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Insurrections

Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture

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MICHEL ONFRAY

Translated with an introduction by
Joseph McClellan

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Every joy wants eternity.

—Nietzsche, “The Second Dance-Song,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I discovered Michel Onfray, as I suspect many have, by accident. In the summer of 2010, as an impecunious graduate student attending courses at the Sorbonne in Paris, one of the few activities I could afford was to browse bookstores. Tilting my head and crouching in the aisles, I would whittle away afternoons admiring, from A to Z, the names and titles of the remarkable French literary canon. During the course of these adventures, I lingered when I reached the Os, struck by the column of titles by this earnest-looking man named Onfray. Beyond the sheer volume of his writing—often taking up several shelves in a typical Parisian bookstore—the titles themselves were compelling: *The Art of Pleasure: Toward a Hedonist Materialism*; *Sculpting the Self: Aesthetic Morality*; *The Philosophers' Stomach: A Critique of Diatetical Reason*; *Rebel Politics: A Treatise on Resistance and Insubmission*, among dozens of others. Intrigued but suspicious, I bought the cheapest one and took it home to read. Not only was the French extremely accessible, the book contained some of the clearest expositions of materialist and hedonist philosophies that I have ever read. In particular, his writings on ethics were timely, passionate, and practical, addressing difficult contemporary concerns with ease. The next day, I was back at the store, stocking up on several more titles, which had the same effect. I knew without a doubt that I had encountered a writer who would always be in my head, and I was astonished to find out that only one of his dozens of books had been translated. On his profile page at the Université Populaire de Caen, I found his email and on a whim decided to ask him which of his books he would next like to see in English. The same day, he responded cordially, naming *A Hedonist Manifesto: The Power to Exist* as the most appropriate choice. All of a sudden I had a new project to occupy my time in Paris (and for the next several years, thanks to innumerable delays and distractions).

As I worked through the preface of *A Hedonist Manifesto*, I could recall few philosophy books that begin so confessionally, or that employed such a warm and familiar style of writing. Encouraged by his tone and general

persona, I wrote to Monsieur Onfray again and asked if he would be willing to meet for lunch if I happened to pass through his town in Normandy. To my surprise, he graciously accepted, and my partner and I met him and his longtime companion, Marie-Claude Ruel, for a wonderful meal and informal conversation in the village of Argentan. On our drive to Normandy from Paris, we were amused when Radio France came on the air, featuring none other than Michel Onfray lecturing on Freud and debating a panel of psychoanalysts over his controversial new book *The Twilight of an Idol: The Freudian Fantasy*.

Our meeting with him confirmed for me the sincerity of his Epicurean spirit. Perhaps the legendary philosopher of the ancient Greek Garden was not so different from this down-to-earth Norman who was willing to take time out of his grueling schedule to spend the afternoon with an undistinguished American graduate student. For the remainder of my stay in Paris, I noticed Onfray's presence everywhere: more radio programs; countless YouTube videos, including two feature-length documentaries; and magazine articles, including his interview with President Sarkozy in the popular newsstand publication *Philomag* (only in France!). These early impressions, combined with several subsequent years engaged with Onfray's work, have led me to believe that there is no one like Michel Onfray working in contemporary Anglophone literature. While other writers have overlapping concerns, none has his ability to produce broad cultural popularity and significance out of philosophical analysis, nor do they approach the synoptic scope of his project.

Inevitably, he will be compared to the popular New Atheists, who have had great recent success, and this is not inappropriate. However, he is valuable to us in English translation not as a French echo of our contemporary humanists, but for the depth and structure he gives to contemporary humanist goals. Not only does he diagnose major political and social problems, he brings thousands of years of philosophical history to bear on them, exposing how different metaphysics and theories of perception affect the way we treat ourselves, the policies we write, and the relationships we build. Yet he is not a mere intellectual historian. At the heart of his writing is a critical energy and clarity of purpose: to show the deleterious effects of idealism and the benefits of hedonism—terms that are not always well understood, and that he takes pains to clarify for contemporary audiences. In other words, his philosophy talks us down from the ledge of believing that fulfillment, truth, and health must be found outside of this world, and that there are eternal laws written

somewhere beyond the sky that we are obliged to follow. Once we are shaken out of those delusions, we can construct new, fresh, tailor-made orientations that make life more bearable and perhaps even enjoyable.

In the United States, when we produce philosophers, they are not rewarded with the fame that Michel Onfray enjoys in France. Thus, he cuts an anomalous figure: a *philosopher* who, at age fifty-five, has written more than sixty trenchant manifestos, critiques, and treatises; a *philosopher*—charismatic and telegenic—who has mastered the modes of contemporary media and achieved an improbable ubiquity in his native country; a *philosopher* from humble beginnings who went on to write multiple best sellers; a *philosopher* with the resources and social conscience to build a free university for his working-class neighbors in the provinces. If the Anglophone world combined the literary fecundity of Stephan King, the pedagogical passion of Allan Bloom, Martha Nussbaum's range of philosophical interest, Christopher Hitchens's panache, Noam Chomsky's radical leftism, and Cornell West's class consciousness, we would be in the ballpark. But even this chimera misses the mark. There remains something uniquely *French* about Michel Onfray. He carries a national mantle that goes back for generations in France, with no clear counterpart in the Anglophone world: not just a vague person of letters or popular science, but a public, politically engaged philosopher with true national influence.

In the past century, perhaps no other country has boasted so many of this ilk: Léon Blum, Raymond Aron, Albert Camus, and Sartre, to name a few. All of these thinkers, working during and after the Second World War, applied their philosophical training to the pressing political questions of their time, which most often had to do with the uncomfortable tension between American liberalism and the vestiges of Marx represented by the Soviet Union. This tension exploded and became much more complicated following the calamitous Paris uprisings of May 1968. This event was the paroxysmic culmination of an anti-idealism that had been gaining strength throughout the 1960s, and it would profoundly affect the lives of everyone in its wake, including Michel Onfray.

The French Context: Idealism Before 1968

Of all the French wartime writers, Onfray is closest to Camus. Departing

from his contemporaries on the Left, Camus refused to endorse Stalinism as a viable and necessary alternative to Gaullist traditionalism or American liberalism. For other leftists of the time, Stalinist violence was troubling on the surface, but since it claimed a lineage derived from the sage Marx, it was seen as collateral damage in the execution of a noble plan. Such a view is quintessentially idealist, for it believes, coarsely or subtly, that there is some metaphysical thread running through history, some secret purpose or destiny unfolding inexorably, enlisting individuals as pawns. When Camus rejected this view, he rejected a very entrenched idealist understanding of history handed down through the canons of Western thought for centuries.

The idealist understanding of history goes back at least to the Old Testament, and has been defended by Christian philosophers as diverse as Augustine, Luther, and Hegel. For all of them, there is a primordial intent, a logos, underlying events, and it is something we can decipher. Napoleon's wars, Robespierre's Terror, and the revolutions in America and France were all the expression of a code, just as the images on a computer are the unfolding of an anterior language. Nationalists of all stripes, supplicants of the market's invisible hand, and those who blithely accept political and economic collateral damage all adhere to this idealist version of history: whatever happens in the realm of politics and the economy happens by necessity. The wise man understands why it could not have been otherwise.

So desperate were wartime French leftists for the success of the Communist dream in the Soviet Union that they were willing to pour their energies into interpreting a silver lining to the Gulag abattoir. Seeing a need to counterbalance de Gaulle's traditionalist regime, French leftists were also willing to sanction the widespread use of terrorism in the Algerian resistance to French colonialism. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was, along with Sartre, one of the most influential Stalin apologists of the time, wrote, "But Marxist Machiavellianism differs from pure Machiavellianism inasmuch as it transforms compromise through awareness of compromise, alters the ambiguity of history through awareness of ambiguity, and it makes detours consciously—calling them detours."[1] What Merleau-Ponty euphemistically calls "detours" includes, of course, mass executions, starvation, and forced labor. For the apologists, however, it is unsophisticated to think of them merely as atrocities; there are lessons to be learned from them. He explains, "History, despite its detours, its cruelties, and its ironies, already contains

a working logic in the condition of the proletariat which solicits the contingency of events and the freedom of individuals and so draws them toward reason."[2] Thus, current events emanate from some metaphysical entity—History—and it is up to the intellectual to interpret events to understand *why* history is doing what it's doing. It is this permissive, passive, interpretive political orientation that pervades the political thought of French leftist intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. But they did not construct any radical new politics; all they did was invert the same idealist paradigm as before. Both sides still believed that certain States are destined for glory and righteousness, authorized to sacrifice individuals in the name of that destiny. And if one disagrees with the State in power, individuals are authorized and even exhorted to resort to murder in order to hasten the demise of such false States.

Camus, however, was profoundly uncomfortable with this understanding of history. At great personal cost—the alienation of many friends and the dismantling of his reputation—he insisted that history's bloodlettings could not be interpreted away or justified as inexorable "detours." While conceding that suffering could not be eliminated from the human condition, Camus held that avoiding it and mitigating it should never cease to guide our political decisions. Permitting either the State or the individual to use murder as part of a political or ethical process forecloses any hope of partaking in a legitimate future. It is like the vengeful Marquis de Sade who, locked in his prison cell, dreamed of a twisted oligarchy that sustains itself through the murderous consumption of everything other than itself. However, the killers are unable to escape the very logic of their system, and they inevitably fall victim to the violent energies they have been fueling. Likewise, National Socialism, in the final analysis, never truly envisioned its own success. Its essence was negation and destruction, and Camus notes, if it "had gone still farther, we should only have witnessed the more and more extensive deployment of an irresistible dynamism and the increasingly violent enforcement of cynical principles which alone would be capable of serving this dynamism."[3] For Camus, contemporary violent regimes and movements do not get a free pass. Every postwar philosopher recognized the tragedy of Heidegger's endorsement of the psychopathic-utopian Nazi regime, yet the lesson seemed not to have been well learned. History had already condemned National Socialism and humiliated Heidegger for his myopia and inhumanity, yet Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the majority of French

leftists threw their political lot in with Stalinist communism, despite its well-documented practice of terror. Camus held that individual dignity could not be exchanged for the success of a herd, no matter how reasoned its goals. Knowledge of history should not incline one to passively observe contemporary acts of violence while waiting for them to be vindicated. Knowing history should incline one to think critically of what is going on in light of the lessons of the past. Thus, the responsible intellectual should be willing to judge and condemn anything that falls short of a high ethical standard. Yet it is precisely the construction and defense of ethical standards that eluded French leftists in first half of the twentieth century. They had grown accustomed to challenging the morality propped up by the conservative regimes of Vichy, Pétain, and de Gaulle, as well as the moral principles promoted by American capitalism and the ugly irruptions of Fascism and National Socialism.

If the conflict between so many competing moralities makes one thing clear, it is that none of them is absolute and we must work to create new values—perhaps not just communal values, but values tailor-made for each individual. This is the starting point of Sartre's existential ethics and Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*—where the individual, thrown into this world, must define herself and maximize her freedom within her own circumscription. In defense of this open-ended ethics, Sartre idealized antinomian figures such as the playwright, inveterate thief, and unabashed sexual deviant Jean Genet.[4] And while Sartre's project produced compelling work, we see that it nevertheless failed to criticize Stalin; for with all its conviction, it lacked the self-doubt needed to take a step back and ask if things should not, in fact, be different. Along with Merleau-Ponty, Sartre settled on a philosophy of abstract metaphysics, penetrating psychoanalysis, and passive politics that "transforms compromise through an awareness of compromise." But where Sartre and Merleau-Ponty wait for history to redeem Communism at the end of all its "detours," Camus could not escape his own involvement in the history unfolding around him. He could not sit and watch death and murder without crying out against it, even if this made him appear unsophisticated to his contemporaries. Of the lessons to be learned from the suffering of history, he writes,

> I have need of others and others have need of me and of each other. Every collective action, every form of society, supposes a discipline, and the individual, without this discipline, is only a stranger, bowed under the weight of an inimical collectivity. But society and discipline lose

> their direction if they deny the “We are.” I alone, in one sense, support the common dignity that I cannot allow either myself or others to debase. This individualism is in no sense pleasure; it is perpetual struggle, and, sometimes, unparalleled joy when it reaches the heights of proud compassion.[5]

This is the perennial challenge of ethical and political philosophy: how to maintain the integrity of the individual without usurping the freedom of others. Why should one ethical perspective be preferred to another? Camus, never convinced of his ability to resolve these questions, at least exhorted his contemporaries to be more critical of the moral relativism they clung to so stubbornly. Cold logic defends moral relativism well, but all for nothing; moral critique and judgment must be possible. Moreover—and here we begin to lean toward Epicurus—they should be founded on the principles of empathy and compassion and aimed at the mitigation of suffering for oneself and others. Values do not derive from a communal destiny, but from the pains and desires of individuals, each longing for freedom.

Camus proffered no system by which we should make ethical judgments. His thoughtful essays and works of fiction make few prescriptions, but encourage us to embrace our self-doubt and think more subtly about our actions and political commitments. He was not a systematic or totalizing philosopher—as his erstwhile friend Sartre unsuccessfully aspired to be—but a gentle critic of the entrenched and stubborn ideologies of his time, someone who began to weave together the philosophical strands of moral rigor, Nietzschean anti-idealism, and leftist libertarianism, all crucial elements of the philosophy of Michel Onfray.

In *The Libertarian Order: The Philosophical Life of Albert Camus*, published in 2013, Onfray argues that Camus’s whole philosophical intent is summarized in a single line from his essay “Summer,” published in 1950: “In the dark of our nihilism, I only look for reasons to overcome this nihilism. Not through virtue, nor through some rare elevation of the soul, but through an instinctive loyalty to the sunlight where I was born, where, after thousands of years, men have learned to embrace life even in suffering.”[6] Onfray adopts the same guiding spirit, glossing Camus’s passage in the following way: “Camus’s philosophy is encapsulated in a single sentence: the diagnosis of European nihilism, the will to overcome it through a positive philosophy, thinking beyond good and evil, the smell of the earth, the visceral memory of a childhood sunlight, one’s inscription

in an ancestral lineage, and the acquiescence to life even in its negativity."

The present book, *A Hedonist Manifesto*, proceeds from this Camusian starting point. In the preface, Onfray lays bare his own unshakable past and the indelible imprints it left on his life, culminating in the positive outcome of achieving *The Power to Exist*, even when memories still hurt. He picks up the gauntlet dropped by the humble and self-doubting Camus prescribing a reliable and responsible system by which to make ethical decisions. But he does not offer some entirely novel ethical theory born from his own genius. Rather, he simply proposes the rehabilitation and adaptation of a venerable but traduced ethical philosophy: the Epicurean Hedonism of ancient Greece. Camus was surely sympathetic to Epicurean Hedonism (which he interpreted as an impossible attempt to banish pain and expectation from the human experience) but his principal sandbox remained a combination of the belles lettres and phenomenology that prevailed in his era. The philosophy of the time was still riding the waves made by Husserl and Heidegger, all set against a Hegelian background propagated by Alexandre Kojève and his dozens of students, and to a lesser extent, Jean Hyppolite.[7] To endorse the blithe, materialist, pleasure-seeking Epicurus at such a time would have been dismissed as obtuse. Even worse would have been to endorse the most recent advocates of Epicurean Hedonism: the English philosophers John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, who were at once critics of the French Revolution and inspirators of American liberalism. Onfray, on the other hand, under no such constraints, takes it upon himself to reconcile Camusian individualism with the updated and rehabilitated Epicureanism kept alive by English Utilitarianism. He argues, "I would like philosophy to be understood as the construction and decoding of an egodicy,[8] a philosophical life resulting from an epiphany of reason, for an existential perspective with a utilitarian and pragmatic aim. All of these converge in one term, *Hedonism*, which can be further distilled into Nicolas Chamfort's maxim "enjoy and have others enjoy, without doing harm to yourself or anyone else; that is all there is to morality."[9]

Onfray's philosophical project diverges from a long lineage dominated by Hegelian idealism and the ensuing tradition of phenomenology that has remained an integral part of the French philosophical style. Fueling Onfray's project is the iconoclastic spirit of May 1968—a cry out against

the consequences of France's idealist heritage, but one that was ultimately reabsorbed by it and needs to be revived.

Idealism After 1968

The events of May 1968 started as a minor dustup between administration and students at Nanterre University. A small group of protestors challenged antiquated rules and regulations, specifically over the school's ban on coed dormitories. The university closed, expelling many students and angering even more young people in the capital. As protests mounted, President de Gaulle mobilized the police against them in force. This authoritarian display lit a fire under the capital's left-leaning labor unions and disgruntled workers in general, who embarked on wildcat strikes on an unprecedented scale. Eventually ten million workers walked off their jobs throughout France—roughly two-thirds of the national workforce. Under the threat of civil war or violent revolution, with the army stationed just outside of Paris, de Gaulle was forced to call a new general election, and the crisis was diffused almost as quickly as it had started.

These events forever reshaped the role of the State and the individual in France, and the effects would spill over into many other Western nations. Moreover, 1968 called traditional moral questions, and it had a fissiparous effect on leftist ideology, nudging it out of its Marxist furrow and into a new era, much more difficult to define, that would come to be known as postmodernism.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important influences on the minds of leftists leading up to the events of 1968 was Nietzsche. His antiauthoritarianism, anti-Statism, opposition to the degradation of common wage labor, and general philosophical anti-idealism provided sustenance for a disillusioned generation. Before the 1930s, his work inspired such thinkers as the anarchist Georges Palante, who admired his passionate individualism and skepticism of Marx's teleological view of history. However, upon Nietzsche's death—when his right-wing, anti-Semitic sister became the executor of his literary estate and bastardized many of his writings in support of National Socialism—he would be forsaken by the Left for decades. Although Henri Lefebvre attempted to rehabilitate him in 1939, and Georges Bataille in 1945, he was not

appropriated by the Left until the 1960s, when philosophers like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze began to introduce him to a young and hungry audience. His antiestablishment spirit (far from the German nationalism with which he had been erroneously associated) even began to trickle into the United States, inspiring counterculture and even reformist theologians such as Thomas Altizer, who on Good Friday in 1966 was featured in *Time* magazine's cover story "Is God Dead?"

Nietzsche's pugnacious and hyperbolic language was imitated by the early instigator of May 1968 Daniel Cohn-Bendit, whose determination to be admitted into the women's dormitory at Nanterre University was expressed in quotes such as "It is forbidden to forbid!" and "Live life without limits and enjoy without restraint!" While the initial ambitions of the protest may have been modest, it soon dawned on millions that these sentiments could be applied much more broadly; there were far too many restrictions in contemporary French society—in schools, in the workplace, in relationships—and it was time to shake them up.

Yet, as in the era of Camus, this wave of critical negativity failed to usher in a phase of positive value construction. Rebellion relied on an inversion of existing paradigms: idealist Christian morality was flouted by the scatological sexualities of Bataille, Sade, and Genet; the idealist teleological history of Hegel, and even Marx, was thrown out in favor of thoroughgoing nihilism; idealist belief in perfect Beauty gave way to glorification of neurotic semiart. These developments were certainly interesting, but they did not build revolutionary new models.

Camus died in 1960, but had he been alive in 1968 and the years following, he would have been disheartened to see his fellow leftists missing the opportunity to start fresh and establish new and more humane values. This is a challenge Onfray gladly takes up, proposing a way out of the impasse: "There are ideas out there to help us resolve contemporary problems that face the Left in the areas of ethics, politics, and economics," including ancient Greek hedonism and the much misunderstood Nietzsche. Onfray argues that these philosophical resources should be reclaimed and rehabilitated by the Left to satisfy the ongoing hunger for alternatives to frustratingly entrenched attitudes.

Onfray's willingness to construct clear ethical standards also goes a long way toward quieting conservative critiques of the Left's moral relativism. In the United States, the most trenchant critique of this kind comes from Allen Bloom in his best-selling book published in 1987, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom paradoxically laments America's

embrace of pluralism and tolerance in vogue in the 1960s. He argues that the toleration of all cultures, traditions, and practices, far from opening our minds and helping us see more clearly, simply clouds our moral vision. It makes us afraid and unwilling to judge and weigh one course of moral action against another. It divests the contemporary world of meaning and renders it a directionless arena of nihilism. Referencing one of his heroes, Plato, he writes, “Methodological excision from the soul of the imagination that projects Gods and heroes onto the wall of the cave does not promote knowledge of the soul; it only lobotomizes it, cripples its powers.”[10] Bloom’s answer to the challenge is to revive the very idealism that had been criticized by the Left since the 1960s. Rather than encourage students to abstain from absolute moral positions, Bloom believes it is his duty as an educator to guide students to put in the hard intellectual work it takes to finally settle on a righteous moral position. We should all strive to know what Plato meant by ideal Beauty, Truth, Justice, Good, and Right rather than smugly dismissing these values as illusory:

> History and social science are used in a variety of ways to overcome prejudice. We should not be ethnocentric, a term drawn from anthropology, which tells us more about the meaning of openness. We should not think our way is better than others. The intention is not so much to teach the students about other times and places as to make them aware of the fact that their preferences are only that—accidents of their time and place. Their beliefs do not entitle them as individuals, or collectively as a nation, to think they are superior to anyone else…. This folly means that men are not permitted to seek for the natural human good and admire it when found, for such discovery is coeval with the discovery of the bad and contempt for it. Instinct and intellect must be suppressed by education. The natural soul is to be replaced with an artificial one.[11]

Onfray agrees with Bloom’s diagnosis, but he does not give in to the temptation to posit a “natural human good” or “natural soul” unless both claims are thoroughly grounded in materialism: we are circumscribed by the genetic material that makes us up and the environmental material that shapes it. Likewise, there is nothing inherently negative about an “artificial” soul, if understood clearly: the soul according to Epicurus is an epiphenomenon resulting from the collision of atoms within space; it has very many special qualities, but it is not some eternal, sui generis thing.

Like Bloom, Onfray proposes a return to values, by no means advocating universal tolerance. (His critics often excoriate him for his eagerness to condemn entire traditions and oeuvres, such as monotheism, Freud, and Plato himself.) The answer is not to prop up the moribund absolutes of Platonism and monotheism; contemporary nihilists

are at least correct in rejecting those phantoms. Just because a value is not eternal and unchanging does not make it meaningless. He writes, “We have to commit to a nominalist ethics in order to avoid relations calibrated toward platonic friendship, literary love, ancillary affairs, bourgeois adultery, tariffed trades, inevitable clandestine trios, and other banalities.” A nominalist ethics is effective, for it accords far better with reality than an ethics that believes, by sheer force of will, that eternal laws exist and only need to be deciphered. Onfray explains that “nominalists use concepts that are useful for discussion, but not for anything else.” We must continually construct and amend our ethics with a constant vigilance, never assuming that it has reached perfection. Here we see the influence of Jeremy Bentham, who in *Anarchical Fallacies*, published in 1791, warned the authors and enthusiasts of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man that the patent idealism pervading the document was both meaningless and dangerous. Regarding the presumption of eternal, preexisting rights, Bentham argues, “There are no such things as natural rights—no such things as rights anterior to the establishment of government—no such things as natural rights opposed to, in contradistinction to, legal: that the expression is merely figurative; that when used in the moment you attempt to give it a literal meaning it leads to error, and to that sort of error that leads to mischief—to the extremity of mischief.”[12] This turned out to be a remarkably prescient warning against the mischief that would follow in the form of Robespierre’s Terror of 1793–1794 when an inviolable Republic was protected with a fanatical, pure, and swift Justice, establishing a “despotism of Liberty.” Bentham could not have dreamed of a worse “extremity of mischief,” and it was all the result of an irrational use of language and a fervid clinging to illusory absolutes.

Like Bentham, Onfray has no truck with such Platonic relics, yet he is confident that we have the capability and the resources we need to construct new positive values that are self-conscious of their own nominalistic precariousness. Like Bloom, he enlists reason to judge between different courses of action, but reason does not lift a veil to reveal an eternal Platonic foundation. It acts as reason does in the scientific method—it seeks restlessly to refine and clarify courses of action that are more satisfying and more humane.

The Anglophone Context

Anglophone philosophy diverges significantly from the continental tradition with the success of Locke's, Hobbes's, and Hume's empiricism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was incorporated by Bentham and Mill a century later. For them, reality could not be a kind of magic show emanating from Platonic forms in an invisible realm. In terms of metaphysics and epistemology, reality is what is verifiable to direct perception. Ethics ceased to be a game of interpreting eternal principles and became an ongoing construction of conventions aimed at minimizing suffering. However, more recently, Anglophone philosophy has been less concerned about ethics and more concerned with reducing philosophy to a combination of formal logic and cognitive science, all under the umbrella term *analytic philosophy*, as opposed to the old theology-tainted, overethical tradition of the "continentals."

A very visible recent example of the state of analytic philosophy, which likes to call itself "academic philosophy," can be seen in Colin McGinn's *New York Times* editorial "Philosophy by Another Name," published in 2012. McGinn argues,

> Most of the marks of science as commonly understood are shared by academic philosophy: the subject is systematic, rigorous, replete with technical vocabulary, often in conflict with common sense, capable of refutation, produces hypotheses, uses symbolic notation, is about the natural world, is institutionalized, peer-reviewed, tenure-granting, etc. We may as well recognize that we are a science, even if not one that makes empirical observations or uses much mathematics. Once we do this officially, we can expect to be treated like scientists.[13]

The linchpin of this move toward institutional validation is the renaming of philosophy to "ontics," the study of the fundamental nature of reality. Such a shift would remove the ethical burden that comes along with the label "philosopher," lover of wisdom, contemplator not only of the nature of reality, but of one's proper role within it. In ontics, Nietzsche, anxious and euphoric over the prospect of escaping nihilism, is a quixotic dreamer. Even Aristotle is naïve when he writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "We are conducting an examination, not so that we may know what virtue is, but so that we may become good, since otherwise there would be no benefit from it."[14] Academic philosophy should focus its energies on, and be content with, just discovering what virtue is objectively. Only upon this objective, scientific knowledge of the true

nature of virtues can we take tentative, modest steps in the direction of ethical speculation.

