to suppress pain, we are led to action, instead of limiting ourselves to dramatization. Action led in order to suppress pain moves finally in the opposite direction from the possibility of dramatizing in its name: we no longer tend towards the extreme limit of the possible—we remedy pain (without great effect), but the possible in the meantime no longer has any meaning; we live on projects, forming (despite the presence of irreducible hostilities) a world quite united with the debauchee, the shop-keeper, the egotistical devout individual.

In these ways of dramatizing at the extreme limit, we can, within traditions, distance ourselves from them. The recourse to the desire not

to die and, except for the humiliation before God, even habitual means are together almost missing in the writings of Saint John of the Cross who, falling into the night of non-knowledge, touches upon the extreme limit of the possible: in the writings of several others this occurs in a less striking, though perhaps not in a less profound way.

Kierkegaard, by dint of going to the end of the possible, and in a certain way to the point of the absurd, having received the authority of each element of the drama by tradition, moves about in a world where it becomes impossible to rely on anything, where irony is free.

I come to the most important point:³ *it is necessary to reject external means*. The dramatic is not being in these or those conditions, all of which are positive conditions (like being half-lost, being able to be saved). It is simply to be. To perceive this is, without anything else, to contest with enough persistence the evasions by which we usually escape. It is no longer a question of salvation: this is the most odious of evasions. The difficulty—that contestation must be done in the name of an authority—is resolved thus: I contest in the name of contestation what experience itself is (the will to proceed to the end of the possible). Experience, its authority, its method, do not distinguish themselves from the contestation.*

I could have told myself: value, authority—this is ecstasy; inner experience is ecstasy; ecstasy is, it seems, communication, which is opposed to the “turning in on oneself” of which I have spoken. I would have in this way *known* and *found* (there was a time when I thought myself to know, to have found). But we reach ecstasy by a contestation of knowledge. Were I to stop at ecstasy and grasp it, in the end I would define it. But nothing resists the contestation of knowledge and I have seen at the end that the idea of communication itself leaves naked—not knowing anything. Whatever it may be—failing a positive revelation within me, present at the extreme—I can provide it with neither a justification nor an end. I remain in intolerable non-knowledge, which has no other way out than ecstasy itself.

State of nudity, of supplication without response, wherein I nevertheless perceive this: that it depends on the flight from excuses. So that—precise knowledge remaining as such, with only the ground, its

*As I write in Part 4, the principle of contestation is one of those upon which Maurice Blanchot insists as on a foundation.

foundation, giving way—I grasp while sinking that the sole truth of man, glimpsed at last, is to be a supplication without response.

Taken with belated simplicity, the ostrich, in the end, leaves an eye, free from the sand, bizarrely open . . . But that one should come to read me—should one have the good will, the greatest attention, should one arrive at the ultimate degree of conviction—one will not be laid bare for all that. For nudity, to sink, supplication are at first notions added to others. Although linked to the flight from evasions, in that they themselves extend the realm of knowledge, they are themselves reduced to the state of evasions; such is the work of discourse in us. And this difficulty is expressed in this way: *the word silence is still a sound*, to speak is in itself to imagine knowing; and to no longer know, it would be necessary to no longer speak. Were the sand to permit my eyes to open—I have spoken: the words *which serve only to flee*, when I have ceased to flee, bring me back to flight. My eyes are open, it is true, but it would have been necessary not to say it, to remain frozen like an animal. I wanted to speak, and, as if the words bore the weight of a thousand slumbers, gently, as if appearing not to see, my eyes closed.⁴

It is through an “intimate cessation of all intellectual operations” that the mind is laid bare. If not, *discourse* maintains it in its little complacency. Discourse, if it wishes to, can blow like a gale wind—whatever effort I make, the wind cannot chill by the fireside. The difference between inner experience and philosophy resides principally in this: that in experience, what is stated is nothing, if not a means and even, as much as a means, an obstacle; what counts is no longer the statement of wind, but the wind.