Onfray takes a completely different approach. He also considers the role of modern science in philosophy, but not in order to arrive at absolute conclusions about ontics. Rather, his goal, as we see in part 5, “A Promethean Bioethics,” is to use new scientific knowledge to refine the ways we act in the world—to better understand our limits and possibilities. Philosophy is an art of living, not a descriptive science. It does not derive its value from the unassailability of its arguments or the objective truth of its conclusions. Tight argumentation is rhetorically important, for sure, but a philosophy is valuable only if it *matters* to a real, present, active, embodied ethical life. A philosopher does not construct a theoretical edifice based on the dissection of things outside his self; he struggles and overcomes some pain or anxiety and is driven to share that overcoming with others so that they may not suffer the same way.

Therefore, instead of restricting our philosophical scope in the name of objectivity, the most effective methodology for moral philosophy is that of the autobiographer. With this attitude, Onfray is among the few contemporary philosophers to take seriously the task of *strengthening* the bond between metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, instead of carving them up into autonomous fields. It matters from where one thinks ethics derive their value, because one will choose one’s actions based on those assumptions. As human beings, perhaps the most objective knowledge we have is of the primacy of pleasure—the absence of pain—as the motivating force behind our own and others’ actions.

On this point Onfray stands firmly on the shoulders of Bentham, as well as Mill, who explains, “The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest-Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.”[15] This thinking flies in the face of idealism, Platonic, Christian, or otherwise. Those traditions seek not to adapt ethical principles to maximize happiness, but to temper our demands for happiness in order to better accord with eternal ethical laws. The slave economies, theocracies, and phallocracies that populate our histories and propagate wretchedness are challenged only when people demand happiness and abandon a priori assumptions about eternal laws. Examples of this in the modern world include the battle for gay rights—the first widely read essay

in support of which was Bentham's "Offences Against One's Self," published in 1785. Moreover, anti-idealism is at the heart of feminist criticism: Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, and Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, published in 1869, dispensed with the presupposition of a metaphysical hierarchy between men and women, as well as any ethical imperatives based on such hierarchies. The real social and political effects of such work are immense, but we are still plagued by many of the same problems they inveighed against two centuries ago. Why has moral progress been so slow? For Onfray, one reason is that we have not heard Nietzsche's cry clearly enough: we still cling to the residue of moribund Christian ideals instead of constructing something new and fresh for ourselves in the present day.

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche exposes the idealism that pervades popular morality. We celebrate the ascetic ideal, glorifying the weakness and cowardice of the herd by dressing them up in terms like *humility*, *meekness*, and *chastity*. From St. Paul to the present day, we have not been able to shake these guiding principles.

Even after the success of British empiricism and the French Encyclopedists, idealism produced a new hero in Kant, who was able to harmonize the two traditions. Kant's crowning achievement in ethics was the formulation of his categorical imperative, a universal, transhistorical principle to guide all moral decisions: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law."[16] Against empiricists, Kant argues that it is unsophisticated to base morality on a sensible principle such as happiness, for happiness is too fluctuating and too bound up with individual desires. Rather, an eternal principle must be found, for "if pure reason by itself can be practical and actually is, as is evinced by the consciousness and moral law, it is always one and the same reason which, whether for a theoretical or a practical aim, judges according to a priori principles." Where idealist morality had been diligently maintained for millennia by the Christian tradition, Kant now secularizes it; he lets the deity out of the house and reason steps in as custodian. This secularized idealism leads to what Georges Palante calls the secular priestly spirit: an outgrowth of Plato-Christian idealism given new credibility through secular inversion. Palante writes: "The secular priest considers himself a laborer in a disinterested task. Nothing selfish must be mixed in with his mission. He works for the pure idea; at least he claims so, and sometimes even believes it. Nietzsche noted

devotion to truth among our free-thinkers and atheists, the final incarnation of the ascetic ideal."[17] Perhaps nowhere is the secular priestly spirit more evident than among the New Atheist authors that have been so successful of late. These writers are motivated by a passionate devotion to the truth, which is at odds with theism or any other kind of supernatural discourse. (For example, in *The Moral Landscape*, Sam Harris offers compelling arguments for the objective neurological foundation of morality.) They dust off hoary refutations of the deity, shine a bright light on the horrors committed in the name of religions, and defend the reasonableness of a materialist metaphysics. They argue for what their own area of expertise can offer the world, but they generally fail to contextualize the history of Western thinking. They link the ills of today to the noxious remnants of Christianity, but with their secular priestly spirit, they fail to understand the fundamental idealism that preceded and pervades it.

Onfray and New Atheism

In the 2000s, humanistic criticism flourished in the work of Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett, who came to be known as the New Atheists. While their literary success is considerable, all of them have been widely criticized for annihilating straw men and failing to offer clear and constructive alternative systems of ethics. This criticism is not so easily leveled against Michel Onfray.

Working in confessed isolation from the Anglophone world for more than twenty years, he has become one of the most vociferous critics of Europe's Christian heritage and, in the vein of audacious philosophers like Hegel and Sartre, he has constructed a comprehensive, systematic philosophy, complete with a clear and practical ethics fine-tuned for the contemporary West. Onfray's work, of which the present book is a synthesis, does more than chime in with the New Atheists. While he laments the same theism that they do, for him the real force of negativity is the general philosophical orientation of idealism, particularly the inheritance of Plato and his scion, the Christian tradition. By tracing the damaging effects of Plato-Christian idealism throughout history, Onfray shares a bold new vision of the world, anticipating the concrete repercussions entailed by a genuine materialist and atheist reorientation.

He does not try to hide his distaste for religion, clearly confessing where it comes from: his miserable childhood in a Salesian orphanage surrounded by oppressive, violent, and pedophilic priests and Catholic laymen. With philosophical rigor, he shows how theistic metaphysics and idealist morality provide us with a perfect roadmap to error and pain. Yet he is not content with dressing them down; they are valuable reference points against which to build less mistaken metaphysical and ethical orientations. He systematically offers a path to what all the New Atheists seem to be after but do not explicitly articulate, or perhaps resist desiring: Epicurean, hedonic pleasure.

Perhaps the most Epicurean of all the New Atheists in his personal life was the late Christopher Hitchens, who in his popular *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* elucidates "four irreducible objections to religious faith": "That it wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos, that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism, that it is both the result and the cause of dangerous sexual repression, and that it is ultimately grounded in wish-thinking."[18] Onfray echoes all of these points, taking them as the springboards of his philosophy, which differs more in form than in content from Hitchens's literary intent. Having diagnosed the errors of theism, Hitchens eloquently explains the atheist approach to things:

> And here is the point, about myself and my co-thinkers. Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason. We may differ on many things, but what we respect is free inquiry, openmindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. We do not hold our positions dogmatically: the disagreement between Professor Stephen Jay Gould and Professor Richard Dawkins, concerning "punctuated evolution" and the unfilled gaps in post-Darwinian theory, is quite wide as well as quite deep, but we shall resolve it by evidence and reasoning and not by mutual excommunication…. We are not immune to the lure of wonder and mystery and awe: we have music and art and literature, and find that the serious ethical dilemmas are better handled by Shakespeare and Tolstoy and Schiller and Dostoyevsky and George Eliot than in the mythical morality tales of the holy books. Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind and—since there is no other metaphor—also the soul. We do not believe in heaven or hell, yet no statistic will ever find that without these blandishments and threats we commit more crimes of greed or violence than the faithful…. We are reconciled to living only once, except through our children, for whom we are perfectly happy to notice that we must make way, and room. We speculate that it is at least possible that, once people accepted the fact of their short and struggling lives, they might behave better toward each other and not worse. We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion.

Onfray should certainly be included in these cothinkers, yet he diverges from all of them in his thoroughly philosophical approach. This is not to say that philosophy is the only valid, or even the best, path to the ethical. However, philosophy can go a long way in fleshing out intuitive claims like “an ethical life can be lived without religion.” Epicurus himself dismissed the polytheistic superstition of his time, arguing that the gods may exist—since we do indeed seem to talk about them—but that their divinity renders them merely transcendent and nothing else. We are irrelevant to them, and they are irrelevant to human experiences. Speaking of them only clouds our understanding of the universe. Unlike Plato, whose rigorous curriculum at the Academy was designed to orient the soul upward and away from the coarse earth, Epicurus would have us breathe the air about us more deeply and touch the earth more fully. For Onfray, theism and faith are not intrinsically evil; nothing is. Rather, they must be judged by their consequences: “The invention of an afterlife would not matter so much were it not purchased at so high a price: disregard of the real, hence willful neglect of the only world there is. While religion is often at variance with immanence, with man’s nature, atheism is in harmony with the earth—life’s other name.”[19]

It is not religion per se that obstructs immanence, but the idealist metaphysical orientation promoted by nearly all religions. Hegel himself diagnosed this problem, observing that Jewish theology and Muslim theology seek the absolute elsewhere, as something wholly other. He saw this as a mistake. These theologies, in which the absolute is alien to our own world, produce an *unhappy consciousness* that is in a state of perpetual longing and dissatisfaction. Using his philosophical genius, Hegel rehabilitated the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to teach that there can be a bridge between the transcendent and the immanent; indeed, the transcendent and the immanent are codependent and indissociable. But Hegel’s subtle theology, even if correct, is understood and understandable by very few. It is not what is taught in most churches and Sunday schools. Quite the contrary. We generally believe there is some plan, some destiny that may not be understood, but that we can somehow intuit and make an anchor of our conviction. It is not just religions that do this. School history courses at every level lead us to believe in a teleological thread running through events. Pundits and professors of international relations teach “American Exceptionalism,” which any presidential hopeful must be able to convincingly defend. These are merely a couple of the infinite idealist phantoms that populate

our world and influence the ways that we act—always according to some hierarchic, servile, or solipsistic principle.

In their frequent debates with believers, New Atheists make the same mistake again and again, missing the opportunity to undermine religious thinking by attacking the idealism it rests upon. Both sides rest comfortably on straw men: atheists provide a litany of atrocities committed in the name of religion, and theists offer the counterargument that atheism produces murderous nihilists like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mao. Knowing relatively little about Asia, they pass on Pol Pot and Mao, but eagerly cite Hitler's and Stalin's exploitation of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, respectively. Without the aid of these self-serving institutions and the credulity of their followers, neither Hitler nor Stalin would have had the capital they needed to enact their sanguinary policies. This is quite true, but it only addresses a fragment of the issue. If they considered Pol Pot and Mao, they might see what all four of these dictators have in common: they are consummate idealists. They all believed in abstract, immutable, eternal entities that needed to be fed with blood. Most obviously, like Robespierre, they all believed in a State that exists over and above the individuals within it. They believed in the same "kingdom of heaven" or "City of God" ideologies of past Christian rulers; they merely wrapped them in secular dress. They were certainly not nominalists, understanding the State to be a mere convention describing a complex collection of people, laws, and relations; they were not Epicureans or Utilitarians after the greatest good for the greatest number; and they did not heed Nietzsche, who believed any sort of nationalist or tribal pride—the renunciation of individuality—to be the height of folly.

Idealism, and not mere religion, incites mass violence, just as it is to blame for so much individual suffering in the contemporary world. This is where Onfray comes in most usefully—not as a chronicler of past historical thinking, but as someone who sees, right here and now, the harm that idealist thinking does to us, and how to begin to move beyond it.

Leftist Libertarianism

Onfray's impact in France is not in question. Not attracted to the ideal

intellectual lifestyle, he renounced the elite Parisian academia and taught high school in his native Normandy for over two decades. Not accepting the ideal style of philosophical writing, he penned dozens of books meant for a wide audience, most unfamiliar with philosophy. Not limiting himself to the ideal philosophical outlets of article, monograph, and cloistered lecture, he frequents radio and television programs and founded his own free university, inspired by the ethos of Epicurus's Garden, open to everyone. He rankles the psychoanalytic industry, not as the Scientologists do in the United States, but through an erudite and tightly argued six-hundred-page critique of Freud's own method.[20] And while remaining on the fringe, he writes prolifically about contemporary French politics, teaching his large readership about libertarian principles and why the current Left is an illusion. This final point is not unheard of in the United States, for it was the general sentiment of the loud, if inchoate, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement of 2011. This movement, unsatisfied with the spineless collaborationism that passes for leftism in American politics, could have used a philosopher like Onfray on their side, joining lonely voices like those of Noam Chomsky to unite individualism with responsibility, anarchism with compassion, and resistance with clarity of purpose.

This is not to say that any new anarchist movement must have a clear philosophical system undergirding it. Certainly May 1968 in France did not unfold according to some theoretical plan, and much of OWS's power stemmed from its spontaneity and explicit refusal to label itself. However, it stands to reason that if anarchism is to become a lasting and effective alternative to our dominant liberalism, there should be a more thorough understanding of its history and variations; only then can American activists refine what might work best for their communities, communicate clear messages, and gain converts. Indeed, contemporary American political discourse, dominated by corporate cable news, reflects very little general understanding of *any* political theory. How many times have we heard conservative lawmakers or presidential candidates massacre the basic principles of socialism, completely conflating it with communism, or conflating both of them with modest government regulation of the private sector? If even our own legislators are ignorant about basic socialism, what need is there to speak of anarchism? The very word *anarchism* generates sneers and summary dismissal. To the vast majority of Americans, it is a laughable, ridiculous dream of dreadlocked marijuana enthusiasts and vandals. How could it possibly be taken seriously?

One of Onfray's goals has always been to rehabilitate terms that have been vitiated by long traditions of biased idealist thinking. First on his agenda is to rehabilitate the term *hedonism* from thousands of years of abuse at the hands of Christianity, whose self-hating, sickly attitude is antithetical to that of Epicurus. In the fragments that survive of Epicurus's words and in Lucretius's Epicurean masterpiece *De Rerum Natura*, there is nothing of Dionysian excess or of nihilism giving way to despair. There is just a commitment to this life, this earth, this body, and these friends, which are the only things we can hold to. Accused of gluttony by festooned clerics, Epicurus merely asks them to "send me a pot of cheese, so that I may have a feast when I care to." Steven Greenblatt, in his popular book *The Swerve*, contributes to Epicurean rehabilitation, arguing that Lucretius's worldview is at the heart of what we think of as modernity. Plato-Christians have tried to hide this influence, much to our impoverishment.

Anarchism needs a similar revival. Fear-mongering elites have fought to convince us all that anarchism means chaos and hopelessness, and that it does not merit serious consideration. However, if only we looked a little more deeply into the principles articulated by people like Palante, Bakunin, and Proudhon, we would see that from its infancy, anarchism as a political orientation never advocates a dystopian free-for-all. In fact, serious anarchism is far more in line with what we often intend when we use the term *libertarianism*.

In the contemporary United States, libertarianism has taken on a strange national flavor. Generally associated with the Republican Party, and more recently the Tea Party, it chooses its battles very carefully. Libertarians pine for a moratorium on taxation, as well as moratoriums on government regulation of commerce, labor, and the traffic of firearms. But American libertarians' ambitions tend to stop there. They still call for government sponsorship of Christian doctrine and regulation of nontraditional social practices like same-sex marriage. Thus, it boils down to a harsh economic individualism and ethical egoism à la Ayn Rand.

This is a sad and incomplete politics that does not conduce to civilized and enlightened society. American libertarianism could give itself much more substance by incorporating properly understood principles of anarchism, such as the emphasis placed on the coalition of individuals found in anarcho-syndicalism. The bunker-mentality aspect of American libertarianism is largely responsible for its stunted growth and inability to

become a viable political alternative—one that might produce new ideas, agendas, and parties, breaking us out of our stagnant two-party deadlock and providing meaningful options to our sometimes directionless "independent" voters.

The Left need not concede libertarianism to the Right. By incorporating theoretical anarchism and staunch individualists like Nietzsche, American progressives may gain new life. They may realize that Marxism and state socialism are not the only options, and they may better resist the siren call of hysterical leftist idealists like Slavoj Žižek, who teaches us to admire Robespierre's Terror and, ensconced at our desks, to not fear the prospect of blood running in the streets.[21] While Onfray is not yet a household name on this side of the Atlantic, we may hope that his work in translation will make him an effective ally to Americans disillusioned by the speciousness of the institutional Left and rudderlessness of a Left yet to be.

New Directions

What else does Onfray have to offer the Anglophone world? He is a repository of alternative attitudes about sexuality, bioethics, and art. Of course, these topics are well covered by our own authors, but no one else weaves these threads together as tightly, exposing the intransigent conservatism that results from idealist clinging in so many areas. He shows that other models and other angles are not only possible, but better.

For example, one of the most vital social revolutions of our time is the rapid validation of marriage for homosexuals, as well as the recognition of many other legal rights. While Onfray did not need to nudge this movement along, his work elegantly describes this transformation as the crumbling of moribund ideals, that is, the belief in an eternal, inviolable category of marriage that exists in a perfect form somewhere outside the realm we live in and see. Feminist critique and queer theory have stood on this same antiessentialist foundation and can only benefit from a more thorough understanding of their implicit but fundamental opposition to the legacy of Platonism. By wedding metaphysical antiessentialism with systematic ethical hedonism, Onfray paves the way for new combinations of thought. Libertarian and libertine feminism becomes easier to imagine

and discuss, as do new approaches to bioethics. When Platonic ideas are invalidated, it becomes harder to argue that stem-cell research infringes on some eternal, mystical human sanctity.

In addition to these issues alive and well in the news, Onfray's comprehensive hedonism gives us resources to think differently about more subtle parts of our lives. It is not often that we hear cogent critiques of procreation itself, which most of us still consider the ultimate purpose of human life. But such thinking is patently idealist; it shows how much we cling to metaphysical categories outside of ourselves and how much we believe our lives house some inherent teleological purpose rather than a purpose of our own devising. Marriage itself, or the compulsion to live in lifelong monogamy for the good of society, becomes questionable for those who renounce metaphysical idealism. The sex-positive movement knows this, and countless people have benefited from the light-hearted erotics validated by popular figures like Dan Savage. Recently, transgender activism has seen great advances, leading people away from the fear and anger that often arise when sacred sex and gender categories are called into question.

Onfray only adds substance and structure to what many intuit, giving them historical context and pointing out interrelated issues. As his work gradually reaches the English-speaking world, I hope that our discourses will absorb some of the style, clarity, and ethical conviction he has offered France for decades.

A Note on the Translation

Jargon, neologism, and polyvalence are not integral to Onfray's work. Therefore, there are few technical challenges to translating him. Self-consciously departing from the obscurity of most continental philosophy, Onfray's style is closer to William James than Derrida or Lévinas, and thus feels quite at home in the succinct conventions of English. Yet part of Onfray's immense appeal and success as an author is the informal flair and energy of his style. Thus, the general methodology of the translation has been to attempt to capture that flair, sometimes at the cost of literal fidelity. The most common license I have taken is probably the shortening of sentences with the insertion of periods. The average French sentence runs longer than the average English one, and it employs the passive

voice liberally, without any negative connotation of passiveness. Therefore, since Onfray's points almost never hinge on tricks of language, the ease of his writing is best captured in the natural cadence and active voice of English.

Another characteristic of Onfray's antischolastic style is his rejection of footnotes. The original text contains no annotations; therefore, it should be understood that *all annotations have been added by the translator* to clarify philosophical and cultural references that may be unfamiliar to the average Anglophone reader.

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PREFACE

I died when I was ten years old, one fine afternoon, in an autumn light that made me long for immortality. September shared its beauty, its dreamlike clouds, the glow of the waking world, sweet air, perfume of the leaves, and the pale yellow sun. Finally I am discussing on paper September 1969 thru 1973. I have written some thirty books as an excuse for not writing the pages that follow. I put it off because it was too much work to revisit those four years I spent—between the age of ten and fourteen—at an orphanage run by Salesian priests. Those years were followed by three additional years away at boarding school—seven years total. At the age of seventeen, I emerged a zombie and left on an adventure that would lead me to where I am now, in front of this piece of paper where I am going to let go of one of the keys to who I am…

Before this period, my life had played out in nature around my home village of Chambois: the dull river water where I fished for minnows, the bushes where I built forts, making torches out of boughs like a Greek shepherd, paths under the trees, rustling forests, the smell of horses, painted skies, blowing wind, the smell of crops, bees buzzing, feral cats running around. I lived happily in those Virgilian times. Before reading the *Georgics*,[1] I had lived them, my flesh in direct contact with the material of the world.

What made me sad at the time was my mother. I wasn't a bad kid, but she couldn't stand me. She had her reasons, which I better understand now. When we're adults we stop blaming the blind for leading us off a cliff and, applying some reason, learn to pity them. My mother dreamed so much in her life, not wanting to live the one she had. She was like so many women who are taught to have the *Bovarique* impulse as a second nature.[2] She had been spurned, hated, and abandoned by her mother for reasons that were not clear. She was placed in foster homes where she was exploited and beaten. Marriage must have seemed like a chance to escape from her nightmare.

Yet the union changed nothing about her life. Her fate had been inscribed in her since that one Sunday in Toussaint, just after her birth,

when she was left in a crate outside a church. No one really recovers from being rejected by their mother. It is even harder to recover when one becomes a mother and in turn rejects one's own son, cementing oneself in the unconscious hell where another person's life prohibits you from living your own. So simple…Neither a husband, nor kids, nor family can fix things. The wounded subject has to recenter itself. How could my mother live with any equanimity when she had a wound in her that left a trail of blood all the way back to that church gate? To heal, she would have had to consent to a diagnosis. I witnessed far too many of the dead ends that sidetracked my mother. She wasted her time indiscriminately, like a caged animal running headfirst into the bars, always bloody, tortured by needs, and made crazier by finding that its self-destruction will not end its captivity. Quite the opposite: the prison gets smaller, the bleeding continues, blood calls for blood. Perhaps my mother ignored it, but her subconscious could not.

The taciturn and withdrawn boy didn't cry, didn't complain, and didn't protest beyond the usual mischief of a kid his age. I saw, felt, calculated, was surprised here and there, and learned a thing or two. One lesson was that in a village, children are entangled in all the negativity of the adults. Of course, I discovered some secrets, but did she ever know that I knew them? I don't know. The fact remains that this woman who was beaten as a child went on to beat her child, compulsively, with whatever she had at hand—bread, cutlery, all kinds of objects without distinction…

At the time, although I can't remember any remarkable mistakes or monkey business on my part, she would threaten to send me to a reform school, a military school, or an orphanage…I remember equally well that she said I would end up being hanged some day! Since I had never killed my father or mother, did not plan to lead the life of a highwayman, and did not contemplate becoming a murderer, I could not see why I should come under the executioner's blade. But my mother sure could!

God she must have suffered, not being able to absorb the hatred she was subjected to. She turned back against the world, indiscriminately, without even sparing her own son! What could a child of ten understand of this blind process that sucks mindless actors in against their will, sending them to a madness that destroys them? Sometimes a mother hits her son like a tile falls from the roof—a natural movement—the wind is not to blame. By leaving her daughter at the gate of a church, my grandmother, of whom I know nothing, contributed to the course of these subsequent childhoods ruled by toxic negativity. There is a blind force

driving the planets that just as innocently conducts the lives of people fed so long by dark energies.

In a weird paradox, I was taken out of my mother's way and put into an orphanage *by my parents…* The impulse to repeat things, a primal scene, a cathartic dramatization. I was playing a role on a stage whose logic I didn't understand. It was the same thing that happened to my mother. My father just went along, incapable of countering her violence. When she was challenged, it only intensified her hateful energies. His placid nature and stubborn commitment to nonconflict made him an accomplice. Most of the time he was stupefied by the brutality of his exhausting work as an agricultural laborer and by the general misery of his life. Yet he never complained.

So in 1969 I was driven to an orphanage called Giel—a mix between *gel* (ice) and *fiel* (bile). Yes, they welcomed children whose parents were still living, but the place was designed in the nineteenth century solely with orphans in mind. On the stamps of its envelopes, in its official header, on its road signs, report cards, school plaque, newspaper advertisements, and mentions in the local press, the word was loud and clear: *orphanage*.

What could a ten-year-old kid dropped off there think, other than that he had been abandoned? What came next changed the course of the story. My mother had decided that boarding school would be good preparation for my higher studies, and she stopped talking about reformatories, military schools, and other tender affections. But such preparation was improbable, and she would never be around for what became of my life once I went. What was wrong with the local school where my little brother studied? He got to come home every night. Giel was good for my mother because it allowed her to swap her position as abandonee for abandoner.

The boarding school was just thirty minutes from my home village—exactly twenty-eight kilometers. May 1968 had taken place, but hadn't had much impact in that lower Normand province.[3] The county of Orne is full of dirty farms, where the people still believe in witches, warlocks, and sorcerers. When the spirit of May '68 reached the area two years later, the word *orphanage* would give way to an acronym much more in sync with the time: the Giel Orphanage changed to ESAT—École Secondaire Agricole et Technique (The Secondary School of Agriculture and

Technology)—a different packaging but the same Salesian logic.

Its architecture relied on massive blocks of Armorican granite, a kind of somber and depressing stone that had been hardened by rain.[4] Not surprisingly, the place had recycled the blueprint of a building built for incarceration, like an asylum, prison, hospital, or barracks. All together, it made the shape of an E. For a ten-year-old kid barely three feet tall, the limbs of this building were crushing to the body and thus the mind. Around this core building were arranged a farm, apprentice shops, a greenhouse, and sports complexes. It was like a village. There were six hundred students and staff, making it more populous than the little town that I came from. A self-sufficient factory, a man-eating machine, a cannibalistic cesspit.

The prison didn't have walls, a clear boundary, or visible signs marking outside and inside. When were you really inside it? Was the surrounding countryside part of the arrangement or not? Not far from the main core was the mill, surrounded by canoes and kayaks built by the priests. There were a series of buildings on the banks of the Orne, a miniature replica of the Lourdes cave, footpaths cutting through the forests, an area of woods called Le Belvédère, meadows, and an open landfill. All of these things still belong to Giel.

You can't really escape a place like that. Hemmed in, you were sucked down into the dark pits of the disciplinary institution. Anyone who flees, who deserts the group, soon finds themselves in a hostile countryside. The priests' cars came and went on the two or three surrounding roads, as did those of the country people in the area, and residents were immediately aware that any child walking alone on the side of the road was a fugitive from the orphanage. The inside was the same as the outside. There's no fleeing a prison without walls. There, the body and mind are controlled, even at a distance—especially at a distance.