At this point we see the second meaning of the word dramatize: it is the will, adding itself to discourse, not to be content with what is stated, to oblige one to feel the chill of the wind, to be laid bare. Hence we have dramatic art, using non-discursive sensation, making every effort to strike, for that reason imitating the sound of the wind and attempting to chill—as by contagion: it makes a character tremble on stage (rather than resorting to these coarse means, the philosopher surrounds himself with narcotic signs). With respect to this, it is a classic error to assign St. Ignacious’ *Exercises* to discursive method: they rely on discourse which regulates everything, but in the dramatic mode. Discourse exhorts: imagine the place, the characters of the drama, and remain there as one among them; dissipate—extend for that reason your will—the absence, the dazed state, to which words are inclined. The truth is that the *Exer-*

cises, in absolute horror of discourse (of absence), try to cope with it through the tension of discourse, and this artifice often fails. (On the other hand, the object of contemplation which they propose is no doubt drama, but engaged in the historical categories of discourse—far from the God without form and without mode of the Carmelites, more eager than the Jesuits for inner experience.)

The weakness of the dramatic method is that it forces one to always go beyond what is naturally felt. But the weakness is less that of the method than it is ours. And it is the powerlessness, not the voluntary side of the process which stops me (to which here is added sarcasm: the comical appearing to be not authority, but one who, though desiring it, does not manage in his efforts to submit to it).

As a matter of fact, contestation would remain powerless within us if it limited itself to discourse and to dramatic exhortation. That sand into which we bury ourselves in order not to see, is formed of words, and contestation, having to make use of them, causes one to think—if I pass from one image to another different one—of the stuck, struggling man whose efforts sink him for certain: and it is true that words, their labyrinths, the exhausting immensity of their “possibles”, in short their treachery, have something of quicksand about them.

We would not get out of this sand, without some sort of cord which is extended to us. Although words drain almost all life from within us—there is almost not a single sprig of this life which the bustling host of these ants (words) hasn't seized, dragged, accumulated without respite—there subsists in us a silent, elusive, ungraspable part. In the region of words, of discourse, this part is neglected. Thus it usually escapes us. We can only attain it or have it at our disposal on certain terms. They are the vague inner movements, which depend on no object and have no intent—states which, similar to others linked to the purity of the sky, to the fragrance of a room, are not warranted by anything definable, so that language which, with respect to the others, has the sky, the room, to which it can refer—and which directs attention towards what it grasps—is dispossessed, can say nothing, is limited to stealing these states from attention (profiting from their lack of precision, it right away draws attention elsewhere).

If we live under the law of language without contesting it, these states are within us as if they didn't exist. But if we run up against this law, we can in passing fix our awareness upon one of them and, quieting dis-

course within us, linger over the surprise which it provides us. It is better then to shut oneself in, make as if it were night, remain in this suspended silence wherein we come unexpectedly upon the sleep of a child. With a bit of chance, we perceive from such a state what favors the return, increases the intensity. And no doubt the slumber of the child is not the main reason why a mother is passionately retained, for a long spell, next to a cradle.

But the difficulty is that one manages neither easily nor completely to silence oneself, that one must fight against oneself, with precisely a mother's patience: we seek to grasp within us what subsists safe from verbal servilities and what we grasp is ourselves fighting the battle, stringing sentences together—perhaps about our effort (then about its failure)—but sentences all the same, powerless to grasp anything else. It is necessary to persist—making ourselves familiar, cruelly so, with a helpless foolishness, usually concealed, but falling under full light: the intensity of the states builds quite quickly and from that moment they absorb—they even enrapture. The moment comes when we can reflect, link words together, once again no longer silence ourselves: this time it is off in the wings (in the background) and, without worrying any longer, we let their sound fade away.⁵

This mastery of our innermost movements, which in the long run we can acquire, is well known: it is *yoga*. But *yoga* is given in the form of coarse recipes, embellished with pedantism and with bizarre statements. And *yoga*, practiced for its own sake, advances no further than an aesthetics or a hygiene, whereas I have recourse to the same means (laid bare), *in despair*.

Christians dispensed with these means, but experience was for them only the last stage of a long asceticism (Hindus give themselves up to asceticism, which procures for their experience an equivalent of religious drama which they are lacking). But not being able and not wanting to resort to asceticism, I must link contestation to the *liberation of the power of words* which is mastery. And if, as opposed to the Hindus, I have reduced these means to what they are, then affirmed that one must take into consideration the inspiration which resides in them, I can also not fail to say that one cannot reinvent them. Their practice heavy with tradition is the counterpart of common culture, which the freest of the poets have not been able to do without (no great poet who hasn't had a secondary education).