The main building was opposite a chapel, the original source of the name Giel. In fact, it was more of a proper church, as big as a village parish. Its most recent addition was the assembly hall, which contrasted with all the surrounding architecture. The lines of its roof cut an angle that embodied the aesthetic of the 1960s. You can imagine Cazotte's devil sitting down in the chapel and leaving an impression of his ass there to mark his visit.[5] Anthracite tiles, grey granite, windows in long rows—dark on the outside, light on the inside—a clock tower (with no clock) built of reinforced concrete. When rains soaked the chapel, it looked desolate.

Next to the chapel, in front of the main building, adjacent to the farms —with their manure piles and their mooing cows with kind, beady eyes and perpetual foolish smiles straight out of *Ferdinand the Bull*—in a tiny garden were statues of people I consider, in the etymological sense, pedophiles: Don Bosco and Dominique Savio, the first saints in the gilded legend of Salesian mythology. In their order there was not much left of Francis de Sales, author of the lovely *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which contains wonderful pages on "the tenderness we have for our selves."

Don Bosco got rid of Francis de Sales. The priests promulgated a comic strip called *The Prodigious and Heroic Life of Don Bosco*. From that moment on, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* counted for nothing. In the same manner as Jacques de Voragine, but armed with Goscinny and Uderzo, they presented Bosco as a veritable hero who was canonized by the grace of Pope Pius XI—the final mark of his perfection.[6] From his origins in poverty to his four-poster bed in the Church of Saint-Pierre, Don Bosco was, in the minds of the apologists, the embodiment of the ideal life trajectory.

If you believe the comic strip, Don Bosco faced many obstacles: others' skepticism, communist persecution, the cynicism and arrogance of the upper classes, and resistance from within the Church. However, guided by Providence—often represented by a great dog-protector named The Grey—he accomplished all of his aims, including the founding of his orphanages. Sometimes at night we were made to pray for the settling of the organization's debts. We solicited a financial miracle. In the morning, if a donor showed up, we knew it was because of our prayers!

Salesians are mainly concerned with the education of young people, more precisely, with shaping them through manual labor. The organization's goal was clear; it was for each to find an acceptable vocation. Back when the orphanage was self-sufficient, that meant being a farmer, baker, cook, or butcher. Later, that meant lathe milling and, when I was there between 1968 and 1973, carpentry and horticulture. The most intellectually pliant were candidates for the priesthood. But Salesians dislike intelligence. They are suspicious of books and fear knowledge. The *intello* ("intellectual," a word used all the time by our priest teachers) is the enemy.

In the first minutes of the first hour of the first day of those four years of hell, I had a foundational experience: I was standing in line at the bursar's office under a hot September sun—all kinds of papers, disbursement regulations, enrollment fees, and receipt formalities. We were broken into different classes by a priest who used the tube of one of his locker keys as a whistle for addressing the gathering. The sixth-grade chattel stood waiting to be registered into the orphanage's machine.

My parents were gone. I left my little *papier-mâché* valise near a staircase, next to a huge woodpile. I wouldn't visit my village again for three weeks—and then only for a few hours. At the tender age of ten, this seemed like an eternity, an amount of time impossible to measure, if for no other reason than the hole it digs in your heart, making you weak in the knees, threatening a sudden collapse, right there in the middle of the courtyard, in the middle of the throng of children who are brutally forced to reckon with their destiny. A being's history is inscribed right there, in that existential ink and in that flesh that's scared of itself, that body that simply registers its solitude like an animal feeling its own abandonment and isolation, the end of its world. Torn away from my habits and rituals, my familiar faces and places, I found myself alone in the universe experiencing the Pascalian infinite and its ensuing vertigo, my heart and moods in a vortex.

On the verge of fainting and to avoid my assimilation into the herd, I became totally transfixed by an upturned collar in front of me. A fold in the clothing of the child standing in line with me—a white band of cloth with a last name embroidered in red thread. "Last name. Name!" Suddenly I trembled: my clothes also had these bits of fabric required by the orphanage's administration, but my name wasn't written there—just a number: 490.

The floor fell from under me. Michel Onfray was no more. From now on, I would be 490—my whole being reduced to a number. It made sense; I was in an orphanage, where people abandon kids. So we were separated from our names and became numbers on a list. The kid in front of me must have had parents and thus a lineage, a filiation he could claim and wear in letters made of red thread. For me, however, it was all over. The child in me died that day and I grew up instantly. Nothing would ever be more devastating.

Later, I found out that 490—me—was designated especially for kids who

worked in the laundry. Since I was one of the kids staying on the longest, I had to take part in housecleaning chores. In that world of grime, sweat, and the odor of little boys, the stenches of dirty priests, and the film of grease on everything, the laundry was a haven of cleanliness and soft smells—a bit of childhood preserved.

Waiting in that line, I noticed the structure of the institutional machine. Like all organizations of power, it functioned through division and hierarchy. Every one of the six hundred students was put in a group and then a subgroup—each with its own rules, regulations, and prerogatives. The cardinal division was between the masters and their apprentices: the real boys, the tough kids, the strong, the sturdy, those who would become artisans in their turn, and those who would reach the professional pinnacle. Then there was the class of subhumans: the studious, the classically weak, the girls, the sissies, reciting their Latin declensions, the infamous *intellos* with their dubious virility—the last straw in this nest of pedophile priests…

There was one hope for the latter type: the chance, with BEPC in hand, to join the vocational training of the former.[7] The complete man not only shows that he can distinguish between an accusative and an ablative, he also excels at the lathe and the jointer. He could succumb to the temptations of silks and soft hands, but chooses wood shavings and metal filings. In the last advisory council of my third year, they were in doubt that I would be able to get my certificate. The possibility of me getting a baccalaureate was completely off the table, so they offered me an apprenticeship in the sawmill. I refused, earning a slap from my mother. My parents shared the thought that intellectuals were good for very little, if anything.

The power machine also bifurcated the classical middle-school structure: there were the higher secondaries (level three and level four) and the lower secondaries (level five and level six). They tolerated hazing, humiliation, and the nastiness of fifteen-year-old adolescents toward the “little level-sixers” who had just had their tenth birthdays. All the initiatory trials were conducted with the blessings of the priests.

They also divided us alphabetically: from A to C in descending order of quality. The top students, according to the classics teachers, were obliged to study the best subjects. But there were priests who employed another hierarchy and who had different requirements. Rather, a double hierarchy: one athletic, the other musical. This is because Salesians serve two religions: one of Don Bosco in which one must and may sing

and one of football. I believe in neither of them…

In the orphanage's singing school, there was a priest from Saint-Brieuc who was devoted to the Mayenne football club from Laval (I think…) who played the clarinet despite having a severed tendon in his pinky (which, according to him, was the reason he had not become his generation's Jean-Christian Michel).[8] Sometimes he would slobber into a melodica, a strange instrument begotten from a monstrous coupling of harmonica and miniature piano keyboard.

This little pot-bellied priest divided his students into two parts: one athletic—the amateurs who played on sports teams, the fans of Mayenne, the sopranos who were useful to his chorales, those with whom he could discuss the football scores, the Olympic Games, and other nonsense—and all the rest: the dregs of humanity. I was part of that filth, those "egg-heads" who read in the corner instead of fraternizing over the football games on television. That priest taught us about love-thy-neighbor and then demonstrated, as clear as could be, the classic mechanism of all injustice. I salute his memory: in spite of himself, he taught me how to recognize the kind of arbitrariness that I am unable to tolerate.

The religion of sport makes life difficult for those who don't join that peculiar cult…Three disciplinarians—those who taught "sport," or "outdoor activity," since "physical education and athletics" had not yet become pedagogical terms—paraded around in fancy tracksuits and sneakers. In those days the style was fluorescent: three stripes of orange, vibrant red, and electric blue. One of them was the track and field star Guy Drut, who competed in the Mexico City Olympics; another was an extremely hirsute rugby man from Toulouse; and the third was a little rachitic made frail by alcohol, tobacco, and probably the Algerian War who swam around in his beige Lycra jumpsuit. He didn't swim for very long, though, and came to an untimely death.

The reigning discipline was cross-country racing. The classes, which were held in the forests and fields surrounding the orphanage, were a typical example of the law of the jungle: all bundled up with stopwatches in hand, the coaches watched the troops march by. Once brought out to the forests, the bigger, fatter, older, more determined kids would elbow the younger, weaker, more fragile ones into the thickets, shrubs, and streams. Those in front would spit masculinely, and those in back had

drool, snot, and mucus all over their faces.

The most experienced kids ran on the balls of their feet, as did those from the richest families who could afford good footwear. Everyone else made do with old shoes that would come off as soon as we tread into mud. Elongating their strides, throwing their legs forward, the expert runners—who were so admired by the priests, who sometimes watched from the side of the road—threatened to kick out the legs of those in front of them. A veritable school of life, a real love-thy-neighbor temple.

Once a year, the priests organized an official hazing: the “twenty four hours of Le Mans.” It was a trial shrouded in mystery. Those who had been around knew what was coming; the young ones would find out. A team of three or four had to race, tied together by short ropes. At “rest stops,” covered in mud, soaked in sweat, and panting like dogs, we were dragged and cursed by the faster, older teammates. All happened under the derisive eye of the Salesians, who waited for us to pass by and doused us with buckets of cold water. A real neighborly school, love-of-life lessons.

Another spectacle, which would have delighted a Lower-Normand Leni Riefenstahl,[9] was the Olympic Games of Easter Sunday. The night before, the whole orphanage took part in an inauguration ceremony under torchlight in the darkness of the rural night. Each class represented a different country, and people’s mothers were compelled to buy jerseys in national colors and to sew ad hoc national flags.

There were phalanxes, military marches, herds, bearers of flags chosen at the whim of the adults, an Olympic torch carried by the best athletes, and the hysteria of the priests who encouraged their pets by yelling from behind the barriers. The Salesians competed as well, displaying their skinny, white, hairy legs on the fields and podium, among the anthems and flags…

I was good at sports; I was rated especially highly in speed events. But I hate the masochistic celebrations, the praise of debilitating effort, the taste for competition in which the Salesian tribe, strengthened by the village staff, teaches that “what is important is to participate”—following the well-known formula of the fascist Pierre de Coubertin.[10] But in practice they only celebrate the winners. Strong together with the weak, the weak with the strong—in those days I saw the brutal law of nature unfolding openly.

At the orphanage, they loved a body that was dirty, fouled, bruised,

broken down, tired, and hurt. Cleanliness was not one of the priests' specialties. We had stained, tattered, patched-up clothes; worn out shoes; grease stains all over; a film of grime in our elbows and on our necks; suspicious odors; dirty nails. Completing the picture was all the blood, sweat, tears, and warrior virtues that go into good sport. If you didn't share such a taste for humiliating your flesh, or for other forms of self-abuse, you were considered a girl. The worst insult.

We did sports for at least an hour a day. When the sports were added together with "outdoor activities," we could spend up to three hours a day in physical activity. Yet showers were allowed once per week, no exceptions: on Thursdays, our day off. A run through the mud on Friday? So what? Shower next week.

The showers were in a basement of crude concrete. Divisions were made of wicker, a cheap stool on the ground, a showerhead, a painted green swinging door like in a western movie, and a door cut short on the top and bottom, allowing the prison-guard priest to peer into the steam at the boys' slender bodies.

On our way back in, we waited in our underwear, one behind the other with our kits and towels. Father Brillon controlled the water flow, and thus the length of the shower. Without a doubt, we enjoyed the water and were satisfied by cleaning our bodies and, vicariously, our souls. Yet we had no chance to enjoy ourselves a little bit in privacy, under the warm drizzle, far from the world, all alone under that purifying private rain. Pleasure in cleanliness? That's a sin. A girl's obsession.

It was as if a conductor guided everything. We waited our turn without complaining, entered promptly, washed quickly, left the room almost instantaneously, scrubbed the floors, and tidied the room for those coming in next. We then crawled through the cellar window to lay around the cement basement smelling like wet dogs for an hour of television —*Zorro* in those days…While we watched, the kids in detention had to study.

The priests had a method: when each kid was in their shower stall, they would tell us to do things the following way: "get wet"; "step out of the water"; "soap up"; "return to the water"; "rinse"; "get out quickly"; "dry off"; "leave the shower area," even if you're still dripping wet. Especially dripping wet. From the controls of the machinery they yelled at us to get out of the warm stream of water. Woe to he who did not immediately

obey; on him they would then open the valve controlling the boiling water. Corroborating the lessons of Pavlov, the group shower never went over the allotted time…

One terrible day, we witnessed a Homeric rage, a diabolical hysteria… Father Brillon found a small turd delicately positioned on the floor of the showers. Everyone fled to escape the Salesian's fury. I believe that the little coprophile in question had so well integrated the idea of the death of the individual propagated in that orphanage that he must have imagined that his little defecation, *like everything else*, would disappear into the laws of the community.

Where and when was there any space to enjoy a bit of personal calm? Only in the dormitory, after the lights went out. But there too, space had its limits. We had a bed, a red or green plaid blanket (the colors alternating over 120 beds), and a little armoire with a drawer and a cabinet. Those were all our riches. Treasure and necessity were one.

I came to find out very late that my mother had been intercepting letters from my sweetheart, a Parisienne who spent her summer vacations in my village. I never got anything from the postman, save one letter from my father telling me about my mother's hospitalization from a car accident. The other driver died and the other passenger went mad. (Earlier I had heard from a boarder coming back from Chambois that my mother had died in that accident. But I asked the staff to confirm it, and they disproved it a few hours later.) The only precious thing I had for those four years was a card with a picture of my little brother, on which he had scrawled a little phrase of fraternal affection. Later on for Saint Michael's day, my parents sent me a couple of simple necessities.

My only treasures were the books in the dormitory library. Some edifying literature, of course, but also bad adventure novels (I remember a character by the name of Bob Morane) and even some classics.[11] Our nonordained French teacher had us read a magnificent, wondrous text by Flaubert called *Salammbô*, through which I got to see Carthage while still stuck in Giel. The Orient in an orphanage!

There was some real sweetness in those moments in bed right after the lights went out, after I had washed my face in the cold water in the sinks in front of the hall bathrooms and dressed in my pajamas. In that hushed atmosphere, privileged students' murmurs were sometimes tolerated, some were reprimanded, and others were punished. There was

always the smell of soap and toothpaste. Sometimes there was soft classical music in the air. Then books…the Book.

The best were the stories you could spend all day reading: *The Old Man and the Sea* inspired me to write. To one Monsieur Naturel, a stubby little man in a great, belted grey blouse, I put in a request for a yellow notebook, pretending it was part of essential "supplies," as we used to say. I filled that book with a piece of fiction about a horse that was abandoned and beaten by its owner. It was quite likely autobiographical!

Once the lights went out, the priest made his rounds. Under the beam of light from a pocket flashlight, he examined whether we had our hands *on top* of our blankets rather than *under* them. From time to time, he stood at the foot of the bed, fingering his rosary in the glow of his torch, extremely close to the petrified body of a child holding his breath. At other times, the sound of a candy wrapper attracted the Salesian who took his share and said, self-righteously, "It's better when you share."

Exhausted, he moved between the snores, the sighs, the dreams, the elusive sleep, the sound of tired bodies turning in their bedding, and the creaking metal springs in the mattresses. His felt slippers glide over the floor. Finally, he opened the door to his stall and retired. I listened to the everyday noises of that cramped life. I watched the shadows of its tiny movements. I cried.

Existential freedom was alien to the dormitory. Even in our quietest hours, gentlest rhythms, and calmest moments, there was always the latent threat of the Salesians' brusque and irrational fits of hysteria. Even the few menial members of the staff that came in from the town joined in the perversion. It was their way of getting a thrill.

We never intended to set off these excesses of violence. Whispering and terrified, we could not fathom why a little bit of hushed talking after lights-out should inflame the priest's fury. He turned on the lights, screaming and yelling at everyone to get out of their beds. He snatched our covers back, with red eyes and flailing arms, his jaw clenched, his legs weakly trembling, shouting orders at us. In the winter, for this offense of speaking in a low voice, if the *guilty ones* did not confess, the entire dormitory found itself out in the cold—120 kids in their pajamas in the black of night, the blue light of the moon shining on sheets of snow in the courtyard. The priest, bundled up in his coat, left us standing there, waiting for us to denounce our friends, which we never did.

So as not to lose face, Father Brillon led us to the study hall and made the whole group of shivering children do homework, copy verses, and memorize poems in record time. Then he pretended to choose a propitiatory victim at random and made him recite the verses. The group's whole fate was in the hands of this scapegoat. Thus, by just choosing the right person, it was easy to cut the madness short or prolong our stay in the study hall for another hour into the night.

Another time, the singing of a cricket in the middle of the night was enough to reactivate this same priest's fury. We used to, little prisoners that we were, harbor crickets, beetles, and little snakes in empty chalk boxes. The little elytrons made an untimely racket, waking the Salesian. It caused the same scene as before, only the priest's pet was allowed to stay in bed, supposedly for medical reasons—that complicit little fink.

I'm not exactly sure why I was elected victim one night. For those adults who were shut in with their supposedly celibate peers, it was probably a useful pretext for channeling their libidos. One night, a young coadjutor acting as supervisor ordered me to go shovel sawdust in the carpentry workshops at the edge of the orphanage, near the cemetery.

As brave as Poil de Carotte,[12] I faced the sounds of the night, the swooping of nocturnal birds, the tempestuous wind in the creaking branches, the clacking of poorly closed shutters, and the rats leaping out of the trashcans outside of the refectory. More than anything, I was afraid to run into a pedophile priest, of which there were three or four around.

Most of my sawdust was scattered by the night wind on my way back from the workshop and I was afraid to return to the dormitory empty-handed. With my slippers and pajamas covered in wood powder, I handed over the demanded loot. The apprentice priest looked at me mockingly and said with a smile, "Good, now bring it back to where you got it." Outside again, I threw the remaining sawdust in one of the refectory trashcans and hung around for a while under the concrete steps, waiting for a reasonable time to pass before I went back.

I did not cry that night when I returned, absolved of a crime I did not commit, experiencing injustice deliberately inflicted on me by those who paid lip service to justice. From then on, only the suffering or death of those I loved would bring me to tears. I would keep my anger intact, not with hate, resentment, or rancor, but available to help those who could not use their own, beaten down as they are by the brutes.

There is no need for justice; terror is the only form of government: “To be obeyed, first we must be feared” was the thinking in France before May 1968. The Salesian priests certainly thought this way. Hence their logic of terror, arbitrariness, and the constant, immanent threat of catastrophe: guilt is everywhere, even there where you don’t see it. Punishment falls from the sky, without justice; it is sovereign, arbitrary, capricious.

To maintain a level of fear, there was a well-oiled system in place that installed a sword of Damocles above the head of every orphan. Work and discipline: those were the two categories of punishment. Any relaxation of standards or effort, any violation of the written or unwritten rules would trigger a process of control and punishment. Ultimately, each week every child would receive a score out of ten in these two categories.

There was a system of different colored cards—from white to the most catastrophic yellow passing through a rather good salmon color—that corresponded to two, four, and six points. There was also a green card of honor; it was longer than the other ones and gave you bonus points.

The rain of cards fell thickly from a terrible German teacher of ours who used to test our nerves. She would throw fits at her tape recorder, which didn’t obey her any more than we did. It was always also a threat with an English teacher who made us memorize interminable lists of vocabulary. One week the theme was viticulture, and we had to memorize *oenology*, *stave*, *retro-olfaction*, *yeast*, *fermentation*, and *botrytis*. There were forty words to learn, and we would be quizzed on twenty of them. If we knew any fewer than fifteen: yellow card. On the week dedicated to anatomy, we learned how to say *tarsal*, *metatarsal*, *bile*, *trachea*, and *pancreas* in the language of Shakespeare, with the accent of Yasser Arafat. I still can’t even ask for directions when I’m in London.

With all solemnity, the director gathered the whole orphanage into the study hall. Every week, he went over each student’s case, announced his notes, and offered some comments—congratulations or criticisms…Any score worse than five landed you in work or detention. It was all about punishment. We were deprived of television, forced to copy lines of text, memorize poems, or do whatever redaction or exercise the punishing teacher demanded. We were also held in on the weekend or even on multiple weekends in a row. There were no winners in this game. It was unforgivable to deprive us of a break from our cells.

Discipline worked entirely through the ticket system. So simple. Sometimes it was more expeditious, taking the form of physical punishment: a priest kicked his boot with all his force into the rear end of a kid who was a little bit slow, hurting his coccyx for days. They smacked the backs of our heads, putting our necks out of joint. They seized us brutally, shaking a recalcitrant's arm to the point of dislocating his shoulder. They made sure to turn the rings around on their fingers before slapping us. These adults, immature as they were, didn't know their own strength and didn't know how to relate to the body except with brutality.

Enjoyment was forbidden in the refectory. One ate to ingest calories, not for pleasure. The service ladies who came from the neighboring village were right out of a Fellini movie. One was such a bad klutz that we feared she could fall over at any moment; another sported a mustache like a Portuguese bricklayer; and a third was pudgy and wore a blue nylon blouse covered in grease. It is unlikely that the Salesians violated their vows of chastity with any of them. For those with high libido, a child sufficed.

Discipline was constant, eternal, tireless, unrelenting. There was never a moment without the smell of terror. Enter the refectory in silence; sit down in an orderly way; do not speak until given permission, which was sometimes given quickly, sometimes later, purely by caprice. To shut the assembly up, the father on duty clapped his hands twice and everyone immediately complied. Whisper something to a friend? A brutal smack on the back of the head or on the cheek. With a snap of the fingers, we all placed our cutlery in a white plastic bin that was covered in dings, lacerations, and grease. A new snap and we were off to study.

One night, a student refused to eat the tomato-vermicelli soup. It made him think of beef blood and maggots, even though it was the same food they served all the time. To not eat your soup was to lose your right to eat at all; it called for punishment…The priest ordered him to swallow the red liquid. He refused. Another order, another refusal. This put the priest into an indescribable rage. He grabbed the boy by his hair and threw him to the ground. The chair clattered to the floor, and he screamed as he stomped the boy with his boots. The violence of his blows kicked the boy across the length of the refectory. We were paralyzed in mortal silence. The boy came to rest against a sink, whimpering like an animal, emitting little yelps from his throat. His blood pooled on the ground and left a stain like those in a butcher shop after they slaughter a pig. Nobody spoke for the rest of the meal. That silence still rings in my head.

The yellow and salmon tickets and the beatings were not the only tools of the disciplinary system. It relied just as much on the law of silence surrounding pederasty. In those days, nobody—parents, for example—ever believed that a priest could like to fondle young boys. We heard, “A man who has given his life to God and taken a vow of chastity would never do such a thing.” But they did…

One of them taught shop. Everyone admired his dexterity and competence. He skillfully saved many a Mother’s Day present in that shop where we broke saw blades, bored holes in dishes with overzealous gouges, oversoldered Virgin Mary figures, smeared glue on pieces of wood, and burned images of squirrels with a pyrogravure on the bottoms of plates.

At the same time, everyone paid a little fee for his help: under the pretext of teaching the exact procedure, he positioned himself behind us and told us to put our hand on his in order to memorize the movement. He then took advantage of this drawn-out moment to rub the back and bottom of the child he had pinned up against the bench. The rhythms of his gestures resembled masturbation.

Another one of them taught music. He was a beanpole—often accompanied by Coco, the crow that served as the orphanage mascot—who cast his lanky silhouette on the wall of the building where he gave his music classes. He was the Professor Culculus of his field; his desk cluttered with electric cords, tuning forks, tools, papers, and assembly manuals.[13] He kept rats and mice in a cage and walked around in his dirty, smelly socks.

We had to build him a stereo from scratch: everything from soldering components and connections, all the way to transforming raw lumber into the amplifier’s finished facade. He also appropriated the orphanage’s egg budget to requisition lumber to transform his music room into a second-rate auditorium. For this, we had to chop down a huge tree on the bank of the river that provided shade in the spring, changed colors in the fall, and was a nesting ground for birds in the winter.

In his quarters at the edge of the school, he made us listen to Arthur Honegger’s *Pacific 231*, telling us about axles, sparkplugs, and steam power. With *Schéhérazade*, he took us to the Orient, as he did with *On the Steppes of Central Asia*.[14] He mimed to Paul Dukas’s *Socerer’s Apprentice*, taught geography to Smetana’s *La Moldau*. Those were actually sublime moments, just like the titles of the pieces to which he

taught. Art showed me that even if the world of the living was hell, it also contains some paradises.

On the other hand, he inflicted flute courses on us and made us play *At the Clear Spring*.[15] In those sessions he would ask the first row to move to the back row. We all knew what that meant. As soon as we were concentrating on the score and the instrument, he caressed our heads and passed his hands over our necks, occasionally creeping inside our collars. This derailed the budding musician, who was now choking on his shirt, terrorized by the fondling.

The same one was in charge of our canoeing trips on Sunday afternoons. Logically, only those of us who could swim were allowed to participate. The waters of the Orne River are cold, pure, clean, and clear. It is wide and deep and at its bed you can see floating algae, green and brown threads of undine's hair.[16]

But there was one exception: one kid who couldn't swim was allowed to participate. The only condition was that he had to go in the priest's canoe. Near the bridge over the Orne, the Salesian challenged us to a race and we all unleashed a fury of paddle strokes trying to be the first to pass under the iron structure. He then adjusted his garments and entered into the reeds with his victim—just enough time to get sexual with the child, who later, without shame and a bit naïvely, admitted to being "tickled." When the crickets sang that night, there was one student not in his bed, for medical reasons: the same boy.

A third priest also practiced on the little boys. He had a position very convenient for his crime: he was the "prefect of discipline," not a mere "education counselor" one would find at a secular school. Every child knew that he passed through the halls and had the authority to apprehend them and mete out bodily punishment by ad hoc means. Nobody even knew if he had an office.

There was also the Salesian in charge of the infirmary, where nobody was in a hurry to go, and for good reason. It was better to let a little headache become a migraine than to be on the spot, depantsed, and then molested. With our pants around our ankles, if we pointed out that the ailing area was not the one being examined, he would tell us that complications can arise anywhere! That groper then declared, detachedly, that it was time to go back to class, handing out a parsimonious dose of aspirin. I kept my headaches to myself.

It was always this atmosphere of discipline, punishment, legality, illegality, good, bad, and blame. Schoolwork was also all about fear: you were subject to the law of the weekly grade and punishment whether your bad result came from lack of effort or talent.