What I have taken on is as far removed as I can make it from the scholastic atmosphere of *yoga*. The means of which it is a question are double; one must find *words* which serve as sustenance for practice, but which turn us away from those objects the whole group of which keeps us hemmed in; *objects* which cause us to slip from the external (objective) plane to the interiority of the subject.

I will give only one example of a “slipping” *word*. I say *word*: it could just as well be the sentence into which one inserts the word, but I limit myself to the word *silence*. It is already, as I have said, the abolition of the sound which the word is; among all words it is the most perverse, or the most poetic: it is the token of its own death.

Silence is given in the sick delectation of the heart. When the fragrance of a flower is charged with reminiscences, we linger alone over breathing it in, questioning it, in the anguish of the secret which its sweetness will in an instant deliver up to us: this secret is only the inner presence, silent, unfathomable and naked, which an attention forever given to words (to objects) steals from us, and which it ultimately gives back if we give it to those most transparent among objects. But this attention does not fully give it up unless we know how to detach it, in the end, even from its discontinuous objects, which we can do by choosing for them as a sort of resting place where they will finally disappear, the silence which is no longer anything.

The resting place which the Hindus chose is no less inner: it is breath. And just as a “slipping” word has the property of capturing the attention given in advance to words, so breath captures the attention which gestures have at their command, the movements directed towards objects: but of these movements breath alone leads to interiority. So that Hindus, breathing gently, deliberately—and perhaps in silence—have not wrongly given to breath a power which is not the one which they had thought, but which opens no less the secrets of the heart.⁶

Silence is a word which is not a word and breath an object which is not an object . . .

I interrupt once again the course of the account. I do not give the reasons for this (which are several, coinciding). I limit myself now to notes from which the essential emerges and in a form answering better to intention than to continuity.

Hindus have other means, which have in my eyes only one value, to show that poor means (the poorest) have alone the property of effecting rupture (rich means have too much meaning, come between us and the unknown, like objects sought for themselves). Intensity alone matters. Now—

Barely have we directed our attention towards an inner presence: what was concealed up to then takes on the fullness not of a storm—it is a question of slow movements—but of an invading flood. Now sensibility is exalted: it suffices that we detach it from the neutral objects to which we usually attach it.

A sensibility having become, by detachment of what attains the senses, so inner that all returns from the outside, a fall of a needle, a cracking, have an immense and distant resonance . . . The Hindus have noticed this peculiarity. I imagine that it is as in vision, which is rendered sharp in darkness by the dilation of a pupil.⁷ Here darkness is not the absence of light (or of sound) but absorption into the outside. In simple night, our attention is given entirely to the world of objects by way of words, which still persist. True silence takes place in the absence of words: that a pin should then drop: at the stroke of a hammer, I jump involuntarily . . . In this silence made of the inside, it is no longer an organ, it is entire sensibility, it is the heart which has dilated.

Various means of the Hindus.

They pronounce in a cavernous way, prolonged as in the resonance of a cathedral, the syllable OM. They take this syllable to be sacred. They thus create for themselves a religious torpor, full of uneasy, even majestic divinity, and whose prolonging is purely inner. But one needs there either the naivete—the purity—of the Hindu, or the European's sickly taste for an exotic color.

Others, if need be, use drugs.

The Tantric Buddhists have recourse to sexual pleasure: they don't ruin themselves in it, but use it as a springboard.

Games of virtuoso, of deliquescence intermingle and nothing is further from the will for laying bare.

But I know little, at bottom about India . . . The few judgments which I abide by—more in antipathy than in receptivity—are linked to my ignorance. I have no hesitation about two points: the Hindus' books are, if not unwieldy, then uneven; these Hindus have friends in Europe whom I don't like.

Tendency of the Hindus—mixed with contempt—to flatter the Occidental man, his religion, his science, his morality, to clear himself of an appearance of backwardness; one is in the presence of a system remarkable in itself, which takes stock of itself, and does not gain from this start of a bad conscience; intellectual pretension sets off naiveties which are touching or inconsequential without it; as for morality, modern Hindus attenuate to their detriment an audacity which they have perhaps kept (tradition of the advaita Vedanta in which Nietzsche saw precursors), do not rid themselves of a concern borrowed with reverence from principles. They are what they are and I hardly doubt that in all respects they raise themselves high enough to see from above, but they explain themselves in an Occidental fashion—hence the reduction to the common measure.