The aforementioned pugilistic priest of the refectory also taught French, through extravagant methods. In the winter, he opened the windows wide and forced us to stand before them reciting poems with deep breaths and dramatic gesticulations. He had us jump over our book bags and march clockwise around the room big enough to hold a hundred students.

Under the influence of I don't know what pedagogical concern—probably the effect of 1968—he developed a series of courses that he recorded on his little homemade tape recorder with wires and bits of wood sticking out of it. The recordings sputtered from faulty connections, and worst of all, the little headphones stuck together from students' accumulated earwax.

He hung those headphones with clothespins on nylon strings suspended between walls decorated with pictures clipped from *Le Pèlerin* or *The Catholic Life*.[17] We all feared that he would call on us to comment on his clichés. We could sometimes avoid it by refusing or complaining, but we might just as likely trigger a dreadful crisis. It was impossible to predict.

Another priest—the math teacher—wasted day after day grooming his hair, including his eyelashes and eyebrows. One day, he was completely bald, his head rubbed with some kind of walnut pigment for aesthetic purposes. The next day he showed up with a wig, which flew off in a tussle with a student one day.

That same one cleared his throat compulsively, churning up wads of spit into his mouth that he would chew like oysters. He'd puff up his cheeks and reswallow the mucus like a grand cru Bordeaux. We could hear him teaching all the way down the long corridor. He always started his quizzes with a resounding call: "First question! Half page!" Followed by the question. Then the second, then the third. Over the course of the quiz, he would lengthen his strides, hastening shorter answers. He'd then enter the room and announce, "I am collecting the papers!" On those occasions too, slow students sometimes escaped his wrath, but just as often triggered a rage.

We prayed on empty stomachs in the morning for half an hour. At the end of the day, another half an hour, followed by an evening lecture, a moment of personal edification, a comment on current events, or a chance to pray for the elderly community. I can say after nearly thirty years that I benefited from these moments of collective good intention. Sometimes they even read a fragment from the only source of literature the Salesians could tolerate: *The Reader's Digest*. I read anything I could get my hands on, including that.

One night, Father Moal, the vexed clarinetist, was in charge of that nightly séance. He noticed that singing and sports mattered equally little to me and that I would rather read than participate in collective diversions. I read Jean Rostand,[18] to whom I wrote a letter that was never answered. I told him I wanted to become a biologist, assuming that his pseudo-philosophical preaching was some kind of biology.

On student council stationary I declared my interest in the work of the old scientist from Ville-d'Avray. This zeal got me through our natural science classes: pissing in test tubes to measure albumen, decapitating frogs with rusty scissors in order to examine the brain's irrelevance to reflexes, brushing acid onto the poor thing's thighs.

This particular priest had no love for what he called *intellos*. During one of our nighttime reading sessions, he read a passage from that wretched publication and, in front of all my friends, interrogated me as to the author of what he had just cited. It so happened that I had read the same piece a while before, so I responded, "It is by Teilhard de Chardin, and it is about parthogenesis" (of bacteria, but, humble as they were, the priests extrapolated the theme all the way to the Virgin Mary!). The specialist in love-thy-neighbor didn't hesitate to smack me, but he missed.

Another time, an alumnus was presented to us as a model of wild success: he had become a car dealer. He rolled up in a brand new shiny Renault 15—canary yellow. He was given the honor of the nightly address, during which he sang the praises of the orphanage, of its priests, of its founders, and so forth. Around the same period, the school was organizing a trip to England, and the car dealer promised to pay for one of the poorer students. However, we had to *deserve* the award.

No mention was made of the criteria of such merit, but we saw clearly which student was credited with it. It was none of my unfortunate four best friends, nor was it me. We stayed alone in the orphanage while the rest of the school left on buses for their trip. The Salesians had not made

any provisions for the social detritus that they left behind. They even forgot to prepare us a meal that evening.

On Sundays at the orphanage, the grip loosened, somewhat imperceptibly. There was a break in the violence, a little more softness and attention. Things moved a little slower, but also took a little longer. Order remained, of course, but we noticed it was more like a velvet glove than an iron fist. These relaxed periods began on Saturday evenings and lasted until Sunday afternoons, which were dedicated to religious education. On Sunday evening, families arrived in a commotion of cars, children glaring cruelly at other kids' parents. The glares between the children themselves were even more brutal.

Buses congested the courtyard. On my first journey out, I experienced the savagery of these reptilian hordes. My ten-year-old carcass offered no resistance to the older trade-school students piling onto that imposing bus. I remember holding my suitcase over all of their heads, hoping I could just travel standing up. I was so sad to have to stick my little body into that stinking and muscular mass of boarders. Inevitably, I traveled sitting down.

On leave days, watching the other kids going home made me want to scream and sob like a wounded animal. I had an unhealthy desire to take refuge in a corner, to shrivel and curl up in a fetal position, lying there in a pool of urine and feces, hoping for an end to the world that would end this nightmare. I felt like a mangy cur languishing in a hole.

Our masters, probably aware of what it might mean for an orphan to see his fellows leave (and therefore with fewer orphans around), seemed to take the opportunity to release tension. There was the gentleness of a kennel, humiliating attentions. We'd get a little mint or grenadine in our water, or yellow or orange soda on Sundays. Sometimes we'd get projections of *Tintin* with running commentaries added by the Salesians. They'd read by torchlight from a text they had written on cardboard. Those stories of Tintin on the moon were so stupid that they made me want to cry. I swallowed a hundred years worth of those tears.

Sunday morning mass…I always left chapel with a firm and clear conviction not to believe a single world of that drivel. It wasn't the priests who made me a nonbeliever, since I already was one. Quite the contrary, I was born an atheist and their spectacles only strengthened my judgments of their existential failures. As a child, I pitied these immature

adults.

When I went to my birth village, I had to sign a paper to turn into the priest assuring him that I went to mass that week. I always quickly scribbled my signature and then ran outside to smoke my father's harsh Gitanes cigarettes under the tin roof of the washhouse right next door. Sometimes I perched in a tree to read on a branch hanging out over the river. The clock bells told when it was time to go home…

On my first trip back home, I went with my little brother to collect chestnuts, and when the bells of angelus rang, they sent me into a fit of tears. It was too much for me. I thought it would have been better to have never been born. I tried to imagine myself suddenly consumed by a sort of black fire that turned me to ashes, leaving only the trace of the smell of death.

As soon as Sunday lunch ended, the countdown to the abyss began. (I remember one Sunday my mother complained about the price of having to feed me, since my meals were already included in the tuition…) Time plunged. Tomorrow would be a parasite on today; the idea of Monday undermined the reality of Sunday; the hell to come scorched the present. I was an open wound that opened up more with every second.

On Monday mornings, an electric lantern colored everything yellow. It was the only item in our little room where my brother and I stayed at my parents' house—a single room of seventeen square meters, identical to the one upstairs. Why did I have to go back to the orphanage? I couldn't understand. For four years…Four interminable winters, four times two hundred days of ice and bile, a thousand days in the presence of my childhood's decomposing cadaver.

Bobette and Coco, the dog and the crow, are dead. Poor Fernand too. And Father Moal is buried on the sandy bank of the Manche. The shop teacher quit the Salesian order, I heard, to marry and start a family. He did well. There are no new pedophiles like the music teacher and the disciplinarian. The nurse lies underground in the school's cemetery. One of the coaches has become my friend. His wife used to pass me scissors to dissect frogs in lab; now she doesn't miss a single one of my courses at the Université Populaire de Caen. The pugilistic priest entered retreat, in bad shape I'm told. The priest with the bald head like an ass walks around without his wig. We have spoken a few times. He thinks I have a wild imagination. He still has a short memory, an irremediable pathology.

I don’t hold a grudge against any of them. Rather, I pity those marionettes. The stage was too large for their little destinies. They were poor, pathetic bastards turned executioners trying not to think of themselves as mere toys of fate. I know that the orphanage killed some people; some never recovered and are still broken, cracked, and shattered. It also made a few more efficient cogs for the social machine: good husbands, fathers, workers, citizens, and probably believers.

I accompanied my mother one day to the office of public assistance to help her find out the identity of her own mother. We found out that she, along with her brother, had been abandoned at the Giel Orphanage. Once I knew that, I felt a duty to contribute some peace to her unhappy mind. Instead of feeling resentment, life requires us to become bigger by making gestures of peace toward those who have thrown us to the dogs. They didn’t know what they were doing. Resentment wastes too much energy. Magnanimity is an adult virtue.

A few things kept people and their negativity from killing me. First there were books, then music, later art. Above all, philosophy. Writing put them all together for me. Thirty books later, I feel I have to compile my words. This preface provides some keys. The pages that follow are, like all of my works, products of the survival mechanism I developed to deal with the orphanage. I am calm and free of hate or contempt. I desire no revenge and I harbor no rancor. But I am motivated by the considerable power of sad passions. All I want is to nurture and expand the “power to exist.” I borrow this felicitous phrase from Spinoza, having found it like a pearl in his *Ethics*. This “power to exist” follows a single way: to heal all past, present, and future pains.

November 1, 2005

PART I

AN ALTERNATIVE METHOD

ONE

A Philosophical Side Path

A Dominant Historiography

Classical historiography of philosophy is constructed by wishful thinking. Strangely, the apostles of pure reason and transcendental deduction all agree in the mythology that they create and that they perpetuate with a vengeance by teaching, compiling, lecturing, writing, and publishing fables. Through repetition, these become gospel truths. Scholarly looting, unmarked citation, conceptual regurgitation of other's work—these are the happy practices of those who edit encyclopedias, conceive lexicons, and otherwise write the history of philosophy and the textbooks in which it is inscribed.

A staggering uniformity reveals itself in this field. It is always the same entries, the same texts by the same authors, the same biographical sketches, even the same portraits. Encyclopedias often plagiarize passages of works they pretend to describe. The author, paid a servant's wage, whips an article off quickly, including a bibliography that frequently refers to his own pamphlets and unpublished articles. From one book to another, we reproduce myths without calling them into question.

One fable has become a redoubtable certainty: people that we call the Pre-Socratics invented Philosophy in the sixth century BCE in Greece. That single sentence contains at least three errors: one of date, one of place, and one of name. We think about those who came well before this date—people in Sumeria, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, India, and China, and other barbarians—from the point of view of the Greeks. *Pre-Socratics* is a catchall term extremely useful for avoiding further investigation.

What does the term itself actually mean? De facto, it seems to denote a moment before the time of Socrates. Is it defined by his birth date, around 469 BCE? His death, 399 BCE? Or maybe his prime, around 350

BCE? We could reasonably call *Pre-Socratic* an event—a number of events anterior to the aforementioned dates. Could it correspond to Thales falling into his well?[1] Is "Pre-Socratic" linked to a book like Empedocles's poem *On Nature*?[2] Is a particular philosopher the key? Perhaps Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus? A system of thought, such as Abderitan atomism?[3] Or a special idea? One of Parmenides's perhaps?[4] At the very least, certainly nothing that follows the death of Plato's teacher may be called *Pre-Socratic*.

How, then, are we to understand the integration of Democritus into that constellation? For centuries there had been a mixing of absolute materialists and total idealists, atomists and spiritualists, believers of myth and holders of reason, geographers and mathematicians, Milesians and Ionians, and so many other views.[5] Or a better question: Who can explain how the philosopher from Abdera (Democritus) can be the Pre-Socratic with the largest preserved corpus, knowing that calculations place him as a rough contemporary of Socrates. He survived the latter by three decades? Why such a flagrant error (acknowledged but not corrected by Jean-Paul Dumont in his Pléiade edition)?

Another fable concerns the white, European birth of philosophy. We tend to see all barbarians as the same; we take this fantastical genealogy as a real one. All of this presupposes a lexicon of *yellows*, *negroes*, and *crossbreeds*. But in terms of skin, there was nothing particularly white about the racist Greeks, who also had little to do with democracy (another common trope: the Greeks invented democracy)! They celebrated pure lineage—the sole criterion for participation in the life of the city—while excluding women, nonwhite aliens, domestic aliens, and impure whites from that famous "democracy," which really amounted to the single city of Athens.

The miracle of the Greeks was that the Logos came down from the heavens. What, then, to make of Pythagoras's travels to Egypt and the knowledge and wisdom he found there? What about Democritus's travels in Persia and among the Indians, Ethiopians, and Egyptians? What about his meetings with Chaldean astronomers, Persian magicians, Indian gymnosophists, both on their own lands and as they passed through Greece?[6] *Greek white purity* denies the mixing of people and ideas. Could barbarian cosmopolitan impurity have played a determining role in their thought? Shudder to think…

In the realm of official philosophy, fables rule. We don't question the

dominant historiography. This is not surprising, since historiography is never taught as an integral part of philosophy. Nobody spends time on that craft; you don't philosophize about glossing over philosophy's history. Why not blur out the rough spots, forcing diversity into forms that diminish the vitality of thought? Why not adopt a single, great, prepackaged story?

An epistemology of the discipline seems inappropriate, yet we love Marxist-Leninist histories of philosophy, or similar projects signed by a Christian author. Why would historiography taught in institutions be neutral? In the name of what would it defy ideological expectations? Particularly those of a civilization marked for two thousand years by the Christian worldview? When we produce a history of a given discipline, it should be objective; the point is not to preserve our own cultural episteme.

Our historiography was formed over two thousand years by conscious and determined actors; by faithful scribes and archivists; by the events of history, such as papal support, revolts, natural catastrophes, adverse conditions, and inconstant means of preservation; by the good and bad will of different actors; by personal initiatives and ideological choices of the State; by the meddling of forgers; by the campaigns of incompetents; and so forth. All of these contribute to the production of a primitive canon, which helps us carve out some kind of order.

Who writes the history of philosophy? According to what principles? With what objectives? To show what? To whom? From what perspectives? What is the beginning of the practice of History? The Encyclopedia? The Dictionary? The textbook? Who publishes, distributes, and diffuses it? Where? For what audience? What readers? When these works fall into our hands, there is a more or less well-intentioned and capable cohort in the shadows reading over our shoulders.

The Platonic A Priori

Those two terms are very telling: dominant historiography is based on an a priori in relation to which everything sensible is a fiction. The one true reality is invisible. The Allegory of the Cave is a manifesto for classical philosophy: on the one hand, the truth of Ideas, the excellence of the Intelligible World, and the beauty of the Concept; and on the other hand,

the ugliness of the sensible world, the rejection of the world's materiality, and the discrediting of tangible and immanent reality. To understand what this world-view is about, we should look at who sets up, illustrates, and follows these a priori principles.

When Whitehead joked during his Gifford Lectures that the history of philosophy in Europe is a series of footnotes to Plato, he was not altogether wrong.[7] As he implied, anything not related to the Greek philosopher is forgotten, ignored, denigrated, or bullied. By not translating, by not producing critical editions, by leaving the canon scattered among the shambles of antique literature, we ignore the work going on in universities, in dissertations, articles, and other publications. We thus thwart the teaching and diffusion of what are still important ideas.

Using the principle of Christ, we write a history of philosophy celebrating the religion of the Idea and Idealism. Socrates is the messiah put to death for incarnating the revelation of the philosophically intelligible Ideal;[8] Plato is the apostle—even the St. Paul—of the intelligible world. Idealist philosophy: there you have the revealed religion of occidental Reason. Consequently, we compute everything around Socrates: before him, after him; Pre-Socratic, Post-Socratic. Historiography even uses the terms *minor Socratic* and *subsidiary Socratic* to characterize Antisthenes, a cynic, and Aristippus, a Cyrenaic,[9] both of whom created unique sensibilities. There is even the expression *other Socratics*, most notably for Simias and Cebes—both Pythagoreans!

Idealist domination over classical historiography is the main theme, but it undergoes a number of variations. For example, Christianity, having become the official religion and philosophy, discards that which generated its lineage—Abderitan materialism, Leucippes's and Democritus's atomism, Epicurus and the Greek Epicureans, the late Romans, cynical nominalism, Cyrenaic hedonism, sophist perspectivism and relativism—privileging its own propaedeutic: dualism, the immaterial soul, reincarnation, the denigration of the material body, antipathy for life, and the ascetic ideal. Pythagorean and Platonic postmortem salvation and damnation suited it perfectly.

Later on, Christianity watched, with unfeigned gladness, the flourishing of the spirit and tone of medieval scholasticism. It experienced the joy of its greatest hours again with the German Idealism initiated by Kant and consummated by Hegel, who is never held sufficiently accountable for

the harm he committed to historiography, with his testament to arrogance, self-satisfaction, pretension, and the philosophical nationalism of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, which contemporary followers hold as a model of a *philosophia perrenis, but white, idealist, European*…

To say again: the dominant historiography is idealist. It can be split into three periods: the Platonic period, the Christian era, and German Idealism. In the language of official school syllabi: Plato, Descartes, and Kant; *The Republic* and its cave of Ideas, the *Discourse on Method* and its thinking substance, and *The Critique of Pure Reason*, with its phenomena, of course, but mainly its noumena, the German reincarnation of the Platonic Idea.[10] These are enough to sell the illusion of variety while peddling the same thing under a different name…

A Counterhistory of Philosophy

Constructing such a lovely garden, with its straight walkways and well-pruned hedges, takes work. We have to prune, trim, and cut often. We have to put one author ahead of another, one way of thinking before another. We have to highlight certain trends, doing everything possible to elevate one's own thesis and relegate the names, arguments, books, and concepts of others to the dungeons. Putting one thing into the light entails putting another into obscurity. Nevertheless, important, unexploited material is left in the shadows. The purpose of my course at the Université Populaire de Caen (see *La Communauté philosophique*) is to exhume that alternative historiography.

Historiography has thus forgotten things, or at best ignored them. It has passed them over, knowingly or unknowingly. It shelves things away. Armed with prejudice, it does this without qualms. For example, we customarily do not consider the cynics as philosophers. What's more, Hegel has written in black and white, "They offer nothing but anecdotes." Sophists? Until their most recent rehabilitations, we have looked at them through the eyes of Plato, that is, as philosophical mercenaries for whom there is no truth and in whose eyes all that matters is triumph in debate. Historiography strives to prevent modernity from being recognized in the ideas of relativism, perspectivism, and nominalism—or in one word, Anti-Platonism.

The agents of traditional historiography realize Plato's incredible dream. The evidence is there in the case of Diogenes Laërtius—*Lives, Doctrines, and Sayings of the Eminent Philosophers* (IX, 40)—and I find it strange that we never consider his history *philosophically*. Plato, in effect, wanted all the books of Democritus to end up in a bonfire. His work was too prolific, too successful, and too ubiquitous. It took two Pythagoreans —Amyclas and Clinias—to dissuade Plato from committing such a heinous crime. He was the philosopher-inventor of the modern auto-da-fé.

This explains why in Plato's entire corpus we don't find the name Democritus mentioned a single time! That omission is tantamount to a conceptual auto-da-fé. Democritus received this treatment because of the import of his work—especially since it is the doctrine most likely to challenge and jeopardize the fabrications of Plato. It employs clear, frank, honest, and intellectual exegesis. The antimaterialist faction took shape during the life of Plato himself and the logic of the classical and dominant historiography repeats the following trope: "We do not accord the slightest dignity to that other philosophy—the reasonable one, the rational one, the anti-mythological one verifiable only through good sense," which is something philosophies so often lack…

This seems to be the story: by reviving the materialism of the man from Abdera (Democritus), Epicurus and the Epicureans triggered an assault by the idealists. They railed against the philosophy of the Garden. And that was just during his lifetime. They called it crude, lascivious, lazy, porcine, drunk, gluttonous, dishonest, profligate, malicious, wicked, plagiaristic, arrogant, complacent, conceited, uneducated, and so on. In short, they said that Epicurus and his disciples were pigs unworthy of inclusion in the pantheon.[11]

Such slander persists in the canon. Ataraxia, as the definition of pleasure—that is, the absence of disturbance through a skillful management of natural and necessary pleasures—is considered the trivial pleasure of an animal lost in primitive enjoyments. Atomism—that is, reducing the world to a combination of atoms within a void—is considered a theory for those with no intelligence. Because he welcomed slaves, women, and foreigners into the Garden, it was said that they all fell victim to his unbridled sexuality, and the like. The details of these slanders haven't changed for twenty centuries.

Only in antiquity is the counterhistory of philosophy so identifiable: it comes down to the enemies of Plato! This is almost entirely true: for

example, Leucippus, the founder of atomism; Democritus; then Antisthenes, Diogenes, and other cynics; Protagoras, Antiphon, and a handful of sophists; Aristippus of Cyrene and the Cyrenaics; Epicurus and his followers. These were major players. Later on, other figures emerged to counteract the fiction built around the character of Jesus, to counteract the Fathers of the Church who turned the empire Christian, and to counteract the medieval scholastics. In the shadows were licentious gnostics (Carpocrates, Epiphanes, Simon Magus, and Valentine), followed by the brothers and sisters of the Free Spirit (Bentivenga de Gubbio, Heilwige Bloemardinne), the brothers of Brünn, and other luminaries. Those obscure unknowns, with their theoretical pantheism and practical philosophical orgies, were much more exciting than the monks of the desert, chaste bishops, and other monastic cenobites…

We can say the same about the constellation of Christian Epicureanism inaugurated by Lorenzo Valla in the quattrocento in a work called *De Voluptate* (never translated into French until some of my friends and I rectified that). It was expanded by Pierre Gassendi and passed through Erasmus, Montaigne, and others. Then there were French baroque libertines like Pierre Charron, La Moth Le Vayer, Saint-Evremond, and Cyrano de Bergerac. Following them were French materialists like Abbot Meslier, La Mettrie, Helvétius, and d'Holbach; Anglo-Saxon utilitarians like Bentham and Mill; physiologic ideologues like Cabinas; Epicurean transcendentalists like Emerson, and Thoreau; deconstructive genealogists like Paul Rée, Lou Salomé, and Jean-Marie Guyan; libertarian socialists; leftist Nietzschians like Deleuze and Foucault; and so many other disciples of pleasure, matter, flesh, body, life, enjoyment, joy, and other sinful things.

What's wrong with these people? They want happiness on earth, here and now, not later in some hypothetical, unattainable world conceived as a children's story. Immanence! That's the enemy! That terrible word! The epicureans owe their nickname, "swine," to their physiognomic constitution: their existence generates their essence. Unable to be anything but a "friend of the earth," according to the felicitous expression from Plato's *Timaeus*, these materialists condemn themselves to sniffing around, unaware that above their heads is a Heaven full of Ideas. The pig always ignores the truth because it is only found in transcendence. Thus, Epicureans languish ontologically in their total immanence. There is only this: the real, matter, life, and living. Platonism declares war on all of it,

looking to punish anyone who celebrates the drive for life.

What is the common point between that whole constellation of thinkers and their uncompromising attitudes? For one, they share a formidable concern with deconstructing myths and fables, rendering this world inhabitable and desirable. They want to rid us of gods and superstitions, fear and existential anxiety about material causality. They want to ease the fear of death with therapy here and now rather than invite death for a graceful exit. They come up with solutions relying on the actual world and actual people. They prefer viable, modest philosophical propositions to sublime but uninhabitable conceptual edifices. They refuse to turn pain and suffering into paths to knowledge and personal redemption. They propose pleasure, enjoyment, the common good, and gladly accepted contracts. They take control of their bodies and don't hate them. They master their passions and impulses, desires and emotions, instead of brutally extirpating them. What is the aspiration of the Epicurean project? The pure pleasure of existing: a project that is always welcome.

TWO

Bodily Reason

The Autobiographical Novel

Other powerful lineages populate the history of philosophy. There are other binaries to describe the issues and people at work in the tradition. Of course, there is Idealism and Materialism; the ascetic Ideal and the hedonist Ideal; and transcendence and immanence. But equally, there is denigration of the "I" and writing about the self. On the one hand, the philosophers I have listed did not seem to value autobiographical confession or little details derived from personal experiences. On the other hand, their lives fed their thought and they acknowledged drawing lessons from life. Some are messengers who efface themselves, trying to convince themselves that they act as mediums inspired by some extrinsic force, something beyond themselves, descended from the sky. Others are egoists, recounting their lives, involving themselves in the narrative and teaching that all ideas proceed from one's self, more precisely, from one's body.

The split between self and body is a fiction. All philosophers without exception start from their own concrete existence. Dualism reveals a different logic: Some hide in it, creating the illusion that dualism was revealed to them as an epiphany of reason, something that welled forth in spite of themselves. On the other hand, there are those who clearly protest. Classical and traditional historiography is for skillful liars and the falsely modest. It loves the proud humility of a Pascal who claims that the Self is detestable, but who uses the word "I" 753 times in the pages of his *Pensées*.

Montaigne is one of my heroes. Part of the success of his *Essays* comes from the personal examples he uses: waking to the sound of the pines; the servants speaking Latin; his father's skill as a horseman; his

own awkwardness in all manual, physical, or sportive exercises; his taste for oysters and claret wine; his passion for women; the *enormous lesion* of his tiny organ; the taste of feminine kisses perfuming his mustache; his cat; his precocious sexual failures; his fall from a horse; his misadventures with troublemakers in the forest and in his own home; and so many other moments much more useful than mere anecdote. For philosophy, the point of the stories is not their narrative power; they are important for their philosophical role: these existential details provide us with a theory that allows us to get back to our own existential condition.

Through these stories, which are the means of his thinking and not the ends, Montaigne clarifies the role of education in the constructions of identity, the inherited part of all personal evolution, and the body's major role in his philosophy. He reflects on identity, Being, our ontological uncertainty when confronted with the Other; man's animal aspect; the importance of determination, Stoic confidence, and strength; and the possibility of an Epicurean life. These life lessons illuminate the author's self-construction, of course, but also that of the reader, who is drawn in amiably.

One part of French philosophy speaks in the first person. Adrien Baillet, Descartes's first biographer, tells us that the famous *Discourse on Method* was almost given the name *The Story of My Life*. But beginning with the self does not mean you have to stay there forever, nor does it compel you to indulge. Between the self-rejection of the self and maniacal egoism, there is a way to give the "I" dignity: a chance to apprehend the world and uncover some of its secrets. Philosophical introspection—the wager of Descartes's cogito—is a point of departure. All ontology is preceded by a physiology.