I don't doubt that Hindus advance far into the impossible, but to the greatest degree they are lacking—and this I find important—the faculty of expression. From the little that I know, I think I can gather that asceticism plays a decisive role among them. (The opposite excesses—eroticism, drugs—seem rare, are rejected by a great many. The excesses themselves do not exclude asceticism, even require it by virtue of a principle of equilibrium.) The key is the search for salvation.

The misery of these people is that they have concern for a salvation, moreover different from that of the Christian. We know that they imagine a succession of rebirths—up to the deliverance: to be born again no longer.⁸

What strikes me in this regard, what seems convincing to me (although conviction does not arise from reasoning, but only from the feelings which it defines):

Assume the following: x dead, that I was (in another life) a living and z, what I will be. I can in a living discern ay which I was yesterday, at which I will be tomorrow (in that life). A knows that ay was yesterday himself, whom no one else was. He can in the same way isolate at from all the men who will be tomorrow. But a cannot do this of x dead. He knows not who he was, has no memory of him. In the same way x could not imagine anything of a. In the same way, a could imagine nothing of z who has no memory of a. If between x, a and z there exist none of the relationships which I perceive between ay, a and at, one can only introduce between them inconceivable relationships which are as if they didn't exist. Even if it is true from some unintelligible point of view that x, a and z are but one, I can only feel indifferent about this truth in that,

by definition, x, a and z are necessarily indifferent about one another. It is comical on the part of a to be concerned about z forever unknown to him, for whom he will be forever unknown, as comical to be concerned as an individual about what tomorrow could happen to any stranger whatsoever. Assume k to be this stranger: between a, x and z there are, there will always be the same absence of relationships of the ay, a, at type (that is of graspable relationships) as between a and k.

From that point on: if one proves that I have a soul, that it is immortal, I can assume relationships of the a, ay type between this soul after my death and me (my soul remembering me as a remembers ay). Nothing easier, but if I introduce between the same entities relationships of the a, at type, these relationships remain arbitrary; they will not have the clear consistency of those which characterize a, at. Assume ad to be my soul after death. I can have with respect to this ad the same indifference as with respect to at (if I say I can, impossible, I speak strictly of myself, but the same reaction would be obtained from each straightforward and lucid man).

The truth—of the most comic type—is that one never gives thought to these problems. We were discussing the strong or weak foundation of beliefs without noticing an insignificance which renders the discussion useless. Nevertheless I do nothing but give a precise form to the feeling of each person of some intellect, believer or not. There was a time when the relationships of a to ad of the a, at type actually existed (in unsophisticated minds) where one had a true, inevitable concern for the after-life: men at first imagined a terrifying after-life—not necessarily long, but charged with the nefarious and with the cruelty of death. At that time, the bonds of the self to the soul were unreasoned, (as are the bonds of a to at). But these relationships of a, ad—still unreasoned—were in the end dissolved by the exercise of reason (in which way they were different all the same from the relationship of a to at, sometimes fragile in appearance, yet resisting well when put to the test). To these relationships stemming from dream were substituted in the end reasoned relationships linked to moral ideas which were more and more elevated. In confusion, men can continue to tell themselves: “I am concerned about ad (elsewhere about z) as much as about at”; can continue to tell themselves—but not to concern themselves, really. Once the unsophisticated ideas are dissipated, the comical truth slowly emerges; no matter what he says about it, a is interested in ad hardly any more than he is in k; he lives blithely before the prospect of hell. A sophisticated Christian is, at bottom, no longer unaware of the fact that ad is another, and mocks this as he does k only with, superimposed, the principle: “I must be concerned with ad not at”. There is added to this, at the moment of death, the

pious wish of his loved-ones, the terror of the dying man who is no more able to imagine himself dead, and mute, than as ad continuing to live.

“What makes me shudder with love is not the heaven which you have promised me; horrible hell doesn’t make me shudder . . . if there weren’t a heaven I would love you and if there weren’t a hell I would fear you” (Saint Theresa of Avila). In Christian faith, the rest is pure convenience.