The Existential Hapax

The body plays a major role in the life of a philosopher. Everything that can be said on the subject can be found in the preface to *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche knew from where he spoke—he knew nothing but migraines, ophthalmy, nausea, vomiting, and a collection of other maladies. He proclaimed that all philosophy is reducible to the embrace of the body, to the autobiography of a Being that suffers. Thought emerges out of a subjective flesh that says "I" and "the world that

contains me." Thought does not come down from above like the Holy Spirit that causes the elect to speak in tongues. Rather, it rises through the body, welling up from the flesh and entrails. What philosophizes within a body is nothing other than strength and weakness, ability and disability.

There is yet no discipline that would permit such a decoding of philosophical texts. We don't need a new semiology, textology, or linguistic science, but the kind of existential psychology left stranded after Sartre. It was stranded theoretically in *Being and Nothingness*, and stranded practically in the three volumes of *The Family Idiot*. This is because a philosophy is not apprehended in the Platonic mode of contemplating great concepts in the single nebulous plain of pure spirits. It is carried out on the material earth where the things that matter are bodily, historical, existential, and psychoanalytic, to name a few things.

Strangely, the history of philosophy teems with details that could make this project possible. But in order to do it, we must rethink the rejection of biography and affirm the possibility of entering the interior of a work, knowing its margins, its surroundings, and everything extrinsic to it. The details are not enough in themselves. We cannot reduce everything to anecdotes, nor can mere accessories destroy what is essential. But understanding the nature of a work requires understanding the mechanisms that produced it.

Sartre's original project promoted what I called, in *The Art of Enjoyment*, the *existential hapax*—the *kairos* of every philosophical enterprise.[1] In Greek music, it was the *chaos* of anacrusis before the beginning of refined modulation.[2] It is a singular moment during the life of the philosopher, in a particular place and at a distinct time—the je ne sais quoi of Benito Feijóo[3]—that resolves the contradictions and tensions accumulated in the body. The body registers that shock and it manifests in our physiology: sweating, crying, bleeding, trembling, fainting, comas, exhaustion, and the evacuation of vital fluids. Along the lines of the bodily trances of this peasant mystic, philosophers have produced a considerable number of variations. This hapax is the start of a work's genealogy.

Some examples? They abound…When philosophers are even slightly forthcoming, to which their correspondence bears witness and a biography will attest, one often finds such an epiphany in their existence…It doesn't happen after their great work is written and the

essential part of their production is behind them. It happens in their beginning, before all their work, genealogically. Their potential destiny flashes and it troubles them; it bores into them, penetrates, shoots, kills, and intoxicates them.

Without trying to offer an encyclopedia of examples, here are a few powerful moments: Augustine is the most famous—erstwhile lush and cad, future Father of the Church, the Doctor of Catholic law. He finds himself in the middle of a garden, in Milan, when grace visits him. Tears, cascades of tears, heart-rending cries, a voice from without—he documents this in his *Confessions*. What follows, obviously, is his conversion to Catholicism. Then there is Montaigne and his fall from a horse in 1568 after which he disposes of his Epicurean theory of death; Descartes and his three dreams in November 1619, which trigger the genesis of rationalism(!); Pascal and his famous night in *Memorial* between 10:30 pm to midnight November 1654 (tears there too); La Mettrie and his fever, which inspires his corporal monism on the battlefield of Fribourg in 1742; Rousseau in 1749 on the road to Vincennes, where he was going to visit Diderot in prison, when he falls to the ground in convulsions and begins to write his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men*; Nietzsche in August 1881 on the banks of Lake Silvaplana where he has a vision of the Eternal Return and the Superman; Jules Lequier in the garden of his youth when he witnesses a hawk snatch up a small bird, giving him intuitions about the relationship between freedom and necessity, which is the focus of all his work, such as *The Search for a First Truth*.

Decoding an Egodicy

Paul Valéry had a similar experience, which I called, in *Desire to Be a Volcano*, a *Genoa Syndrome*. What does that mean? A philosopher's body is unique: it is hypersensitive, like an open wound, simultaneously fragile and firm, capable and delicate, a precise machine capable of sublime acts, but also subject to the tiniest disturbances. The artist's body is valuable and is destined to *knowledge through the depths*—according to the felicitous expression of Henri Michaux.

Matter stores up considerable amounts of energy, only to cause Being to bend, bow, and break in two. Forces, tensions, and ontological knots

are incessantly at work inside this machine that is both desirous and nuclear, in all senses of the term. In infancy, but even before that, in our prehistoric unconsciousness, information accumulates as conflicting electrical charges. Only the existential hapax relieves this tension. That moment is a happy and favorable harbinger without which the person's being would probably be destroyed.

Freudian psychologists and their many offshoots focus too much on an autonomous psychic mechanism, which has little relation to historical materiality. Time, family, place, context, upbringing, personal encounters, and physiology are as important as the psychological unconscious. I believe in a sort of vitalist unconscious, one that is energetic but also material and historical. Philosophy cannot be understood through the formal and structuralist method—the Platonic one—as if the text floats in the ether between two metaphysical waters, without roots, without relation to the real and concrete world. A reading must then be refined enough to bring to light the way this mechanism of *egodicy* works.

I borrow this neologism from Jacques Derrida, who coined it in *The Gift of Death*. He meant, in the manner of Leibniz's *theodicy*, that all philosophical discourse must proceed from a justification of self. The philosopher attends to his Being, constitutes it, gives it structure, solidifies it, and then proposes his own autotherapy as if it were a general soteriological path. To philosophize is to make one's own existence viable and livable—right where one is, where nothing is given and everything is yet to be constructed. With his suffering body, sickly and frail, Epicurus came up with a way of thinking that let him live well, live better. At the same time, he proposed, to everyone, a new possibility for existence.

The idealist philosophical tradition refuses to make Reason the flower of such a corporal ground. It challenges what it sees as the fatalistic and mechanistic materiality of being—a complex materiality of course, but mechanistic nonetheless. It bristles at the idea of physical metaphysics. It won't incorporate those trivial activities concerned with the materiality of the world. It remains Platonic, sacrificing to the specter of Thought that needs no brain, of reflection without a body, of meditation without neurons, of philosophy without flesh. It wants something directly from heaven to explain the only unique part of man that escapes our understanding: the soul.

In the 1960s, structuralism lit the last fires of this methodological asthenia against the existential psychoanalysis of Sartre. It was against the materialism of the body and developed a phenomenology of the flesh

mixed with theology and scholasticism. This combination thickens the mist between the real and the consciousness that we can have of it. Structuralism railed against the extraordinary evidence of science, against things like neurobiology. It introduced a new spiritualism. In our time, there has never been a more urgent need for an existential philosophy of the body.

THREE

A Philosophical Life

A Perspective of Wisdom

The idealist tradition manifests in an ad hoc way. Plato practiced a schizophrenic pedagogy: he had an oral esoteric discourse intended for elites, while offering an exoteric teaching to a greater number of people. This is an aristocratic practice of philosophy. The Academy professes that Plato is for everyone, that nothing prohibits us from taking a course on Plato. What we call his complete corpus comes from that one accessible, exoteric transmission.

There was also that secret course lavished upon chosen students, those picked from the elites of the esoteric stratum. It was presumably taught after years of training in high-level mathematics, first principles, final consequences, and genealogical elements. As a result, there is a clear fracture in the history of ideas between inferior philosophy for more people and superior philosophy for the elite.

Once again, in response to the Platonic practice of philosophy, Epicurus and his cohorts started out differently. The Garden was open to all, without distinguishing between age, sex, social status, education, or heredity. There was no desire to produce an elite to occupy the best positions in society and reproduce the social order. Hence, one can say that the Platonic aim is theoretical and elitist and that the Epicurean aim is practical and existential. The history of philosophy hinges on these two tropes: the theoretical practice of a cabinet and the existential engagement with everyday life.

There is a relationship to place. Plato taught in a secluded place, discrete, closed off, and shut in, among similar people who are distinguished from the masses and destined to govern over others more than over themselves. How could this not lead to a principle of elitist

schools that function to provide society with the best means for perpetuating the system that recruits and appoints them? There's a clear connection between this and the secret Academy of the French Republic. It must be added that the University's ideological tolerance is proportional to the weakness of its power. We have seen what happens when its power is limitless.

Pierre Hadot teaches that all ancient philosophy aims for the philosophical life. I'm afraid I must qualify this hypothesis, which is seductive but fragile with regard to various Pre-Socratics: for example, what about Heraclitus and Empedocles, as well as Plato and his cohorts, such as in the *Timaeus*? Or Aristotle in his *Physics* or *Metaphysics*? Clearly, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism, and Cyrenaicism entail existential practice, and their philosophers are leaders of it. However, not all ancient philosophers agree that the theoretical leads, with any force, to eudemonia.

The ancient divide between the *open agora* and the *secret school* deepens with the rise of Christianity, which completely discredited existential philosophy. The Fathers of the Church lay claim to *true philosophy*. We find this expression in almost every one of their discourses. They speak of intellectuals as courtesans and of the power of philosophers. Eusebius of Caesarea, a friend and panegyrist of Emperor Constantine, employs the feminine article *la* for philosophy: the philosopher uses his intellectual ability, his reasoning power, and his talent for reflection in order to justify and legitimize history, the archive, the Truth.

From that point on, a host of thinkers, with varying degrees of zeal, lined up behind such power and crushed any attempt to think or write freely. The philosophical life? Finished: to be a philosopher, it sufficed to follow the teachings of St. Paul. Ancient wisdom, because it was pagan, was false; alternative Christianities, especially Gnosticism, were heretical; and all independent and autonomous ways of thinking were forbidden. The Agora? The Forum? The Garden? No more…The Church takes the first position and submits to the Episcopal, imperial authority.

But existential practice persisted. Astonishingly, the Epicurean community could, with a little theoretical refinement (Epicurean Christians included Valla, Erasmus, Gassendi, and others), reveal the permanent value of existential philosophical practice: theory needs practice, ideas incarnate themselves. To be Christian is not to content yourself with an ostentatious display, but to live as one, to emulate the life and everyday

acts of Jesus. In this regard, the cenobitic community of a Benedict, for example, would not have shocked the Athenian student of the Epicurean Garden.

Thus, Christianity destroys the existential path in order to take the philosopher away from criticism, debate, and controversy surrounding the minute details of doctrine. That is how theology kills philosophy, or at least demands its surrender. From St. Irenaeus with his *Against Heresies*, to Aquinas and his *Summa Theologica*, philosophy acts as a maid doing trivial chores. God, henceforth, is the sole object of all thought. At least that's how it was for six dark centuries of Western history.[1]

A large part of traditional, classical, idealist philosophy keeps reproducing these scholastic schemes. There are interminable discussions about the gender of angels, heaps of sophistries, ad nauseum rhetorical spins, willful verbal obfuscation, religious neologisms, onanistic and autistic approaches to practice, and other peculiar symptoms. A kind of schizophrenia always threatens philosophers who segregate theory and practice. But in secluded cabinets—like the philosopher under Rembrandt's stairs[2]—they can live and make a living from his teaching…This is the character of the Philosophy Professor—well described as a *Socratic functionary*. Is he a corporate sellout? I would say that Hegel is the epitome of all the vices of the profession.

Despite all of this, the existential tradition survived in philosophy. The Greek and Roman spirit continues with Montaigne, for example, and also with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard: *Essays*, *The World as Will and Representation*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *Repetition* can affect our real existence, the concrete one, in the same way as the *Letter to Menoeceus*.[3] But *The Phenomenology of Spirit* tends not to.[4] The ancient spirit still offers a chance to get through the impasse where theoretical philosophy too often stagnates. Yet it is theoretical philosophy that dominates the University and official venues of philosophy. I believe that the spirit of ancient existential philosophy should be reactivated.

What can a philosopher show for himself? His life. If someone writes a book, but it is not accompanied by a philosophical life, it is not worth our time. Wisdom is measured in details: It is found in what one says and doesn't say, what one does and doesn't do, what one thinks and doesn't think. We can put it in terms of Proust's theory of multiple selves:[5] we can, for example, radically separate the philosopher writing *Being and*

Time from the man who adhered to the Party of Hitler during the entire period of Nazism. If we accept this split, a great philosopher can be both a Nazi and a great philosopher with no problem. There's no connection between the person who composes a voluminous treatise on ontology and the one who vouches for a politics of extermination! Certainly, acknowledging Heidegger's political commitment is not sufficient reason to ignore him. We should still criticize him, comment on him, and appreciate his writings. But it's important to avoid the double bind—acting as if the real does not exist and seeing only him…*For Sainte-Beuve* deserves careful consideration.[6]

A philosopher has to be a philosopher twenty-fours hours a day, including while making his laundry lists. Plato was philosophical when he wrote against hedonism in the *Philebus*; but it was even clearer when this preacher of the ascetic ideal died at a banquet. He was a great philosopher when he promulgated the *Parmenides*, just as he was when he expressed his desire to burn the works of Democritus. He was a philosopher when he founded the Academy as he was in his youth as a dramatic writer and fighter. He was a philosopher when he published the *Republic* and *Laws*, just as he was as a courtier to Denis of Syracuse. And so on. They are indistinguishable.

Hence the need for a close relationship between theory and practice, mental reflection and life, thinking and action. A philosopher's biography is not just a commentary on his published works; it shows the nature of the relationship between his writings and his conduct. Only both of them together constitute a work. More than most people, the philosopher must keep these two forces, which so often oppose each other, connected. Life feeds the work, which in turn feeds life: Montaigne first discovered and demonstrated this. He knew that one produces a book, yet what makes it all the more remarkable is that the book shapes the author in return.

A Pragmatic Utilitarianism

What is the principle philosophical arena? It's not the school, the university, or any other enclosed space. It's the open theater of the world and daily life. There, the Lineage, Concept, Idea, and Theory do not have the same status that they have in the idealist realm. Existential logic does away with the religion of the Incarnate Word. Words serve to exchange,

communicate, and formulate, not to separate. Theory proposes a practice; it intends a practice. It does not have a purpose beyond that. In nominalist logic, words work in a utilitarian way; they are nothing more than practical instruments—there is no religion of the Incarnate Word…

I believe we should promote a utilitarian and pragmatic philosophy, not its evil sister—idealist and conceptual philosophy. Only the former allows for the existential project. But before pursuing it, we have to decontaminate these two terms because in the classical tradition, *utilitarianism* and *pragmatism* suffer from a double meaning, as is often the case with nonclassical ideas. Thus, *materialist*, *sensualist*, *cynic*, *epicurean*, *sophist*, *skeptic*, and many other terms have one philosophical meaning, but also a trivial sense. Oddly, the first meaning is usually contradicted by the second; one seems to negate the other…

Thus, *materialist*: In the philosophical sense, refers to a thinker who argues that the world is reducible to a pure and simple arrangement of matter. But for most laymen, it refers to one who is obsessed with accumulating goods and riches. The same goes for *cynic*: Philosophically, it means a disciple of Diogenes of Sinope, someone who practices total asceticism and moral rectitude. However, for most, it means a crude individual without faith or principle. *Epicurean* designates a disciple of Epicurus, a proponent of a frugal life and asceticism. But it also means a vulgar and gluttonous boor. *Sophist* refers to a methodological perspectivism, but it simultaneously denotes an amateur reasoner who cheats in order to win a debate. And so on…

Philosophers know that utilitarianism has a lineage going back to Jeremy Bentham, an important thinker, and John Stuart Mill, who promoted the principle of utility—meaning *the greatest happiness for the greatest number*—as the cardinal point of ethical philosophy. Bentham's *Deontology* (1834) and Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1838) formed the basis of this powerful way of thinking, marginalized by the idealists. Those Anglo-Saxons did not think nebulously. They built a clear, precise, readable philosophy devoid of all a priori metaphysics, and above all—and hardest for the idealists to handle—it leads to wisdom that is useful in everyday life, in the most mundane reality.

For the man in the street, utilitarianism is stigmatized as the conduct of someone who in relationships with others is incapable of generosity or magnanimity. Utilitarian politics, philosophy, and economics is viewed as egoistic, little concerned with people, and preoccupied with immediate concrete results. A little cynicism and Machiavellianism are added: it is

supposed that the utilitarian wants hard cash, material, tangible, immediate, and trivial benefits. This combination is really the antithesis of Bentham and Mill's thinking. What happens to the cardinal principle of the "greatest happiness for the greatest number" if all you end up with is the minor immediate satisfaction of a single person?

The same can be said about Pragmatism. Philosophically, this tradition puts knowledge and the goals of reason into perspective. In other words, this updated positivism proposes a theory of truth that denies the idealist Absolute in favor of epistemological relativism. When Peirce produced the term in "How to Makes Our Ideas Clear," published in 1878, he laid the foundation for an authentic philosophy of immanence. It did not simply arise from a failure to see things from a single point of view or to arrive at expected results.

The Pragmatic Utilitarianism that I propose is a return to philosophical consequentialism: there are no absolute truths, there is nothing Good, Bad, True, Beautiful, or Just in itself, but only relatively, evaluated according to a clear and distinct plan. Indeed, from a personal perspective, hedonism in this case allows us to accomplish this project and achieve joyous results. The idea is already there in Bentham: think in terms of action and aim it relatively to its effects. Think in terms of action, and base your actions on the effects they will have.

A Hedonist System

In summary, I propose a counterhistory of alternative philosophies that will problematize the dominant idealist historiography. I call for embodied reason and the autobiographical writing that accompanies it in a purely immanent logic—in this case a materialist one. I would like philosophy to be understood as the construction and decoding of an egodicy, a philosophical life resulting from an epiphany of reason, an existential perspective with a Utilitarian and Pragmatic aim. All of these converge in one term: *Hedonism*. I often put forward the following maxim of Chamfort, because it serves as a hedonist categorical imperative: "enjoy and have others enjoy, without doing harm to yourself or anyone else; that is all there is to morality." That statement says it all. Of course, we want personal enjoyment, but above all, we want others to enjoy themselves. No ethics is possible without that. Morality is all about others. There is no

other way. For example, the Marquis de Sade did not offer any kind of morality. Chamfort's consequentialist maxim allows for infinite variations.

First of all, I want to give the term *Hedonism* a dignity that it is not usually accorded. For the past fifteen years, my work has aroused many of the same problems that the ancient hedonists faced. Many of my critics have refused to soberly consider the details of what I say. They get hysterical about the single word *pleasure*. Everyone acts according to what they consider pleasurable, and they often simply transfer this onto others with the wish that it also pleases them.

Thus, I have often had to confront criticism that conflates hedonism with fascism, hedonism with Nazism, and hedonism with amoralism. Because of my avowed Nietzscheanism, they suspect that I must have a secret fascination with totalitarian and dictatorial regimes—that whole trope! To enjoy when others are not enjoying is actually the basest negation of all philosophy. But to enjoy *and* have others enjoy…What have they done with this *and*? They have ignored it.

There has also been the most facile interpretation of hedonism that conflates it with crude enjoyment, the trivial enjoyments of liberal consumerism. Others link it to opulent gastronomy—they assumed that this was what my first book, *The Philosophers' Stomach*, was about. In that book I took an ironic approach to philosophical gastronomy (damn the ironist!), to the philosophizing body, to embodied reason (which I called the "Lush's Reason"), to philosophical sensualism, to existential psychology, to the philosophical life, and to alternative historiography. All of those themes are already there in the ancient works of people like Diogenes.

In *Theory of the Amorous Body*, I tried to round out the image of the porcine Epicurean. I laid out the principles for what I called a solar eroticism and offered a manual for postmodern practice, a panegyric to women, and a libertine breviary in the spirit of Don Juan! They call me a stereotypical libertine—in its well-understood, trivial sense—when I oppose the Platonic theory of desire-as-lack to a Democritean logic of dynamic excess, in the latter's favor; when I propose a libertarian feminism that celebrates women in contrast to the Judeo-Christian cult of the Virgin, Wife, and Mother; when, in lieu of marriage, I defend renewable synallagmatic agreements; and when I praise the merits of a metaphysics of sterility against the obligation to reproduce.

Pleasure scares people. They are scared of the word and the actions, reality, and discourses around it. It either scares people or makes them

hysterical. There are too many private and personal issues, too many alienating, intimate, painful, wretched, and miserable details. There are secret and hidden deficiencies. There are too many things in the way of just being, living, and enjoying. Hence, people reject the word. They produce spiteful critique that is aggressive and in bad faith or that is simply evasive. Disrespect, discredit, contempt, and disdain are all means for avoiding the subject of pleasure.

But I persist in my theoretical and existential furrow: Hedonism, despite the way it is misunderstood, is the vision of the world I have been promoting over the course of thirty books. I have, of course, offered an analysis of reality (see the volumes of the *Journal hedonist*), but also a proposal to embrace it. In addition to hedonism, I defend totalizing and systemic philosophy, which has also become unfashionable. I defend trying to think powerfully, solidly, in a structured, coherent way. I try to examine all fields of knowledge. Hedonism is the overarching theme; my different works are variations on it. Thus, I have formulated an ethics (*Sculpting the Self*), an eroticism (*Theory of the Amorous Body*), a politics (*Rebel Politics*), an aesthetics (*Archaeology of the Present*), an epistemology (*Anatomical Wonderlands*), and a metaphysics (*Atheist Manifesto*). I've proposed an *aesthetic morality*, *solar erotics*, *libertarian politics*, *cynical aesthetics*, *technophilic bioethics*, and *postmodern atheism*. This atheism is the condition that makes the rest possible.

PART II

AN ELECTIVE ETHICS

FOUR

An Atheological Morality

The Judeo-Christian Episteme

Most people say they are atheist these days, but they are fooling themselves. Most atheisms are overtly nihilistic. What makes them so? European nihilism—so well described by Nietzsche—presupposes the end of the universe and the difficulty of finding another one. In the meantime, atheistic nihilism struggles between two visions of the world: the Judeo-Christian and something not yet defined, which we'll call post-Christian, for lack of a better term—we do not fool ourselves with that, it is for lack of a better term. Only time and progress through the century will permit us to discover it. For now we have nihilism.

We either subscribe to no values or too many values. There are either none or too many. We don't appreciate the nuances of ethics and metaphysics: we call everything good and well, even the bad. We call everything beautiful, even the ugly. The real seems less real than the virtual; fiction replaces reality; history and memory seem irrelevant to the present moment, disconnected from the past, and unrelated to the future. Nihilism characterizes an age that has no cartography: compasses spin and it is impossible to imagine an escape from the forest in which we are lost.

Nihilism spills out into the gap between two civilizations. The Lower Roman Empire saw the end of one episteme (the pagan and Greco-Roman) and the first stages of a new one (the Christian), which was not yet well defined. Epicureanism runs alongside Gnosticism; Imperial Stoicism cohabitates with millenarianism and apocalyptic ideas that came from the East; and the old philosophic rationalism lives its last hours sharing the century with ubiquitous irrationality: hermeticism, mysticism, astrology, and alchemy. Nobody knew which saint to follow.

Our own time is similar to those times described as *decadent*—a term that should be used with caution. It can be applied to every age of humanity, and it accompanies every epoch from Hesiod to Oswald Spengler.[1] Today, we have to deal with new representations of the world, uncertain blueprints, and perplexing perspectives. We have cosmopolitan ontologies and metaphysics, an ecological crisis, the brutal globalization of economic liberalism, and a market domination that negates the dignity of the majority of humanity. Once we took the first steps on the moon in 1969 and saw the earth as a frigid star, we understood that we only see the cosmos from local perspectives.

What is left of the Judeo-Christian in our daily lives? We must do an inventory. Disaffection with dominical or daily religious practices, skepticism of the reformist gimmicks of Vatican II, and disdain for the pope's teachings on sexual morality are all only superficial feelings. That kind of de-Christianization is only specious and formal. Most people (the agnostic, the vaguely atheistic, the nonbelievers from time to time, and the faithful by habit) submit to religious baptisms, as their parents did. They marry in churches to please their families and insist on being buried near their family members in religious cemeteries and blessed by ad hoc clergy.

It's an illusion that Christianity is waning. Superficial disaffections give the impression of deep change when, however, under the thin surface, the same logic persists that has pervaded European society for nearly twenty centuries. The death of God? That's a Judeo-Christian ruse. Where is the corpse? It is a fiction. What serves as God is far from dead; he's alive and well. He is the irrational in response to the tragedy of the real. In other words, he has to die one day, but the road is still open before him.

Take the example of the laity: Of course, the law signed in 1905 was a considerable step in consolidating clerical power over all of society, but it did not create any new battles or claim any new victories, and it ended up producing a stasis, and then a moribundity, before ever generating a taste for moving beyond the rancid, the insular, and the stale—qualities so often associated with the laity.[2] Its date of expiration has passed, because it never produced a laity that is dynamic, evolutionary, dialectical, and, frankly, postmodern.

When we really look, we see that the traditional laity was formulated with a neo-Kantian vocabulary, the Judeo-Christian Decalogue, and an

evangelical morality. It doesn't necessarily brandish the New Testament in matters of morality (or politics, but that's really the same thing); rather, it prefers severe educators who teach, without necessarily realizing it, Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*. They reduce both of these books to a series of moralizing aphorisms.

We use different vocabularies and have different formulas, and different actors believe they are adversaries, but they really have the same values. Everyone holds to honor your father and mother, devote yourself to your motherland, prioritize others, love thy neighbor, have fraternity, establish a heterosexual family, respect your elders, love your work, cultivate the virtues of goodness—charity, solidarity, graciousness, leniency, alms, aid, beneficence, justice—over malice, and so forth. We have done a lot of work to come up with these lists of signifiers, but it is time that we now figure out how to accomplish what they signify.

It is also important to show just how much the foundations of French juridical thought—said to be secular—remains Judeo-Christian. In this system, guilt is seen as something willfully chosen through free will, untouched by any determinism. Hence, the belief in personal responsibility and justified punishment; hence, the belief in redemption. It's a perverse and infernal cycle. Bioethics has the same problem, still hemmed in by Judeo-Christian fantasies. We still praise the *salvific* power (a Vatican neologism) of suffering and death in relation to original sin. We believe that sickness reveals Providence. And so forth. Our educational system, our aesthetics, and everything else of ours suffer from the same illness. All of these epistemes are built on biblical principles.

The Vatican is not really our metaphysical adversary—it is more like a State operetta, a kind of comic strip. It reflects the consciousness of the people, or its subconscious. It is a problem for individuals, but it's also a collective and communal problem. I am not interested in anything like Jungian archetypes; rather, I'm concerned with the irrational transmissions that inject, without necessarily realizing it, the Judeo-Christian substance into the identity of people and groups. This episteme needs to be understood, analyzed, dissected, and overcome.

The Need to De-Christianize

I want to continue the logic of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Those ideas are not just archeologically valuable; they can serve as transhistorical models. I want to produce a real post-Christian secularism that revolutionizes not only our terminology, language, and writing, but the very heart of things. A new civilization cannot create values without availing itself of the right to invent its own ethics, metaphysics, ontology, politics, and so forth. What should we preserve? And why? What can we and what should we destroy, surpass, conserve, improve, and adjust? What criteria do we follow and to what end?

De-Christianization is not accomplished through violence. The guillotines of the Terror, massacring reactionary priests, burning churches, pillaging monasteries, violating the devout, and vandalizing sacred objects are indefensible in all cases. A reverse Inquisition is no more legitimate or justified than that of the Catholic Church in its heyday. There is another solution: theoretical dismantling and the Gramscian reconquest of ideas.[3]

Every time one civilization gives way to the next, there are always dangers. Irrationalism abounds, superstitious thinking excels, and cheap metaphysical solutions proliferate. Moreover, when a culture collapses after a long misadventure, it is always to the profit of impulsive, instinctual, and animalistic hordes. It is as if the apex of an epoch must always succumb to the magma of primitive energy. In the wake of reason comes senselessness.

The goal of a postmodern secularism would be to accelerate the course of history in order to overcome European nihilism. A long cycle may be coming to an end, but there does not need to be a long, tiresome agony and death. It can go well, quickly and cleanly. When a moribund person has nothing more to do in life, it is useless to carry out a senseless, energetic therapy at their bedside. Europe has been Christian, and it remains so because of habits that are the reflexes of a body disconnected from its cortex.

Post-Christians can learn lessons from pre-Christians. They can show us ethical alternatives to old Platonism: *moralities of honor* and not of blame; *aristocratic* rather than universal ethics; a conduct of immanent play and not of transcendental processes; *virtues that enhance vitality* versus those that shrink it; a *taste for life* that turns its back on self-mortification; a *hedonistic plan* instead of an ascetic ideal; a *contract with the real* instead of a submission to heaven; and so forth.

Nihilism will not be overcome by restoring anything: Some, noting the

decline of Christianity, feel the need to strive for its rebirth, bringing back the habitual arrangements they have with heaven, either in a traditional form or mixing them with some reforms. They turn to fundamentalism or some reform movement. Global American imperialism opts for a fundamentalist Christianity that fights against—puts in its crosshairs, really—Islam, which has become the strongest opiate for oppressed cultures and minorities.

All kinds of alternative terms swing between the Judeo-Christian and Muslim monotheistic poles. We can avoid this sinister impasse by opting for a third option. We can choose not one or the other, but go beyond them, to a true atheism that denies the Torah, New Testament, and Koran in favor of the Enlightenment of Reason and the clarity of Western philosophy. We can apply the spirit of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedia* against the religion of the single Book, which dislikes other books and despises reason, intelligence, women, bodies, passion, desires, life, wide reading, and so forth.

I believe we should turn our back on fictions and fables and drive ourselves truly toward philosophy. That philosophy, however, should not carry an attitude like that of the Fathers of the Church. For example, it should not legitimize violence, which intellectuals who are in every way devoted to American liberalism and capitalism often do.

We often forget the breed of philosophy that collaborated with religion and state power in the nineteenth century. It went under the name of *antiphilosophy*, practiced by a number of people forgotten by history: Lelarge de Lignac, Abbott Bergier, Jacob Nicolas Moreau, the Marquis of Caraccioli, and so forth. They faced off against those who resisted—the philosophers of the Enlightenment.

Dominant historiography holds the Enlightenment figures in high esteem, of course, but it also counts theists, deists, or pantheists as concessions to the Christian religion. I look to more forceful Enlightenment philosophers who are often forgotten and who start with a frank and direct atheism that is clear and precise: Abbott Meslier, Holbach, La Mettrie, and several others. There, in the opening years of the eighteenth century, the new, post-Christian world began. We owe them for an atheism that should now be affirmed against the monotheistic empire. Such a post-Christian atheism would be accompanied by a different morality.

A Post-Christian Atheism

The expression “post-Christian atheism” might strike you as redundant. The substantive alone leads you to believe that one has already gone beyond Christianity and that one is now down off the hill of religion. But by virtue of the Judeo-Christian impregnation of our episteme, atheism itself is forged in the Catholic fire, so much so that there is a Christian atheism and the very term, oxymoronically, characterizes a real conceptual object: a philosophy that clearly denies the existence of God, but also adopts the evangelical values of the religion of Christ.

Thus, the death of God sometimes goes hand in hand with the morality of the Bible. Those who adopt this option deny transcendence and in the next breath defend Christian values in isolation from their theological legitimizations—values that are preserved and honored by virtue of sociological legitimacy. Heaven may be empty, but the world would be better off with the love-thy-neighbor mentality, forgiveness, charity, and other virtues like generosity, compassion, mercy, gratitude, prudence, temperance, and so forth.

A post-Christian atheism emphasizes the principle of the dangerousness of God. It does not deny his existence, but reduces him to his essence: fabricated alienation; a hypostatization of humans’ own impotence; the imagination of an essence outside of oneself; and a projection of essence into an inhuman force. Like Madame Bovary, people do not want to see themselves the way they really are: limited in terms of life span, power, wisdom, and ability. Therefore, they conjure a conceptual personage that possesses the attributes they lack. Thus, God is eternal, immortal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and so forth.

As soon as God’s mystery is dispelled, post-Christian atheism makes a second pass, and with the same fervor, it dismantles the values inherited from the New Testament, which impede any real individual sovereignty and limit the vital expansion of subjectivity. Our morality has filled the cemeteries of World War I and has given us the monstrosity of Nazi death camps, Stalinist Gulags, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki; State terrorism of Western fascism and Eastern communism; Pol Pot, Mao, and the Rwandan genocide; and everything else that stains the twentieth century with blood. We cannot keep calling on a beautiful but inactive and impotent Soul, since its incarnation is impossible and it offers no truly attainable effects. We should elaborate a morality that is more modest

but that can have real effects. Let’s abandon the ethics of heroes and saints and follow the ethics of the sage.

FIVE

A Rule of Immanent Play

An Aesthetic Ethics

As long as God is in charge, morality is a subsection of theology. Ever since Sinai, the True, the Good, the Positive, and the Just all come from the Decalogue. No need to philosophize, to look for foundations, a genealogy, or origins. God serves as an explanation for all of them. The tablets of the Law, Torah, Gospels, and Pauline Epistles have had their time. When God bothers to show himself, or when he delegates this mission to his most dedicated envoys (who dictate all behavior between the self and itself, the self and others, and the self and the world), who could be so insolent or perfidious as to challenge or contest it? How arrogant and conceited is it to audit God's accounts? If not the philosopher, who will do it? Let him live up to his title…

Theology tries to be enough for everyone. Ethics can't pretend to have autonomy. It falls from the sky, descending from the intelligible universe. In this paradigm, morality does not come from a contract with the immanent; it comes from some epiphany, from an apparition. God talks; men listen; then they obey. Just in case his connection to men is hard to understand, since God is not always available, the clergy is there twenty-four hours a day. Ask the priest, the bishop, the cardinal, he'll tell you. Theology, the pseudoscience of the divine, is more accurately the science of rendering people subservient to the fiction of God.

The first stirrings of rebellion were in the seventeenth century: First, Descartes revolutionized math and geometry; Leibniz required that the universe be described in scientific language; Galileo, a master of that entire beautiful philosophical world, was similar; Spinoza used geometry to account for the real; Newton showed how Providence works, submitting falling apples to algebraic language rather than theological

formulas. God withdrew. We gently let go of him, and morality gained a little bit of autonomy…

Baroque libertine orthodoxy prepared the course for atheism. God exists, surely. How can we deny it when Galileo avoided death only by abjuring his findings? Giordano Bruno burned at the stake in Campo dei Fiori; the same for Giulio Cesare Vanini in Toulouse. Théophile de Viau was put in the Bastille and waited for the worst to happen while his books burned. Similarly, Charron, Descartes, Pascal, Malebranche, and so many others saw their works consigned to the Catholic banned books list…

The French Revolution speeds things up. There is a transition from orthodoxy to deism, which is a long way from theism. Atheism moves forward while Christianity starts to run out of gas. They decapitate the king who represents God on earth. God is silent. They burn churches, pillage the temples, violate the devout, and smash crosses and statues of the saints. He remains mute. What happens when they abandon their connection to religion and raise temples to the goddess of Reason? Silence again. Faced with this evidence of God's inertia, they deduced his fiction.

After the paroxysm of the French Revolution, the nineteenth century starts to propose new models—the positivism of Auguste Comte, the dialectical system of Proudhon, Fourier's mathematics of passion, the social physics of the Ideologues, Marx's dialectical materialism, and other signs that morality and politics owe nothing to heaven or theology, but that they emerge from the sun, the earth, and the sciences. These men had diverse ideas and many successes, but they all pointed toward the same apex: a world divested of all transcendence, a world where men are accountable, but to their peers and no one else.

The mathematical model supplants the theocratic one, which was at work from the earliest times, right up until Louis XVI's decapitation—thousands of years. The substitute model rushes into a much narrower space—a few decades between the fall of Louis Capet and the fall of the Berlin Wall—just over two centuries. These two periods are not commensurate; theology had a long time. Moreover, science has often been content to mathematize millenarian tropes and make cosmetic changes to its unitary form. Millenarianism, apocalypticism, and messianic and prophetic discourses at some point or another appropriated all the social, socialist, utopian, and communistic adventures.

Artists in Zurich's cafes call themselves the Incoherents; Tristan Tzara introduces baptismal fountains into Dadaism (*Dada*, 1917); Marinetti sprinkles his futurism with holy water (*The Futurist Manifesto*, 1909); and André Breton traces the magic sign of the chrism on the forehead of Surrealism (*Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924). But the new world and the hopes of science begin to fade in Europe with the First World War: the West was bled for a long time by the absurd, unworldly, delirious, hysterical, foolish, furious, and bloody.

During the Verdun Offensive of 1917, Marcel Duchamp, an *anartiste*, exhibits his *Fountain*. It was something between a hoax and a radical shakeup: the first *ready-made*, which began a very real aesthetic Copernican Revolution. That metaphysical urinal demolished Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and thus Platonism in art and elsewhere. More than twenty centuries of classical theory about Beauty went up in smoke in the blink of an eye. All of a sudden, Beauty in itself goes away and we believe that the audience constructs art.

Duchamp contributed yet another revolution, one of media. This was the end of noble materials, those enshrined through the history of art (colored pigments, marble, bronze, gold, silver, platinum), and a proliferation of media, from the noblest to the basest (fecal matter, dust, garbage), the most trivial (string, cartons, plastic), and the most immaterial (sound, light, ideas, language). For better or for worse, everything—absolutely everything—became the material of art. Why not existence too? It's up to philosophers to look into themselves for the possibility of a revolution. Metaphysically, the time is ripe for an aesthetic ethics.

Sculpting the Self

Let's keep the old metaphor of sculpting: Plotinus used it in the *Enneads* to call each person to be the sculptor of his own statue. A priori, Being is empty and hollow; a posteriori, it is what has been done and what one does. A modern formulation states that "existence precedes essence."[1] Thus, each person is at least partially responsible for her being and her becoming. A block of marble, as raw and identity-less as the sculptor's chisel, does not decide to give itself a form. That form is not hidden and inherent in the material, but is a product of an ongoing work. The work

continues day after day, hour after hour, second after second. Each instant contributes to becoming.

What should we endeavor to produce? An I, a Me, a radical Subjectivity, a singular identity, an individual reality, a proper person, a noteworthy style, a unique force, an impressive strength, a comet tracing an untraveled path, an energy making its way down a luminous passage though the chaos of the cosmos, a beautiful individuality, a temperament, a character. We don't have to aspire to a masterpiece or aim for perfection—of the genius, the hero, or the saint; we should just reach out for an insight that will give us a sovereignty we did not previously know.

The philosophical tradition claims to dislike the I. It announces all over the place that it hates the Me. Many contemporary philosophers unabashedly defend this theoretical position. Then, in their books and articles, they spill forth details of their childhoods, confide their biographies, and give testimonies of their education and formative years. Some provide minutiae of their family's agricultural property; others talk about their adolescent scholarship; and still others write entire books recounting the details of a long nervous depression.

This kind of schizophrenia leads to a contradiction: either they are right to condemn the Me, in which case they should be silent about it, or they can speak in the first person, in which case they should reconcile their system with their personal outpourings. I believe it is necessary to revise the theories as well as to continue the kind of existential autoanalysis that allows us to understand where our thought comes from, what it is, and where it is going.

This does not entail an egoistic religion—a cult of the Me that is autistic and narcissistic—nor does it entail a loathing of everything that manifests in the first person. It is about properly understanding the Me and giving it its due. We don't want to become dandyish caricatures or lust after metaphysical chalices; rather, we compose ourselves in the world without hysteria or grandiloquence. We should be neither critical nor thanatophilic, but logical, like Descartes, who, for the sake of his metaphysics, looked for and found an I. It's essential to do something similar to enable a new ethics. Without a point of departure, there can be no ethical goal.

We can only make sense of the world based on this *I*: we decline *You*, *He*, *She*, *We*, and *You* (pl.) as modalities of alterity: linguistically, we formulate the intimate, informal, close, and distant registers; collections of I's connected by a common interest; the intimate third person; and distant

assemblies. The self must have a healthy relationship to itself if it is going to relate well with others. An identity that is either missing or weak prohibits any kind of ethics. Only the force of an I authorizes the mobilization of morality.

Any part of an I that is unwilled, not forcibly fabricated, not manically hammered out, is, by default, constituted by all kinds of determinisms: genetic, social, familial, historical, psychic, geographic, and sociological. They all work on a Me from the outside, brutally impressing it with all the forces of the harsh world. Heredity, parents, the unconscious, the historical era, the cultural milieu, education, opportunities, lack of social opportunities—all of those knead a ductile material, something extremely plastic, and determine what it will be…There is disorder. Our deficient Me's, broken I's, and unfinished identities produce fodder for prisons, psychiatric wards, psychological clinics, psychotherapist waiting rooms, the backrooms of sophrology, marriage counselors, reflexologists, dowsers, magneticists and other fortune tellers, sex therapists, lines of people waiting for psychotropic drugs, and all kinds of postmodern shamans who do their dance.

Neuronal Training

Ethics is a matter of the body, not the soul. It proceeds from the brain, not the mists of conscience. After the brilliant recent demonstrations in the *Neuronal Person*,[2] the time has come for an end to mind-body dualism in which physical and mental substances are connected by an imaginary pineal gland. Ever since Leucippus, materialist philosophers have verified the evidence of that genealogical truth.

Thus, I am my body, nothing else. Morality proceeds from there. Far from being the ontological and ethereal body of the phenomenologists, or the Deleuzian fiction of a body without organs (a creation of souls on the brink of fragmentation), the flesh works perfectly together with the organs, which are themselves interdependent elements that allow this sublime machine to function.

The old opposition between gross materialism and subtle vitalism pitted nonbelievers against Christians, producing a peculiar dialectical solution: *vitalist materialism*. Matter, and nothing else, is shot through with streams of perpetual flux, which are themselves reducible to matter,

even if they elude pure and simple anatomical explanations.

Between these two kinds of matter, there is more matter, which is guided by forces that are also immanent and awaiting scientific decoding. Thus, the body is, to use Nietzsche's term, very much the *Great Reason*. But the brain is the *Great Reason* of that other *Great Reason*, hence its major role in morality. Ethics is not given but produced and constructed. Like contemporary art, it exists as an artifact. The brain acts as a digital hub, so we need to train the neurons and imbue the nervous system with ethics. Education must play a major role. Formatting lays the foundation; without it, no morality is possible.

Good and bad, true and false, just and unjust, beautiful and ugly are all human judgments that are contractual, relative, and historical. Those forms do not exist a priori, only a posteriori. In order to exist, they have to be written into the neuronal network. There is no morality without the neuronal connections that permit it. So ethics entails a Faustian body that is controlled by the power and demiurge of an intentional intelligence. Morality is practiced. It inscribes itself into the brain's matter, creating synapses and allowing for the anatomical function of moral actions.

Therefore, ethics is not a theological affair between man and God, but an immanent story concerning people, among themselves, with no other witnesses. Intersubjectivity evokes mental, and thus neuronal, representations: the Other is not a face (if the Levinassians will forgive us) but a collection of active nervous signals within a neuronal framework. If the interconnected network has not been put together with love—by parents, educators, mentors, family, environment, or epoch—then morality will not be possible.

Therefore, materialism is not fatalistic, not just a bunch of processes against which nothing can be done. Interaction transfigures both the individual that composes society and the society that forms the individual. They nourish each other and modify each other substantially. Universal, eternal, and transcendental morality gives way to ethics that are particular, temporal, and immanent.

Neuronal training is hard to accept in these politically correct times that we cannot escape: the absence of education, the refusal to transmit values, and the abdication of any pedagogy, all of which, through their absence, constitute another kind of neuronal training. This is dangerous because it builds into the nervous system a sense not of ethical law, but of the law of the jungle.

Therefore, ethology should consider this ethical flaw: each person

evolves, within a limited territory, into his determined role as a dominant male, dominated female, part of the herd, or member of a flock that's bigger than another flock. This produces the reign of the tribe instead of humanity. The construction of an ethical brain is the first step toward a political revolution worthy of the name. This used to be the primary idea of the radical philosophers of the Enlightenment.

SIX

A Hedonist Intersubjectivity

The Hedonist Contract

Given the existence of the neuronal machine, it has to have content, since it cannot function in a vacuum. The brain is an instrument, a means, but never an end in itself. If neuronal training proceeds according to the potentialities of the nervous system, it has to have an aim. What does one train? Why? According to what criteria? Education has to have a plan. Without a clearly defined objective, ethics is useless. What rules of the game are worth the trouble of following? What makes the game appealing?

The answer: a peaceful, joyous, happy intersubjectivity; a peace of mind and spirit; a tranquility in existing; easy relationships with others; comfortable interactions between men and women; artificializing relations and submitting them to the best elements of culture, such as refinement, politeness, courtesy, good faith, and keeping one's word; and consistency between words and actions. In other words, ending war, overcoming the logics of dominance and servitude, refusing to fight for the sake of the real domination or the symbolic domination of territories, and eradicating everything that remains animal in us. More concisely, the complete submission of the animal in each of us and the birth of our humanity.

That is the ideal, but everyone knows the reality: The ethical subject is not strongly endowed with a structured, clear, neat, and clean *I* and *Me*. Identity is often, if not usually, missing. The self is incomplete, fragile, full of fissures, breaks, lacks, shadows, danger zones, death impulses, sadistic and masochistic impulses, and a subconscious accessed at the cost of destruction or self-destruction. These and so many other realities make us believe that since there is no perfection in this world, we must

perpetually construct it with these kinds of general negativity.

Of course, no one still believes there is a clear line between normal and pathological, reason and folly, mental health and behavioral problems. Asylums lock up a certain number of people who are not suitable for the carceral system, yet many slip through the cracks and even occupy strategic positions in everyday society. On top of that, serious illnesses fill them with megalomania, hysteria, and paranoia even when engaging in socially respectable behavior. People of order and authority, professional politicians—minstrels of our spectacular society, people who are hysterical about the state of global culture—provide examples of sublimations that are useful in that they spare the main characters the joys of confinement.

For many of these anonymous people, it is not possible to transmute socially unacceptable activities into acceptable social behavior. What results is inevitable social and ethical damage…I call these people *relational delinquents*, who, neither responsible nor culpable, undergo existential processes that render them incapable of honoring a contract and therefore of maintaining any kind of ethical relationship.

This is because the contract is the foundation of the ethical relationship. We are human beings and as such endowed with the power to communicate. We do this first, of course, through language, but also through thousands of other signs. We emit a message, decode it, receive it, and gradually comprehend it. Nonverbal communication, gesticulations, facial mimicry, body language, tone of voice, inflection, the rhythm and cadence of speech, and smiles all say something about the nature of a relationship. *Arrangements* are at the very heart of ethics.

The first step is *prescience of the other's desire*. What do they want? What do they say to me? What are their wishes? From here comes a *necessary concern*. First, I gather knowledge about this third party with whom I find myself in a relationship. Then I try to be clear about my own actions. We always do this by means of signs, linguistic and otherwise. This perpetual game of coming and going between various parties allows us to encode a *contract*. In the case of the relational delinquent, once the information has been processed, if it happens to impinge on his existential tranquility, he resolves it with a proportionate reaction: *avoidance*. Hedonism is defined positively as the search for pleasure, of course, but also negatively as the avoidance of displeasure. A degenerate mind corrupts what it touches. With the exception of the desire to mutilate oneself (which is ethical if contractual), expulsion

allows the relational delinquent to restore mental peace and psychic serenity.

Sometimes it is impossible to put another at a distance, since there are people whom we are obligated to stay in contact with. Yet there remains an ethical solution—keeping distance—which I call, in *Sculpting the Self*, *eumetry*. Not too close, not too far. Not a pushing away radically or forever, nor a closeness that exposes you to dangers. Don't expose yourself, don't give yourself, don't open all the way up, keep your secrets to yourself, cultivate distance, value discretion, stay opaque, practice politeness and courtesy, the art of fluid but detached relations. To what end? To avoid putting the hard kernel of your identity into jeopardy.

Ethical Circles

Christian morality, in order to cultivate a love for God, invites us to love others as ourselves. What are the implications? First of all, we don't love others as ends in themselves; rather, one loves them as an opportunity, a means to something else: to know God. What about the third party, like a child? They're a step toward God. The other is not loved for himself, but because he allows us, first and foremost, to tell God that we love his creatures. By loving others, it's God that I love: the practice of morality boils down to prayer.

This morality, which is *inhumane* in the etymological sense, speaks about two kinds of humans: one is worthy of love and in no need of an obligation to love them, since we are naturally inclined to love them anyway; the other is detestable, the well-known relational delinquent in his many variations, from the Sartrian bastard to the death camp executioner, from small-time sadists to everyday perverts, from the consistently wicked and to those evil only in little ways.[1] We are supposed to love them? Why?

In the name of what or who should we love another if he is detestable? What could you invoke to get the victim to love his executioner? He is a creature of God, like me, and the Lord makes him follow paths that are mysterious. That's enough for those who worship Christian drivel, but what about for others? Those who live uncontaminated by these fables? "Love the author of the torment that destroys us"—What strange perversion could get us to accept such an extraordinary prescription?

Auschwitz shows us the limits of these ethics; they are interesting on paper, but useless for life.

Against godly morality, inasmuch as it is inaccessible for humans, I propose an *aristocratic and elective ethics*. Do not aim for sainthood, but wisdom. Instead of the false bijection of the triangular Christian relationship, I argue for a geometry of ethical circles, all of which share a central focal point: the Self. Each one is the center of its own system and organizes others around it, concentrically, according to whether or not there are reasons to keep others near. There is no definitive place, every position in this space is decided by what is said, done, shown, proven, and given as signs of the relationship's quality. There is no such thing as Friendship, but only proofs of friendship; no Love, but only proofs of love; no Hate, but only proofs of hate; and so on. Deeds and gestures compose an arithmetic that allows us to deduce the nature of a relationship: friendship, love, tenderness, and camaraderie, or the inverse…

There are two simple movements: election and eviction; centrifugal force and centripetal force; drawing something closer to oneself or casting something off to the margins. An ethics based on these movements is dynamic, unceasing, ever moving, always in relation to the actions of others. Therefore, the other is accountable for his engagements and responsible for his place in my ethical schema. From a hedonist perspective, desiring the other's pleasure is what activates their movement toward you; wanting their unhappiness activates the opposite movement.

Thus, ethics is less a matter of theory than of practice. The cardinal rule of the game could be called jubilant utilitarianism. Action—including thoughts, promises, and deeds—animates the dynamic. Platonic friendship does not exist, only its incarnations. Proofs of friendship bring people together, and expressions of enmity push people apart. The same goes for what we call the salt of existence: love, affection, tenderness, sweetness, thoughtfulness, delicateness, forbearance, magnanimity, politeness, amenity, kindness, civility, attentiveness, attention, courtesy, clemency, devotedness, and all the words carrying a connotation of *goodness*. These virtues forge connections; their failure loosens those bonds; and their total breach leads to severed relations.

So we can add that ethics is a matter of everyday life and of subtle appearances that arise in the complex fabric of human relations. It has nothing to do with pure Ideas and ethereal Concepts. It comes almost out

of nowhere, from something unknown, from the slight and the insignificant. The measuring units of morality are invisible, or they are visible only under a microscope, to eyes trained to recognize atomic variations. This system's equilibrium is always unstable, subject to the disturbances of butterfly wings. This can give rise to catastrophic theories…Everything evolves precariously in relation to other things; each individual resides at the center of its own situation; everyone occupies their place on borrowed time. Only ethical tension, moral attention, and just action enable you to stay in a good place.

In this kind of immanent ethics, sanctions are immediate, far more so than in the Last Judgment. Moral questions do not have a dominant authority in the transcendent sense. There is no sudden impunity under the aegis of divine and postmortem justice. In this perpetual Brownian motion,[2] God does not judge, because nothing or nobody judges and the results consist only in the determination of a relation. Consequences are found only in the decomposition or solidification of a relation. Everything is very concrete. There is no need for a celestial third party.

A Dialectic of Politeness

Hedonism thus entails a perpetual calculus that considers the pleasures one can expect from a given situation, as well as the possible pains. We make a list of what delightful things could happen, what distresses could occur, what will be pleasant or disagreeable, and then we judge, doubt, and calculate before acting. Epicurus gave us a mathematical maxim: do not accept a pleasure here and now if it must be paid back later with a pain. Let it go. Better, choose a pain in the here and now if it leads toward the creation of a pleasure later. Therefore, avoid total jubilation in the present. Joy without conscience will only ruin the soul…

We should always have more pleasure than pain. In all hedonist ethics, suffering—the suffering that we undergo and that is inflicted on us—is the absolute evil. Consequently, absolute good corresponds to pleasure, defined as the absence of troubles, a serenity that's acquired, conquered, and maintained, a tranquility of the soul and spirit. But this conceptual game can be complex. The mental tension that it entails may seem radically impractical since it requires a permanent concern for others. It seems like a perpetual ethical drama, an interminable moral

theater; it seems like a titanic venture, something untenable—no more viable than the Judeo-Christian morality of holiness.