When I was a Christian, I was so little concerned with ad, it seemed to me so vain to be more concerned about it than about k that, in the scriptures, no sentence pleased me more than these words from Psalm XXXVIII: “. . . ut refrigerer pruisquam abaem et amplius non ero” (. . . that I may be refreshed, before I die, and be no more.) Today would one by some absurd means prove to me that ad will boil in hell, I wouldn’t be concerned about it, saying: “it matters little, him or some other”. What would affect me—and of what I would boil while alive—would be that hell exists. But one never did believe it. One day Christ spoke of the grinding of teeth of the damned; he was God and required them, was himself required for their damnation, nevertheless he didn’t break in two and his miserable pieces were not thrown against one another: he didn’t think about what he was saying but about the impression he wanted to make.

On this point many Christians resemble me (but there remains the convenience of a project which one is not really forced to believe in). A good deal of artifice already enters into the concern of a for at (the identity of a, ay, at is reduced to the thread uniting the moments of a changing being, estranged from itself from one hour to the next). Death breaks the thread: we can only grasp a continuity if a threshold which interrupts it is lacking. But a movement of liberty, moving abruptly, suffices; ad and k appear to be equivalent.⁹

This immense interest in k throughout the ages is moreover neither purely comical nor purely sordid. To be interested so much in k, without knowing that it was him!

“All of my hard-working fervour and all of my nonchalance, all of my mastery of self and my natural inclination, all of my bravery and all of my trembling, my sun and my lightning soaring out of a black sky, all of my soul and all of my mind, all of the solemn and heavy granite of my “Self”, all of this has the right to repeat to itself without end: “What does it matter what I am?” (Nietzsche, fragment of 80–81).

To imagine oneself effaced, abolished by death, that there would be missing in the universe . . . Quite to the contrary, if I continued to exist, and with me the throng of other dead beings, the universe would grow old, all these dead beings would leave a bad taste in its mouth.

I can bear the weight of the future only on one condition: that others, always others, live in it—and that death washes us, then washes these others without end.¹⁰

The most off-putting element in the morality of salvation: it assumes a truth and a multitude who, for want of seeing it, live in error. To be juvenile, generous, fond of laughter and—what goes hand in hand with this—loving that which seduces, girls, dancing, flowers, is to err: if she weren't foolish, the pretty girl would wish to be repulsive (salvation alone matters). What no doubt is the worst: the happy defiance of death, the feeling of glory which intoxicates and makes breathed in air invigorating, so many vanities which cause the sage to mutter under his breath: "if they knew . . ."

There exists on the contrary an affinity between on the one hand, the absence of worry, generosity, the need to defy death, tumultuous love, sensitive naivete; on the other hand, the will to become the prey of the unknown. In both cases, the same need for unlimited adventure, the same horror for calculation, for project (the withered, prematurely old faces of the "bourgeois" and their cautiousness).

Against asceticism.

That an anaemic, taciturn particle of life, showing reluctance before the excesses of joy, lacking freedom, should attain—or should claim to have attained—the extreme limit, is an illusion. One attains the extreme limit in the fullness of means: it demands fulfilled beings, ignoring no audacity. My principle against asceticism is that the extreme limit is accessible through excess, not through want.

Even the asceticism of those who succeed in it takes on in my eyes the sense of a sin, of an impotent poverty.

I don't deny that asceticism is conducive to experience. I even insist on it. Asceticism is a sure means of separating oneself from objects: it kills the desire which binds one to the object. But at the same time it makes an object of experience (one only kills the desire for objects by proposing a new object for desire).

Through ascesis, experience is condemned to take on the value of a positive object. Ascesis asks for deliverance, salvation, the possession of the most desirable object. In ascesis, value is not that of experience alone, independent of pleasure or of suffering; it is always a beatitude, a deliverance, which we strive to procure for ourselves.

Experience at the extreme limit of the possible nevertheless requires a renouncement: to cease wanting to be everything. While ascesis understood in the ordinary sense is precisely the sign of the pretense of becoming everything, by the possession of God, etc. Saint John of the Cross himself wrote: :“Para venir a serlo todo . . .” (to come to be everything).

It is doubtful in each case if salvation is the object of a true faith or if it is only a convenience permitting one to give the shape of a project to spiritual life (ecstasy is not sought for its own sake, it is the path of a deliverance, a means). Salvation is not necessarily the value which, for the Buddhist, equals the end of suffering, which for Christians, Muslims, non Buddhist Hindus equals God. It is the perspective of value perceived from the point of view of personal life. Moreover, in both cases, value is totality, completion, and salvation for the faithful is “becoming everything”: divinity directly for the majority, non-individuality for the Buddhists (suffering is, according to Buddha, what is individual). The project of salvation formed, ascesis is possible.

Let one imagine now a different and even opposite will where the will to “become everything” would be regarded as an obstacle to that of losing oneself (of escaping isolation, the individual’s turning in on himself). Where “becoming everything” would be considered not only as the sin of man but of all that is possible and even of God!

To lose oneself in this case would be to lose oneself and in no way to save oneself. (One will see further on the passion which man brings to the contesting of each slip in the direction of the whole, of salvation, of the possibility of a project). But then the possibility for ascesis disappears!

Nevertheless inner experience is project, no matter what.

It is such—man being entirely so through language which, in essence, with the exception of its poetic perversion, is project. But project is no longer in this case that, positive, of salvation, but that, negative, of abolishing the power of words, hence of project.

The problem is then the following. Ascesis is beside the point, without support, without a reason for being which makes it possible. If ascesis is a sacrifice, it is only so in a part of itself which one loses with an eye to saving the other. But should one desire to lose oneself completely: that is possible starting from a movement of drunken revelry; in no way is it possible without emotion. Being without emotions is on the contrary necessary for ascesis. One must choose.

Roughly, I can show that in principle the means are always double. On the one hand, one appeals to the excess of forces, to movements of intoxication, of desire. And on the other hand, in order to have at one's disposal a quantity of forces, one mutilates oneself (through ascesis, like a plant, without seeing that experience is thus domesticated—like the flower—through this it ceases to answer to hidden demands. If it is a question of salvation, let one mutilate . . . But the voyage to the end of the possible demands freedom of temperament—that of a horse which has never been mounted).

Ascesis in itself has, for many, something attractive, something satisfying; like an attained mastery, but the most difficult—the domination of oneself, of all of one's instincts. The ascetic can look from on high at what is below (in any case at human nature, through the contempt he has for his own). He imagines no way of living outside of the form of a project. (I don't look at anyone from on high, but laughingly, like the child, at ascetics and pleasure-seekers).

One says naturally: no other way out. All agree on one point: no sexual excesses. And almost all of them agree: absolute chastity. I would venture to dismiss these pretensions. And if chastity, like all ascesis, is in a sense facile, then wildness, accumulating opposite circumstances, is more favorable than ascesis to experience in that it sends an old maid—and whoever resembles her—to their domestic poverty.

The man knowing nothing of eroticism is no less a stranger to the end of the possible than is the man without inner experience. One must choose the arduous, turbulent path—that of the non-mutilated "whole man".

I have come to the point of saying with precision: the Hindu is a stranger to drama, the Christian cannot attain it in naked silence. The one and the other resort to ascesis. The first two means alone consume

(don't require any project): no one yet has brought them together into play, but only one or the other together with ascesis. If I had had at my disposal a single one of the two, for want of a strained exercise, like ascesis, I would not have had any inner experience, but only that of everyone, linked to the exteriority of objects (in a calm exercise of inner movements, one makes an object even of interiority, one seeks a "result".) But access to the world of the inside, of silence, having been linked within me to extreme interrogation, I escaped verbal flight at the same time as the empty and peaceful curiosity of states. Interrogation would encounter the answer which changed it from logical operation to vertigo (like an excitement takes shape in the apprehension of nudity).¹¹

Something sovereignly attractive in being, as much as the driest Occidental man, discourse itself, and yet having at one's disposal a brief means for silence: it is a tomb-like silence and existence ruins itself in the full movement of its force.

A sentence from What is Metaphysics? struck me: "Our Dasein, (unseres Dasein)" says Heidegger,—"in our community of seekers, professors and students—is determined by knowledge." No doubt in this way stumbles a philosophy whose meaning should be linked to a Dasein determined by inner experience (life in play beyond the separate operations). This less to indicate the limits of my interest in Heidegger than to introduce a principle: there cannot be knowledge without a community of seekers, nor inner experience without a community of those who live it. Community is to be understood in a different sense from Church or from order. The sanyasin of India have among them fewer formal bonds than do Heidegger's "seekers". The human reality which yoga determines in them is no less that of a community; communication is a phenomenon which is in no way added on to Dasein, but constitutes it.