But it's untenable only if there is a lack of neuronal training that permits us to act reflexively. These calculations need not require painful efforts if we have preexisting moral education and our nervous fibers are functioning properly. On the contrary, the fluidity of its unfolding generates a kind of delight. There is a real pleasure to be had from acting ethically and practicing morality; it activates and rewards the hedonic fibers in our cerebral matter.

Any kind of pleasure-arithmetic entails a concern for others. This is the core of any morality. To its adversaries, hedonism is a symptom of the indigence of our time. They say it is individualism confounded with egoism. The first of those argues that there is nothing but individuals, while the second argues that there is nothing but Me. They label it autism, consumerism, narcissism, and indifference to the pains of others and of humanity.

In fact, hedonism proposes exactly the opposite. Pleasure is *never* justified if the pain of another must pay for it. There is only one justification for the pain of another: when there is no other way to thwart someone's destructive negativity: in other words, when war is inevitable. Others' joy leads to my own joy; others' discomfort produces my own discomfort.

In contrast to the static Christian morality that flees from history and functions on a foundation of absolutes, I propose a dynamic ethics. It's not about theory, but concrete instances. Nominalists use concepts that are useful for discussion, but not for anything else. In a humanistic religion, surely God is one of these concepts. There are only concrete situations populated by individuals.

Attention requires tension. Others call me into relationships that are able to give me satisfaction—this is the anthropological and psychological process we are always subject to. Their pleasure constitutes my pleasure; their pain my pain. Moral treatises always talk about the Other. And yet morality, the art of detail, plays out most clearly in modest incarnations. You find ethics in a word, a gesture, a phrase, a form of attention, not in the secular preaching of a philosopher juggling with the Good in itself or absolute Virtue.

Thus, among the many great virtues such as the Good, the Beautiful, the True, and the Just, we search in vain for a minor virtue that can produce grand effects. The Good sounds great, but how do we find it? By

what method? We are told to follow the discourses of the great idols of the tradition; we are told that they map the terrain of intersubjectivity, even though they remain far from the real. Jankélévitch's voluminous *Treatise on Virtues* often forbids us to even make real ethical gestures.[3]

Politeness offers a way to realize morality. It is the small gate to a great castle; it leads directly to others. Why politeness? It tells the other that one has seen them. Thus, it tells them that they *are*. Holding a door, practicing formulaic rituals, carrying on the logic of good manners, knowing how to say thank you and you're welcome, giving, being cheerful in lackluster company: that is how to *do* ethics, *create* morality, *embody* values. This is knowing how to live, knowing how to be.

Civility, sensitivity, kindness, courtesy, urbanity, tact, thoughtfulness, reserve, commitment, generosity, benefaction, effort, and attention: all of these are part of hedonic morality. Acting as a hedonist entails a kind of mental calculation, a regular practice that generates a certain momentum. The less one practices politeness, the more difficult it becomes to implement. Conversely, the more one activates it, the better it functions. Habituation leads to neuronal training. Everything is either ethical or ethological. Impoliteness is the characteristic of savagery. Only the poorest, most humble, and modest civilizations dispose of their rules of politeness. Only broken civilizations on the verge of disappearing, dominated by those stronger than them, practice impoliteness all the time. Politeness toward the opposite sex is what defines erotism.

PART III

SOLAR EROTICS

SEVEN

The Ascetic Ideal

The Myth of Lack

Twenty centuries of wholesale Judeo-Christianity has left its mark on the Western body. Recycling the Pythagorean tradition and, above all, that of Plato has made the Christian European body schizophrenic. It hates itself, and it harbors the extraordinary fiction of an immaterial and immortal soul. It delights in the death drive that the dominant ideology cultivates.

If, as suggested by Crébillon,[1] analysts' sofas or sexologists' chairs could speak, we would likely understand many things that confound us about the gendered use of the flesh, the ways and detours of the libido, and what I call a general sexual wretchedness that avoids everything from zoophilia to necrophilia and pedophilia. All of these show the unfortunate tendency of human beings to take pleasure in passive objects that can be dominated by violence. The archetypal heterosexual couple, to be specific, is also subject to brutality.

Erotism acts as an antidote for bestial sexuality. When sex speaks by itself, it expresses the most brutal instinct of the reptilian brain; as soon as it manifests itself in artifice, it brings together the best aspects of the civilization that produced it. We don't find any Judeo-Christianity in the erotics of China, India, Japan, Nepal, Persia, Greece, or Rome. If we did, those cultures would manifest the same opposition to erotics: hatred of the body, flesh, desire, pleasure, women, and enjoyment. There is no Catholic art of enjoyment, just clever devices that castrate and destroy any kind of hedonist weakness of will.

One of the staples of this machine that produces eunuchs, virgins, saints, mothers, and wives is to demean the feminine within the woman. She is the first victim of this antierotism and is held responsible for

everything on this earth. In order to establish this logic of sexual inferiority, the West creates the myth of desire as lack. Starting with the discourse on androgyny held by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, through the Pauline corpus, to the *Écrits* of Jacques Lacan, this fiction persists and endures.

What does it say? Specifically, that men and women proceed from a primitive unity split up by the gods as punishment for their insolent enjoyment of perfect totality. Pleasure is defined as the fantastic perfection of the spherical, complete animal. Desire-as-lack and pleasure that fills this lack are the cause of uneasiness and sexual wretchedness.

In effect, this dangerous fiction leads most people to search for the nonexistent, so they find nothing but frustration. The quest for Prince Charming or its female equivalent produces deceptions: the real never compares to the ideal. Wanting fullness inevitably leads to the sadness of incompleteness. Only defense mechanisms like denial keep us from being conscious of that truth. We stop fooling ourselves the day we index what is real to us according to what is imaginary—an imaginary that is driven by the dominant morality and fed by a combination of ideology, politics, and religion.

Yet desire is not lack. It is excess on the verge of bursting. Pleasure is not the specious realization of completeness; it is the conjuration of an effusive overflow. There is no metaphysics of primitive and androgynous animals, only a physics of matter and a mechanics of fluids. Eros comes not from the heaven of Platonic ideas, but from the particles of materialist philosophy. Hence, the need for a post-Christian erotics that is solar and atomic.

The Familial Ideology

According to the logic of this animal that must be reconstituted, the fusional couple is the crowning achievement of Judeo-Christian erotics. Most mammals are metaphysically incapable of staying on their own; they are instinctively social and run in packs and herds. Therefore, they have to find an antidote to their situation. When, in *Madame Bovary*, we read of love, soul mates, and princes and princesses, our reason sees them as social contracts or some kind of existential life insurance. This is also illusory.

Amorous discourse masks the truth: novels and media propaganda—advertising, film, television, and “women’s” publications—talk about fireworks, passion, the wonderful power of emotion, and LOVE. However, reason bluntly reveals another story, explaining everything from zoo cultures to the neocortex in terms of pheromones, biological needs, and blind designs of nature that tend toward homeostasis.

Biology picks up where philosophy leaves off. So does ethology, which depends on biology. Traditionally, the “Male” preexists man; “Female” preexists women; and the social partitioning of roles carries out the intention of the Creator. Not understanding the complicated mechanisms of reproduction, the burdened woman, tired from carrying her baby all day, cannot really accompany the Male on his hunting and gathering trips to hostile environments. She is tied to the home on account of the child or children who are already there.

Naturally, the family mobilizes the male and the female into very particular roles: Women take care of the fire, prepare food, cook, bake, weave, tan leather, stitch hides, sew, make wool yarn, and repair garments, among other sedentary activities. In the meantime, their companions hunt, fish, gather, farm, or live the nomadic life. Millions of years later, in spite of different cultural backgrounds and the civilization’s different intellectual strata, could it be any other way?

This primitive ethological arrangement is recycled by politics and society. They give it the authority of a foundational law. From then on, the family, with its nomadic and sedentary poles, forms the foundational cell of society. It acts as the primary cog in the machine of the State and is given the task, consciously or not, of reproducing the gods’ plan for the world. Monotheism triumphs when the family reproduces the celestial order. The One God, the Father, is the model for the familial father. He has absolute authority based on divine right, the foundational gospel, the creative Word. It is his job to be at the peak of the hierarchy. The couple—God and his people—provides the schema for the City of God: the male and his tribe, the father and his family, the city of men.

Cut off, suffering from lack, he finds his other half and reconstitutes his primitive unity, rejoicing in the pleasure of this fusion. He finds peace in the reconstitution of a fictitious entity. The couple consummates this existential amalgamation by producing a third party and then several more. The nuclear family achieves the goal of the species by accomplishing the plan of nature.

Believing themselves to be free from ethological constraints, men

invent a veil of concepts, a trivial reality that camouflages the animal alive within them.

A permanent and all-powerful natural determinism subsists in the most primitive areas of our nervous system. It is not that the family is the magnification of a love embodied by two beings who are free and conscious of their destiny. Rather, it is the destiny of every living form on the planet.

The Ascetic Codification

A priori, desire activates a formidable antisocial force. Before its capture and domestication into socially acceptable forms, it represents an energy dangerous to the established order in which nothing counts but what forms a socialized being: regimented and repetitive use of time, prudence in action, frugality, docility, obedience, and boredom. With domestication, desire conquers everything that opposes it: total freedom, whims, general imprudence, sumptuous expenditure, disobedience of prevailing values and principles, rebellion against dominant forms of logic, and complete asociality. In order to be and to persist, society has to bottle up these savage and lawless forces.

There is a secondary explanation for the ascetic codification of desires and pleasures: the wild will to reduce the incredible power of the feminine to nothing. The male learns quickly from experience, and in matters of sexuality, he follows only the laws of nature. Female pleasure mixes poorly with his natural barbarism, since it demands cultural artifice, erotism, and techniques of the body—whispers, mastering change, control, awareness of the layout of the body, and so on. For someone intent on following his nature, it is inaccessible—inaccessible and endless.

Clumsy, oblivious, and unthoughtful, man pleases himself, and when it comes to constructing an ethics of responsibility, he does not like his partner to remain on the threshold of pleasure. This is not because he is truly concerned with his partner, nor does he have moral empathy with her frustration; rather, he is too proud. In his eyes, he is just an impotent, an incompetent, an incomplete male; his power is fictive, since it is deficient. This is how he thinks. Women are not narcissistic enough; they injure male pride. In order to regulate the problem, he takes great pains

to reduce feminine pleasure to the bare minimum. Judeo-Christianity excels in this baleful enterprise, as does Islam.

Individual males fear castration, and society fights against that fear. Thus, men, the conventional builders of the city, nation, religion, and kingdom, make the rules of sex. The rules for women's sexual conduct are codified through no other authority than the male arbitrator. It all comes from the power of phallocentrism and the fear of castration…

How do we elaborate on and promulgate this code? With the aid of religion, of course—that excellent accomplice in the matter of extinguishing the libido. In order to pin down, reduce, and suppress the libido, those anointed by God—messiahs, apostles, priests, popes, Christian philosophers, imams, rabbis, pastors, and so on—decree that the body is dirty and impure, desire is shameful, pleasure is filthy, and females are unqualified temptresses and sinners. After that, they decree the solution: complete abstinence.

After renouncing the pleasures of the flesh as a whim of the spirit, and then setting the bar so high that it shames the poor wretch who cannot reach the ideal height, they seem to manifest benevolence and understanding by offering an alternative. We can't completely sacrifice the body. They are willing to make a generous concession: familial chastity will suffice; marriage will be permitted. Look no further than the lucubrations of Paul's Epistles.[2]

This solution grants society, and thus the species, free will in its own projects. By conceding one kind of sexuality (familial, monogamous, consecrated to Christian marriage), Paul and other Fathers of the Church grant people a small margin in which to maneuver. Most importantly, they open a boulevard for reproducing the species and ensuring the permanence of the human community as defined by the agents of this ideology of the ascetic ideal.

Over time, passion's flame dies down and then disappears. There is boredom, repetition, and the bottling up of desire, which is essentially libertarian and nomadic. It is bound in a repetitive and sedentary pleasure that squelches the libido. Within the family, where most time is spent on the children and the husband, the woman dies; her only pride is in being a mother and a wife. These goals consummate and consume almost all of her energy.

Conjugal sexuality is inscribed in platitudes and jingles and locks the libido into Apollonian marriages, regulated family lives in which the *individual* disappears and is replaced by the *subject*. Dionysus passes

away and sexual penury reigns. This works so well that servitude becomes voluntary, made so by dint of social pressure and all-out moralizing ideological propaganda. This is the epitome of alienation. The victim even ends up taking pleasure in renouncing himself.

EIGHT

A Libertarian Libido

A Light-Hearted Eros

In order to get rid of sexual wretchedness, we must put an end to the perverse logics that enable it. These include the notion of desire-as-lack; considering pleasure (in the form of the fusional couple) to be the nadir of this alleged lack; ignoring the natural necessity of the family and turning it into a concession for the libido, which is itself a problem; glorifying the monogamous, loyal couple that shares the same hearth every day; sacrificing women and the feminine within them; and the transformation of children into the ontological truth of the parents' *love*. These fictions are useful and necessary for a certain kind of society. But they are ultimately fatal for the individual. Going beyond them will help us construct a light-hearted eros.

To begin with, we need to disassociate love, sexuality, and procreation. Christian morality confuses them and obliges one to love one's partner through the sexual act, with the intention of creating a child. Moreover, that person cannot be a transitory relation, but must be a duly married husband or expressly wedded wife. If not, one has sinned.

Changing customs, along with changes in science, have given us a chance to truly master reproduction with the aid of contraception. While the Church publicly denounces it, contraception allows for a revolutionary disassociation. It can give us sexuality for pleasure, without the fear of engendering something to be experienced as a punishment. The libido is free to find playful combinations, not just those that are obligatorily procreative. The Neuwirth Law and the Veil Law allow us to voluntarily terminate an unwanted pregnancy.[1] Those were authentic revolutions.

Decoupling sexuality from love would be just as radical—if one defines love as commonly taught, that is, as the sentiment that overrides the

exigencies of nature in service of the paradigm of the monogamous, devoted, and cohabitating couple. Decoupling sex from love does not prohibit the existence of sentiment, affection, or tenderness. If one does not desire to commit one's life to a long-lasting affair, it does not foreclose the possibility of romantic sweetness. Sexual relations do not need to be directed toward future effects; they can be about fully enjoying the pure present, about magnifying the moment, about exhausting yourself here and now in your own essence.

There is no need to infuse the sexual relation with nonexistent, a priori heaviness and seriousness. Somewhere between animal innocence, the inconsequentiality of banal exchanges of flesh, and the saturation of the act in moralism, there is room for a new kind of light-hearted, soft, and tender intersubjectivity.

The traditional heavy eros indexes the sexual relation according to the death drive and what is associated with it—rigidity, immobility, domestication, the loss of creativity, repetition, ritualized and brainwashed habitude, and all the things that contribute to entropy. On the other hand, a light-hearted eros driven by an impulse for life promotes movement, change, nomadism, action, displacement, and initiative. We will have plenty of nothingness in the grave; we needn't make offerings to immobility now.

Constructing light-hearted erotic situations is the first step toward an art of loving that is worthy of the name. It entails the creation of a field of atomic vibration where little perceptions of simulacra float around. In the spirit of Democritus and, via Epicurus and Lucretius, contemporary neurobiology, only the logic of particles can sunder the specters of Plato's Ideas.

A predilection for the pure present does not exclude the possibility of its reproduction. The concatenation of instants forms a long-term state. Don't start at the end; don't bet everything on a story's conclusion. Build it up piece by piece. Only that way can we come to imagine the present as a laboratory and crucible for the future. The present is not so much an end in itself but the architectonics of what movements are possible.

The Celibate Machine

My definition of celibacy does not carry the customary sense of a civil

status. In my eyes, celibacy does not necessarily entail being alone or having no companion, husband, wife, or attentive partner. It more often entails one who, even though they may be in what we would call an amorous relationship, preserves the prerogatives of freedom. Such a person treasures their independence and enjoys their sovereign autonomy. They do not commit themselves to an indefinite contract, but rather to one that is determinate, possibly renewable, but certainly never obligatory.

Transforming oneself into a celibate machine within a couple's relationship helps us ward off the consubstantial entropy that occurs within unions. The schema of *nothing/everything/nothing* so often characterizes aborted relationships, or those that are constructed poorly, merely endured from day to day, pushed along by the quotidian, or jolted forward. I believe it much better to develop a configuration of *nothing/more/much*.

All/nothing/all is the dominant model: we exist in isolation, ignorant of others; we finally meet; we abandon ourselves into the nature of the relationship; the other becomes everything, indispensable, the measure of our being, the gauge of our mind and existence, the meaning of life, the partner in all ways and in every detail. Then entropy sets in: they become cumbersome, a pain, tiring, annoying, an irritant, and eventually an outsider to be expelled through divorce and the violence that so often accompanies it. After that, they again become nothing—a nothing perhaps with a measure of hate added to it.

The system of *nothing/more/much* has the same point of departure: two beings are not even aware of each other's existence; they find each other; then they begin building on the foundation of a lighthearted eros. From then on, day after day, they build up a positivity that comes to define the *more*: more being, more expansion, more joy, and more acquired peace. When this series of *more* becomes a tangible sum, *much* appears and qualifies a relationship that is rich, complex, and developed nominalistically. The only law is the absence of Law: there are only particular cases, and everyone must build according to their own idiosyncratic blueprint.

The celibate flourishes in this situation. The modus operandi of the celibate is to refuse unity. They despise the heralded disappearance of two beings into a third form, a third force that is sublimated by love. Most of the time, it is not both parts of the couple that are negated; only one of them yields. Ethological laws ensure that the stronger one wins—the one

who is more dominant or persuasive—and it is not always the one we would expect.

This amalgamation of singularities only lasts as long as denial allows. Sometimes, depending on the acuity of neurosis, Bovaryism lasts a whole life. Plato's conceptual edifice is the foundation of the traditional couple, but it can be undermined by what is real, what is distilled down to the details, trivia, and minutiae of everyday life. The statue he built is a colossus with clay feet, a fiction maintained to make children believe in it. In such a model, *everything* turns to *nothing*.

A Metaphysics of Sterility

The celibate person goes hand in hand with a real metaphysics of voluntary sterility. Indeed, if a subjectivity is jealous of its own liberty, and if it has a child in its charge (a felicitous expression), it is hard to imagine how it could possibly preserve its autonomy or independence, its very faculty of agency even when it is not acting.

The physiological ability to conceive a child does not oblige us to do it any more than the ability to kill requires one to carry out a homicide. If nature says, "You can," culture need not forcibly adjunct a "therefore you must" to it. This is because we can always submit our impulses, instincts, and desires to the analytical grid of reason. Why produce children? For what? To do what with them? What legitimacy do we have to cause a being to emerge from nothingness and to ultimately offer nothing to them but a brief passage on this planet before they must return to the nothingness they came from? To many people, giving birth is a natural act and they follow a logic that blindly concedes it. However, an act that is metaphysically and concretely serious should follow a choice that is reasonable, rational, and informed.

Only the celibate who absolutely adores children will look past their nose and calculate the consequences of inflicting the pain of life onto a nonbeing. Is life so extraordinary, joyful, happy, fun, desirable, or easy that one would make a gift of it to a little person? Must one love entropy, suffering, sadness, and death in order to offer it in this tragic ontological gift-parcel?

Having asked for nothing, a child is entitled to everything, most of all to someone who cares for it entirely, absolutely. Education is not livestock

farming, which is what it sounds like when people speak of *raising children*. Rather, it is attention to every instant and moment. The neuronal training required for the construction of a being can't stand a single minute of inattention. Beings are destroyed through silence, deferred responses, carelessness, sighs, and neglect because we are tired of everyday life and are unable to see that it is essential for a being-in-formation to play not just some of the time, but all the time, with no repetition.

There must be a great deal of innocence and inconsequentiality to educate a being. However, we usually do not even have the means to sculpt ourselves, or to construct our own couple into a form that matches our temperament. Perhaps Freud saw it first: no matter what, education always fails. One look at the biography of his daughter, Anna, shows how right he was!

In a family, a child definitively attaches the father to the mother. "De la Palisse" confirms that a man (or a woman) can cease loving his wife (or her husband) but she (or he) will nevertheless always remain the mother (or father) of their children.[2] Conflating the terms *woman*, *mother*, and *wife*—as well as the terms *man*, *father*, and *husband*—in the classical couple causes irreparable damage to the child as soon as the formula disintegrates. Engendering becomes a trap that impedes a light-hearted eros and condemns us to the heaviness of an erotics that serves something other than itself—that tries to serve society.

On one side, there is the egoism of those who refuse children; on the other side, there is the sharing generosity of completely self-sacrificing couples. The alternative should not be one that opposes the egoism of those who reject children to the sharing generosity of self-sacrificing couples. Rather, beings should be able to discover what works for them, either way—to do their own thing. The egoism of progenitors who follow their inclinations is just as significant as the egoism of the person who chooses voluntary sterility. Yet I believe it can only be done well if it is founded on a sincere love of children.

NINE

Carnal Hospitality

The Erotic Pact

The logic of instincts, passions, and impulses is undeniable. Everyone knows it, senses it, sees it, and experiences it. But there is also a rarer kind of erotic reason that is able to sculpt these blocks of savage energy. It permits us to not let nature have its brutal way, transforming humans into animals that submit to a fate determined by acephalous laws. Erotic culture combines with biological sex to produce ethical artifices, aesthetic affects, and joys that are unheard of in the jungle, cowshed, or pit.

Here, as elsewhere in ethics, as we have discussed, contracts define intellectual, civil, and political forms and resolve the problem of natural violence. We see evidence of ethology in the natural sexual state. There is nothing but territories marked by gland secretions and demonstrations of power, males battling to possess females, postures of domination and submission, hordes set on the weak, the destruction of those less adapted, and the feudal pleasure of the dominant male before he is replaced by someone younger, stronger, or more determined.

There is no eroticism in the herd, pack, or sheep-like organizations. On the other hand, any kind of intellectually constituted microsociety does permit it. The hedonist contract maps a territory policed by two beings (at least) that want to construct their sexuality according to their reasoned caprices, by means of a language that specifies the modalities of what they do. The contract demands a promise; hence, it requires a degree of developed civilization, a certain refinement, at least some kind of refinement.

Of course, this ideal ethical and aesthetic configuration requires certain types of contractors. They have to be clear about their desires; they can’t always change and fluctuate; they can’t be hesitant or plagued

by contradictions; they must have resolved their problems and must not wear incoherence, fecklessness, or irrationality on their sleeves. What characterizes the kind of person just described? Perpetual promise-breaking, opinion-changing, selective and self-interested memory, a taste for verbal and verbose tergiversation that legitimizes their about-faces, and a consummate talent for not doing what they say and for doing the opposite of their announcements. You cannot have a contract with this kind of citizen; once you detect them, walk away.

On the other hand, contracts become possible with people for whom language is monetized. What form does this take? Lawyers call it a synallagmatic contract: if one of the two people disengages from it, the contract suddenly ends because its clauses were not respected. What is its content? It is up to the people concerned: a tender game, a playful erotic perspective, an amorous combination, a long-term arrangement, a one-night stand, a lifelong commitment…Each time the relation is custom-made.

Nobody is obligated to sign a contract; no one is compelled or forced. On the other hand, once the pact is made, there is no reason to extricate oneself from it, except in cases where one party does not respect the clauses. When that happens, in this light-hearted eros, fidelity takes on a different meaning than it does in a heavy eros. The latter defines it as the enjoyment of another's body in a relationship of pure ownership; the former defines it as honoring one's word. There can be no fidelity except when there are oaths of fidelity. Whoever has not sworn will not perjure. So, as with marriage, it would seem wise to know what one is promising when one says "I do" in the context of this fatal act.

Hence, it is in one's interest not to get into a contract that one cannot honor. The content of the contract should not exceed the ethical capabilities of those who consent to it. How logical would it be, for example, to promise "mutual fidelity and assistance"—and if this "for better or worse" is written in the *civil code*—for the rest of one's existence? And we've said nothing of the religious vows that one, so immodest in his wishes, binds himself with for eternity and beyond.

In this situation, fidelity is first an arrangement between oneself and oneself. The freedom to choose implies the obligation to keep one's commitments. Thus, one figures out the right distance between oneself and the other, between the part in oneself that commits and the part that gauges the other person's loyalty. This distance creates the conditions for a harmonious intersubjectivity—one equidistant from an excessive union

and from too much solitude—within the serenity of an ataraxic relationship.

Playful Combinations

A contract is rich with whatever is put into it. If it's not fed, it is empty, and it is full as long as it is charged with promises of happiness. We have to commit to a nominalist ethics in order to avoid relations calibrated toward platonic friendship, literary love, ancillary affairs, bourgeois adultery, tariffed trades, inevitable clandestine trios, and other banalities. So what should we do?

What playful combination best allows us to fulfill fantasies, even within a contractual logic? When Sade built his libidinous castles, he developed a feudal kind of logic. The master takes, abuses, consumes, destroys, and kills according to his desires. There are no contracts, just scenes of intense debauchery unfolding in a state of Nature. On the other hand, when Michel Foucault defined sadomasochism as an ethics of sweetness, he illustrated a new kind of voluntary intersubjectivity.[1]

The combinational art of light-hearted eros is closer to Fourier, who wanted the members of his phalanxes to be able to pursue their personal desires: we just have to express them and solicit a companion, an accomplice with whom we can build an original, custom-made erotic dalliance.[2] To express original ideas, Fourier created neologisms: *luxisme*, *angélicat*, *faquirat*, *unityisme*, *bayadérat*.[3] He describes new kinds of passions: "fluttering," "pivotal." He theorizes about orgies: "noble," "museum-like," and so on. He broadened sexual possibilities and included children, old people, the disgraced, and the deformed. He celebrated universal prostitution and powerful love. He classified different kinds of cuckolds: "transcendent" vs. "crafty," "long-horned" vs. "outdated," "apostate" vs. "emergency," "debonair" vs. "blustering," and about one hundred more varieties. He proposes, as the title of his major work suggests, *A New Amorous Order*.