I must now shift direction. The communication of a given "Dasein" assumes among those who communicate not formal bonds but general conditions. Historical, actual conditions, but moving in a certain direction. I speak of them here, anxious to reach what is crucial. While elsewhere I have wounded, then opened the wound.

At the extreme limit of knowledge, what is forever missing is what revelation alone provided:

an arbitrary answer, saying: "You know now what you must know, what you don't know is what you have no need to know: it suffices that

another know it and that you depend on him—you can join forces with him.”

Without this answer, man is dispossessed of the means for being everything, he is a bewildered madman, a question without a way out.¹²

What one didn't grasp in doubting revelation is that no one having ever spoken to us, no one would speak to us any longer: we are henceforth alone, the sun forever set.

One believed in the answers of reason without seeing that they only hold water by according themselves a divine-like authority, by mimicing revelation (through a foolish claim to say everything).

What one couldn't know: that only revelation permits man to be everything, something which reason is not; but one was in the habit of being everything, hence reason's vain effort to answer as God did, and to give satisfaction. Now the die is cast, the game a thousand times lost, man definitively alone—not being able to say anything (unless he acts: decides).

The great derision: a multitude of little contradicting “everythings”, intelligence surpassing itself, culminating in multivocal, discordant, indiscrete idiocy.

What is strangest: no longer to wish oneself to be everything is for man the highest ambition, it is to want to be man (or, if one likes, to rise above man—to be what he would be, released from the need to cast longing eyes at the perfect, by acting in the opposite fashion).

And now: before a declaration of Kantian morality (act as though . . .), before a reproach formulated in the name of the declaration, before even an act, or failing an act, a desire, a bad conscience, we can, far from venerating, look at the mouse in the cat's paws: “You wanted to be everything, the fraud discovered, you will serve as a toy for us.”

In my eyes, the night of non-knowledge after which comes the decision: “No longer to wish oneself to be everything, therefore to be man rising above the need he had to turn away from himself”, neither adds nor takes anything away from the teaching of Nietzsche. The entire morality of laughter, of risk, of the exaltation of virtues and of strengths is spirit of decision.

Man ceasing—at the limit of laughter—to wish himself to be everything and wishing himself in the end to be what he is, imperfect, incomplete, good—if possible, right to moments of cruelty; and lucid . . . to the point of dying blind.

A paradoxical progression demands that I introduce in the conditions of a community what I refused in the very principles of inner experience. But in the principles, I put aside the possible dogmas and I have done now nothing but articulate the fundamental givens, those at least that I see.

Without night, no one would have to decide, but in a false light—undergo. Decision is what is born before the worst and rises above. It is the essence of courage, of the heart, of being itself. And it is the inverse of project (it demands that one reject delay, that one decide on the spot, with everything at stake: what follows matters second).

There is a secret in decision—the most intimate—which, in the end, is found in night, in anguish (to which decision puts an end). But neither night nor decision are means; in no way is night a means for decision: night exists for itself, or does not exist.

What I say about decision or about the fate of the man to come is at stake, is included in each true decision, each time a tragic disorder demands a decision without delay.

This commits me to the maximum of effacement (without worry), as opposed to comical romanticism (and the extent to which I distance myself thus—resolutely—from romantic appearances—which I must have taken on—is what a laziness engages one to see poorly . . .). The profound meaning of Ecce homo: to leave nothing in the shadows, to dismantle pride in light.

I have spoken of community as existing: Nietzsche related his affirmations to it but remained alone.¹³

In relation to him I am burning, as through a tunic of Nessus, with a feeling of anxious fidelity. That in the path of inner experience, he only advanced inspired, undecided, does not stop me—if it is true that, as a philosopher he had as a goal not knowledge but, without separating its operations, life, its extreme limit, in a word experience itself, Dionysos philosophos. It is from a feeling of community binding me to Nietzsche

that the desire to communicate arises in me, not from an isolated originality.

No doubt I have tended more than Nietzsche toward the night of non-knowledge.¹⁴ He doesn't linger in those swamps where I spend time, as if enraptured. But I hesitate no longer: Nietzsche himself would be misunderstood if one didn't go to this depth. Up to now, he has in fact only produced superficial consequences, as imposing as they may appear.

Loyal—but not without the dazed lucidity which causes me, right within myself, to be absent. I imagine that Nietzsche had the experience of the eternal return in a form which is properly speaking mystical, confused with discursive representations. Nietzsche was only a burning solitary man, without relief from too much strength, with a rare balance between intelligence and unreasoned life. The balance is not very conducive to the developed exercise of the intellectual faculties (which require calm, as in the existence of Kant, of Hegel). He proceeded by insights, putting into play forces in all directions, not being linked to anything, starting again, not building stone by stone. Speaking after a catastrophe of the intelligence (if I make myself understood). By being the first to become aware. Heedless of contradictions. Enamored only of freedom. Being the first to gain access to the abyss and succumbing from having dominated it.

"Nietzsche was only a man."

On the other hand.

Not to represent Nietzsche exactly like a "man".

He said:

"But where do those waves of everything which is great and sublime in man finally flow out? Isn't there an ocean for these torrents?—Be this ocean: there will be one" (fragment from 80–81).

Better than the image of Dionysos philosophos, the being lost of this ocean and this bare requirement: "be that ocean", designate experience and the extreme limit to which it leads.

In experience, there is no longer a limited existence. There a man is not distinguished in any way from others: in him what is torrential is lost within others. The so simple commandment: "Be that ocean", linked to the extreme limit, at the same time makes of a man a multitude, a desert. It is an expression which resumes and makes precise the sense of a community. I know how to respond to the desire of Nietzsche speaking of a community having no object other than that of experience (but designating this community, I speak of a "desert").

In order to provide the distance of present-day man from the “desert”, of the man with the thousand cacaphonic idiocies (almost scientific, ideology, blissful joking, progress, touching sentimentality, belief in machines, in big words and, to conclude, discordance and total ignorance of the unknown), I will say of the “desert” that it is the most complete abandonment of the concerns of the “present-day man”, being the continuation of the “ancient man”, which the enactment of festivals regulated. He is not a return to the past; he has undergone the corruption of the “present-day man” and nothing has more place within him than the devastation which it leaves—it gives to the “desert” its “desert-like” truth; the memory of Plato, of Christianity and above all—the most hideous—the memory of modern ideas, extend behind him like fields of ashes. But between the unknown and him has been silenced the chirping of ideas, and it is through this that he is similar to “ancient man”: of the universe he is no longer the rational (alleged) master, but the dream.

The alacrity of the “desert” and of the dream which the “desert” provokes.

*“How wonderful and new and yet how gruesome and ironic I find my position vis-à-vis the whole of existence in the light of my insight! I have discovered for myself that the human and animal past, indeed the whole primal age and past of all sentient being continues in me to invent, to love, to hate, to infer. I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*).*

There is between the world and the “desert” a concordance of all instincts, the numerous possibilities of the irrational giving of self, a vitality of dance.

The idea of being the dream of the unknown (of God, of the universe) is, it seems, the extreme point which Nietzsche attained. In it the happiness of being, of affirming, the refusal to be everything, natural cruelty, fecundity are at work: man is a bacchant philosopher.¹⁵*

It is difficult to imply to what extent the “desert” is far, where my voice would at last carry, with this bit of meaning: a meaning of dream.

A continual challenging of everything deprives one of the power of proceeding by separate operations, obliges one to express oneself through rapid flashes, to free as much as is possible the expression of one’s thought from a project, to include everything in a few sentences:

*As Friedrich Würzbach said in the preface to his edition of the *Will to Power*.

anguish, decision and the right to the poetic perversion of words without which it would seem that one was subject to a domination.

Poetry is despite everything the restricted part—linked to the realm of words. The realm of experience is that of the entire possible. And in the end, in the expression which it is of itself, poetry is, necessarily, no less silence than language. Not through impotence. All of language is given to it as is the strength to engage it. But silence intended not to hide, not to express at a higher degree of detachment. Experience cannot be communicated if the bonds of silence, of effacement, of distance, do not change those they put into play.¹⁶