Fourier's sole fault was his desire to organize a hedonist society. Deleuze opened up the perspective of a "revolutionary future of individuals" in which the goal is not so much to construct a closed society that is static and conducive to biased contingents of pleasure and the like. Rather, the point is to play with all possibilities, in the invisible

spaces that we ourselves form through open contracts. The point is to promote a kind of dynamic and nomadic playfulness that is allergic to social petrifaction.

It is a major lesson to remember that the erotic richness of the world entails a multiplicity of characters. There is no being who alone can perform all functions at a given moment, who is an ideal incarnation who can do things perfectly. The traditional couple believes that the Other contains every potentiality: they are simultaneously child and master, father and son, strong and weak, protector and protected, friend and lover, educator and brother, husband and confident—and the same goes for the feminine. How could one person uphold the fair and proper role, ad hoc, in one instant? It's nonsense.

The possibility of playful combinations entails a diversity of parties. Nobody can manifest all things in the manner of God: ubiquity, simultaneous efficacy, plasticity of passions, and polymorphic feelings. People do what they are able to: they provide sweetness, beauty, intelligence, availability, tenderness, devotion, patience, complicity, eroticism, and sexuality. They are a mix, a series, improbable configurations, nominalist figures of speech.

Such elective and erotic microsocieties gain nothing from being out in the transparency and light of the public. By being discrete, even secret, they gain efficacy by not exposing themselves to the moralizing judgments of those who lack the courage, qualities, temperament, imagination, and audacity to aspire to such erotic diversity, let alone partake of it. Following concepts as old as time, they drag anything through the mud that they are not able or don't know how to attain. There's no reason to give them the chance to spout a false moralism that masks their true resentment.

Discretion has another advantage: it prevents the jealousy (which is proof of our irrefutable membership in the animal kingdom, a clear demonstration of the truth of ethology) that devastates relationships in which a little bit of culture leads to a lot of eroticism. Traditionally, no one consents to another's joy if that joy does not pass through them first. Such a pleasure leads the excluded party to believe they are not capable of providing the pleasure that a third party has given their partner. To avoid jealousy, it is best simply to not put yourself in the position to feel it…Discretion on your part requires you to refuse to accept another's indiscretion.

A Libertine Feminism

A postmodern libertinage may be defined by the logic of a libertarian libido, the light-hearted eros, the celebration of the celibate machine, the metaphysic of sterility, the hedonist contract, and playful combinations. But these should not remain the propositions of men, to whom women must submit. If they remain so, they will contribute to our sexual wretchedness, increasing it significantly.

Libertinage is an ethical form that adopts the color of its historical era. There are Chinese and Greek versions, Etruscan and Roman, and even several in one geographic zone: Europe, for example, has feudal, traditional, modern, and postmodern varieties, covering a diverse and sometimes contradictory range of behaviors. What do these different historical moments have in common? The desire for a philosophical ataraxia, an ataraxia with respect to sexed and sexual relations that disturb the existential equilibrium we gain when we work on ourselves. Light-hearted eros starts with a regimen that aims for a philosophical state of libidinal serenity.

What would a libertine feminism look like? Or even a feminine libertinage? Ideally, the epithet “Don Juan” would stop being something valorizing of men and depreciative of women, for whom the equivalent word is very often “nymphomaniac.” It is profoundly unjust to use a word that carries the positivity of the literary register in order to qualify men with light-hearted eros, but to employ psychiatric vocabulary for the same tropism in women.

In order to rid us of the feudal libertinage that gives pride of place to the male and turns women into prey, like the prey displayed in a hunting painting, I propose a libertinage that is postmodern, egalitarian, and also feminist. This is needed because original feminism has, for a long time, advocated sexist antipathy in response to male misogyny. In fact, it has reproduced class warfare between the sexes. It has been useful for its dialectical role in counterweighting the scales, but this feminism strikes me as outdated.

We can talk of real equality once literature produces the equivalent of a female Casanova, a female Don Juan, and this proper name becomes a substantive that gives value to the individual it qualifies. But we seem far from that. Women must first free themselves from the tyranny of nature, from the destiny of their biological determinism. To become a

woman, nature and mother must give way to artifice, the essence of civilization. This would be an exciting, inspiring, and joyful perspective.

PART IV

A CYNICAL AESTHETIC

TEN

An Archipelagic Logic

The Ready-Made Revolution

Some clever people, camping out in their aesthetic marketplaces and doing their philosophical commerce, actually think that a history of art is possible…As long as you keep it concise! They dissertate about concepts divorced from any context; they gloss, like Plato's contemporaries, ideas about Beauty-in-itself, the essence of Beauty, ineffable and unspeakable Beauty, or Beauty as a vector of transcendence; that is, they insist on the truth of its existence. From it, they can derive God, who they carefully guard from danger. They get a great deal out of a schema that is so philosophically easy.

The reactionaries among them—in the etymological sense; the most conservative to say the least—forge a common cause with two or three artists who pass for part of an intellectual avant-garde. The media elevates a fool who shares the same aesthetic picnic with scruffy, unknown auteurs who are convinced that their obscurity bespeaks an unfathomable depth. They collect neologisms, webs of glossolalia over the subject of ineffability, the unsayable, the incommunicable, "the veil," and other baubles of negative theology. It all amounts to a banal, autistic, and solipsistic exercise. No need to speak of proper and formal analysis.

Art comes *from* history. It lives *in*, *through*, and *for* it. How can we deny the evidence? It eludes the essentialist's grasp because it is inextricable from matter of the world, hence from all the advancements, retreats, ruptures, obstacles, slow-downs, and revolutions that occur in the history of art. Its guiding factors and induced effects come down to a host of names, figures, and signatures. Thus, Beauty has a history and definitions that are multiple and even contradictory, depending on historical or geographical influences. Contrary to Kant's Beauty, it is not

what is universally pleasing and nonconceptual. Rather, it has to do with what is particular and conceptual.

Art history is shaped by epistemological ruptures. These shifts prepare movements and trends. They realize them; they are dialectical vectors; they produce its effects and consequences, whether good or bad; they cause a movement's supersession or its maintenance, its arch within a certain moment, its inscription throughout a long period. All of these things are important. Every particular moment contributes to the general movement. There was no Beauty for the men of Lascaux.[1] On the other hand, it meant a great deal for the contemporary of Baumgarten,[2] before it became a relic for the descendants of Marcel Duchamp.

The very first ready-made was a spark that burned up the entire aesthetic field. Was it a hoax? A joke? A student's provocation? Anarchist subversion? Facetiousness? A goofy idler's prank? It could have been all of those things, but it was also a real coup d'état within the little guarded world of art. It turned over a major page of art history: that of the Christian West. Suddenly, there was a new chapter: Contemporary Art. Therefore, I define contemporary art as that which succeeds the first ready-made.

What lesson does this revolution teach? Works of art and Beauty have no intrinsic truth. Rather, truth is relative and conjectural. Art does not proceed from the intelligible world, but from a perceptual construction, a sociological operation. Kant fades away and leaves his place to Bourdieu[3]…The *ready-made* object becomes a work of art (a manufactured object, fresh out of a store, exhibited in an environment devoid of aesthetic content). The artist's intention to produce a work can sometimes suffice to produce it.

On top of that, we can add two major propositions: (1) the viewer produces the work; (2) anything can serve as an aesthetic support. Of course, the artist produces something, but the spectator must also walk their half of the path to complete the aesthetic trajectory. This is the birth of the artistic viewer. Noble matter also disappears as a requirement for art. It gives way to mere material, be it noble or ignoble, trivial or precious, physical or immaterial, and so on.

The Death of Beauty

Duchamp's most important act brought together all forms of deicide and

tyrannicide, as well as other kinds of ontological parricide. Since Plato, there has been a long list of followers—spiritualist Christians, German idealists, and negative theologians—who recycle the antiphony praising a disembodied Beauty divorced from the real world. They lived among things like Truth, Good, and Justice and other fictions that never show themselves in person. Thus, for a long time, objects have been beholden to the Idea. What is absolute beauty's relation to the Idea? If it is far from it, there is ugliness. If it is close, there is beauty.

The well-known theory of Platonic participation relies as much on this concept as it does on avoiding asking why a judge has the authority to judge.[4] When someone decrees that something is beautiful or ugly, from where does he derive the admissibility of his judgment? There really would be nothing ideal or Platonic if not for the social groups that confer such authority: the medieval and Renaissance Church, the Flemish bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century, European monarchies, the industrial revolution's capitalist State, the liberal Market of contemporary America.

Judgments of mundane taste come out of sociological, political, historical, and geographical webs. They do not come from a conceptual theology that uses Beauty as a substitute for God, since contemporary civilization has begun holding religion in low esteem. This is because there is a homothetic relationship between God and Beauty: what makes up one very often makes up the other. They have identical consistencies and similar logics and are comparable in their invisibility. Very often, art is a substitute for religion or its ally, even though it retains a register of radical immanence. Since they are both uncreated, incorruptible, and inaccessible to even the best-directed pure reason—since they are eternal, immortal, unmovable, unfading, and unalterable—Beauty and God conduct their business hand in hand.

Duchamp consummates Nietzsche's crime: after the death of God—which also signifies the death of the Good, and thus of Evil and also Beauty, as Nietzsche clearly emphasized in certain passages of *The Will to Power*—we gain access to an immanent world, a real here and now. An emptied heaven allows for a full earth. With his foundational act, Marcel Duchamp advanced a *detheologization* of art in favor of a *rematerialization* of purpose. The sudden and immediate vitality that this movement produced is unmatched in all of art history.

For all of that, this revolution does not succumb to nihilism, the absence of meaning, or conceptual muddles. Quite the contrary: the

famous *Urinal* generated a new paradigm that would shut the door on twenty-five centuries of aesthetics. It stops being about Beauty and starts to take on a greater load of Meaning, which needs to be deciphered. This epistemological rupture turns every object into something of a rebus.

Archeology of the Present

Duchamp's aesthetic coup created a lasting fragmentation of the artistic field. The Style that once defined an era ends up being destroyed in favor of styles that, paradoxically, make up the Style of a newly created modernity (the paradox is evidence of the cunning of Reason). Prehistoric art's long reign gives way to an efflorescence of short and sudden periods, which sometimes die as soon as they are born. Five thousand years of Magdalenian art makes up one *period*, and the same title is given to a single year of the BMPT movement or three years of *CoBrA* or of *New Realism*, not to mention everything that has been called a movement that lasted no longer than a single exhibition.

The twentieth century was characterized by acceleration and speed. There were booms, and the old, slow times metamorphosed into a period of hypermodernity, precipitousness, and speed. This shortening of duration engenders anxiety, feverishness, and sickness. In the wake of the chaos of losing our ontological compass, nihilism takes root. Old geological and Virgilian times—the period of nature—give way to the contemporary, virtual, digital age that knows nothing but the pure and simple present.

This tremendous explosion creates surges of energy. Some blaze new routes, avenues, and highways; others are obstructed. On one side, we have an opportunity for a new kind of rich aesthetics that can last, which develops itself and produces chain reactions; in other places, we have aborted experiences and immediately visible negativities. We praise this richness of potentialities because Duchamp's revolution, by abolishing the reign of univocity and establishing that of plurivocity, engendered more abundance than penury. In fact, within this proliferation, the best rubs against the worst and the masterpiece lays beside a mess.

Hence, judgments of taste about contemporary art cannot be made without risk. Unable to be objective, we are obliged to have an inchoate perspective that disappears over time as the contours of the movement

become clearer. A century of art produces a clear map, but it only does this with patience, in slow time that resists accelerating forces.

Dwelling within this Tower of Babel are new possibilities for the field of aesthetics, of course, but also for the fields of ethics, politics, ontology, and metaphysics. Art can be a matrix within which existential revolutions can occur. Aesthetics plays a major role in the constitution of new kinds of knowledge beyond itself. It should be understood not as an ideological superstructure, but as a mental infrastructure used by all sectors of society. Contrary to bourgeois considerations that use transcendent Beauty to negate the tremendous revolutionary power of art, we should reveal the chance for immanence that this field of possibilities offers.

At the same time, this Tower of Babel houses a lot of dross. That is the negative aspect of this vital process. In it we find the traces and signs of our era's nihilism. Today's intellectual and cultural poverty also shows itself in many of the propositions of contemporary aesthetics. If we want to defend contemporary art, we must avoid celebrating, en bloc, what should be patiently sorted through. We have to separate wonderful positivity from residual negativity. We should defend active forces and reject reactive forces. Hence, art criticism requires a kind of forensic analysis.

ELEVEN

A Psychopathology of Art

Nihilist Negativity

Contemporary art galleries often complacently exhibit nothing but the defects of our time. Why are we obligated to admire something on a pedestal that we would despise outside of the limited context of the artistic world (confines considered sacred these days, just as religious spaces were for so long)? How can we explain this kind of schizophrenia? We condemn liberal capitalism, criticize the domination of the market, and fight against American imperialism, while simultaneously adoring symbols, icons, and emblems produced by that very world we supposedly execrate. Following the old Aristotelian principle of catharsis, we try to distance ourselves from all the negativity through contemporary art, but we continue to harp on our century's negativity without offering the slightest clues as to how we might extricate ourselves from it.

Thus, official exhibition venues often serve as arenas for delighting in neuroses, psychoses, and other sad passions that shape our civilization even as they torment the individual who experiences them. Our nihilist modernity, which is both commercial and liberal (these epithets being synonymous), is foolish in its use of objects, words, things, bodies, everything both immaterial and material. Nothing escapes the total domination of negativity: we hate the self, others, the flesh, the world, the real, images, and life. We celebrate hurt, feces, filth, autism, degradation, waste, infamy, blood, death, screaming, and the like.

Very often, to hide the obvious brutality of these symptoms, the theoretical discourse on art appeals to arguments from authority as well as intimidating citations that encase the symptoms within a discourse. To do this, many preapproved philosophers and thinkers must legitimize the indigence of their intellectual ramblings, or even their complete lack of

substantive content. It doesn't matter if we end up taking interest in a piece of worthless plastic, so long as it is justified by a quotation from Deleuze, a phrase of Guattari, a reference to Baudrillard, an anecdote by Virilio, or, more common these days, a footnote by Sloterdijk.

Take an aesthetic proposition that is hollow yet molded into the form of a *body without organs*, dressed with an old wet blanket embroidered with a *disembodied flux*, shod with the *simulacrum's* clogs, and capped with the hat of *empty angels*; how could we fail to see it for what it is—a complete fraud? The king is naked, but the small tribe that constructs contemporary art—gallerists, journalists, specialists, paid chroniclers, affiliated pen-pushers, and the like—extols his genius and swoons over him. Despite his nudity, they wax on about the beauty of his array. Often, two or three passersby are contaminated and join the choir of abused abusers.

Added to this terrorist application of legitimizing citations is the trope of personal pathologies transformed into crude objects of exhibition, without the burden of any kind of sublimation. The proposition of the artist's pure and simple pathology as a self-sufficient object is worthless unless it is paradoxically preserved by an overcoming, which creates an object that is invested in by a third party. Without aesthetic sublimation, neuroses are clinical symptoms, nothing more.

Hysterical exhibitionism is not sufficient for creating an artistic moment. We know that craziness and schizophrenia can become paradigms in an ill era, but we cannot accept a new norm that turns the resident of a mental hospital into the apotheosis of contemporary reason. Hölderlin's, Nietzsche's, and Artaud's insanity interrupted their work. It required much of their biographies to be bracketed. However, it does not constitute their final word, method, or truth. Egotism, autism (*egautism*), narcissistic solipsism, glossolalia, verbigeration, deliberate refusal to communicate with others, not taking care of our bodies—we are deluded to take these as positive models.

Platonism's Permanence

Oddly, Duchamp's revolution did not slough off the Platonic tropes of the Idea, the Concept, and the Intelligible. It actually recycled them. How so? One would think that such a revolution of artistic media would cause a

rematerialization of art by not celebrating the transcendent, but that was not the case. The Concept is still king, and not just of the realm of conceptual art. Far too often, we consider the body to be something that impedes us on the path to truth, rather than considering it to be something that helps us make sense of things.

In almost every kind of aesthetic product, the Idea takes precedence over its sensible incarnation, its concrete aspect. Kitsch is born from this situation and is the quintessential expression of its perversion. Kitsch sublimates an object that is trivial, banal, common, and vulgar, under the banner of some message that it is supposed to deliver. A porcelain menagerie from a discount store, varnished and colored with pigments of the primary spectrum, becomes, through the power of intellectual anointment, one of our era's modalities of aesthetic truth. In fact, it betrays, like a mirror, the nihilism of this surgeon of contemporary art who recycles Duchamp's merchandise. Intention takes priority over execution. The Concept is much more important than the percept; the virtual is more valuable than the real; and fiction is better than the material.

To clarify Platonism's permanence even more, just look at the way the Judeo-Christian model discredits the sensible body. It is a continuation of the religion of the Idea. It is troubled and embarrassed by the host of passions, impulses, desires, and vitalistic possibilities. The body's pride must be beaten back. As an alternative, let's celebrate the dreadful Passion, the blood of Christ, the swollen, fouled, corrupted, injured, and tortured flesh. Then the cadaver is displayed, exhibited, scrutinized, photographed, painted, and eaten.

Scatological bodily waste (urine, excrement); *physiological residual waste* (pubic hair, locks, nails, blood); *Pure Reason's waste* (glossolalia, screams, backslides, trances, neurotic scenes, psychotic theatrics); *waste of living beings* (decay, feces, corpses, guts, bones, human fat, limbs, garbage, dust); *waste of the iconic real* (interference, static, shattering, defiling, crumpling): all of these are the emblems of the nihilism of our time, visible for a long time now in all of our events, performances, photographs, and videos.

A Market-Religion

On the long list of philosophies used for intellectual intimidation, we can

include that of Guy Debord. His concept of the society of the spectacle was hijacked and adapted for all kinds of purposes. It allows people *within* the trading system to control criticism of the trading system. This discourse gives them legitimacy and good conscience while they collaborate with the market. By using this philosophical magic, they dismiss their activity as an epiphenomenon of market capitalism, which they clearly denounce and inveigh against, agreeing with the situationist[1] in their cult book.

Thus, the field of art often stages events that are subsequently appropriated by the advertising industry. This relationship begins with Andy Warhol's Factory, which contributed to the aura America enjoyed during his era: Campbell's soup cans, portraits of JFK or Nixon, Coca-Cola and electric chairs, the dollar, Elvis and Marilyn, and, of course, the American flag. This is the same way that Kings and Princes, Doges and Condottieres, Virgins and Christ encumber the history of art in order to please their sponsors.[2] Nihilism and its plebiscite merchants reflect their time. Dialectically, these artists help shape the very era that constructs them. Their neuroses neuroticize the world. The world, in turn, neuroticizes them. What remain are the proofs, the testimonies, the results of this exchange.

So many contemporary art installations resemble nothing more than supermarket products. The only difference is the section of the store: garden accessories, baby toys, do-it-yourself items, decorations, furniture, plastic dishes, clothes, and so on. The very consumer items that alienate people earning a minimum wage become icons worthy of our aesthetic prayers and genuflections. Just as with ancient subjects such as Kings, Christ, and so on, which many find alienating, but which we slavishly adore when treated aesthetically, we discover the ritual mysteries of this religion of merchandise.

Today's consumer item plays a role previously held by primitive religions' statues, church paintings, and portraits of monarchs in castles. We organize idol cults around them, and they rule us. We venerate the very things that make life impossible for us; we give thanks to the ironhanded masters that control our bodies and souls.

It is not surprising, then, that there is a clergy responsible for this religion of merchandise. These are gallerists, auction buyers, private collectors, specialized journalists, curators, collaborationist prescribers (authors of monographs, prefaces, directors of art collections), institution

and foundation directors, and so on. The cult organizes itself with the helpful blessings and militant activity of this handful of people, all of whom know one another and set themselves up to maintain control over the field.

The collective actions of this incestuous group consist in producing ratings and reputations, positioning this or that person into a dominant market position, and displacing someone once their profitability wanes. Value depends on confidence, faith—its etymology reflects its *fiduciary value*. And there is nothing better for creating faith than to declare one's dogmas ex nihilo, capriciously, through fiat. This shows their performative power: the prescriber says something, and it is not because he speaks, but because he is a prescriber that what he says is true. Magic!

How did this person, one fine day, become a prescriber? By publicly, visibly, and ostentatiously adopting the codes, practices, ways, and customs of this tiny world that embraces them after measuring their level of servility and verifying their usefulness to the smooth running of the commercial machine. In other words, by adhering to ritual, that is, by laughing when those in the field laugh, by vituperating with the same gregarious energy, by doubting when they doubt, by agreeing when those who are already in place agree.

Of course, art has always come from a world outside of itself: the world of the prehistoric shaman; the world of powerful public figures (the Egyptian Pharaoh, the Persian King, Greek bouletai and prytanea, the Roman emperor, the popes of Western Christianity);[3] and also the world of rich private property owners (Flemish capitalists, Venetian merchants, the Industrial Revolution's bourgeoisie, and the fortunes generated today by multinational corporations). Each of these strove to celebrate their own values, the dominant values of their time. Thus, it is not surprising that a large part of contemporary art mirrors our broken era.

TWELVE

A Playful Art

The Cynical Antidote

There is a vulgar cynicism in this religion of merchandise. However, if we put it up against Diogenes's philosophical cynicism, we may be able to imagine an escape from nihilism, at least within the context of aesthetics. Against its negativity, we can contrapose the positivity of Diogenes's *great cheerful health*, *transmission of codes*, and the *communicative acts*. This tradition leads to a *rematerialization of the real* and fights, at every turn, against pathology, autism, and the rarefaction of immanence.

Ancient cynicism is hurt in many ways by its position in the dominant historiography—Hegel's historiography. Always verging on nonsense, Hegel, in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, peremptorily states that cynical philosophy amounts to only a few anecdotes. Consequently, Diogenes is not considered a philosopher. Academics who have enlisted in the great Prussian's platoon have copied him word for word for more than a century.

Was Diogenes not a philosopher? Why not? Because he did not pave the way for the Hegelian Absolute Spirit? Because he made no contribution to the *Science of Logic*? Therefore, the lantern-toting philosopher could not possibly deserve the titles of nobility that are traditionally reserved for servants of the regime![1] However, Diogenes was a real philosopher who showed a way to be anti-Platonic. He developed a lineage that is anti-idealist, antispiritualist, and consistently materialist. (None of his works survives, but they were once numerous: some dozen dialogues, a *Treatise on Ethics*, a *Treatise on Love*, another on *The Republic*, letters, seven tragedies…) His work is enhanced by the joyful image we have of him. But in Jena, philosophy was no laughing matter.[2] There was no love for the tradition of the laughing sage,

epitomized by Democritus. To enter the pantheon of dominant philosophy, you must be ominous, incomprehensible, obscure, and laborious. Diogenes laughs, puffs up, bursts, and departs…

Why discredit a whole philosophy? We always avoid talking about this. Calumny is a good option for those who can't engage in a real contest of ideas. A perfect example of the disgraceful strategy of avoidance is the traditional stigmatization of Diogenes and his legacy. People reduce him to a mere accessory of Greek philosophical scene. But most are completely ignorant of what that scene was like, what the discourses were about, and what positions were held.

There are anecdotes about Diogenes with the herring and the lantern, the frog and the mouse, the dog and the octopus, the barrel and the satchel, the staff and the bowl, the spit and the urine, sperm and feces, the rooster and the human flesh. Are these any more than amusing sketch materials, devoid of philosophical content? He's a fool, an eccentric, a clown, a minstrel, a buffoon, and a jester. But for the love of God, he is not a thinker, not a philosopher! We should not even use the same word that we use for Plato…

Precisely, Diogenes trains his philosophical eye on Plato and his ideas —his Ideas. To define it negatively, cynicism is a kind of anti-Platonism. Put positively, it is a nominalist perspective. In other words, there is only background; reality is reduced to its materiality; man is the measure of all things; the sensible world provides the only model; there are no intelligible Ideas; the best methods are irony, subversion, provocation, and humor; the heathen body, godless and masterless, is the only thing we have; and thus we can hold on to one formula: life is a party, live it here and now!

But we have our suspicions. Idealists do not like people and their ideas. Platonists take the fictitious ideal for the truth; they hold to a heaven of ideas where concepts float around as if in some ether; they believe that what is real must be beyond them, better than them, even more real than them—the Idea. They hold that man is detestable because of his body and true and respectable for his nonexistent soul. They believe that the world is part of an intelligible matrix, a self-evident seriousness, full of gods, demiurges, and philosopher-kings. What is their formula? Life here and now has no value, and nothing is as valuable as the fantastic conceptual universe to which they go for refuge. To hear about a living death, read or reread the *Phaedo*…

A Transmission of Codes

The cynical turn has multiple stages, beginning with the Hegelian stage in which anecdotes are the final word, where stories are ends in themselves. Want to make sense of those peripheral Cynic characters? Just look at the scene we've set…Alternatively, these little stories and gestures point beyond themselves to something larger. They are means to a subtle end. We just have to know how to read and decode them. We have to know that we can know, and then we can know.

The stories of the Cynics contribute to a joyful alternative to the Platonic world. Diogenes looks around for a *Man* in the streets of Athens. He holds out a lit lantern in broad daylight…Hegel calls this a "schoolboy's farce" and passes over it. But the true sage would call this a philosophical lesson. He is looking for a Man, with a capital M, the idea of Man, his concept, his immateriality that manifests his nominalist materiality. Of course, he doesn't find it, since it doesn't exist, because all that exists is tangible, material, concrete reality. For Plato, famously, Man is a *featherless biped*. Very well, Diogenes plucks a chicken and tosses the creature into the idealist philosopher's lap. He is able to refute the erroneous Platonic definition of man through this playful demonstration. Aptly, the author of *Parmenides* added a correction: *with dull nails*… There you have it![3]

All these stories of the Cynics, which are numerous, operate under the same principle: they drive a meaning; they carry a signification. The Hegelian wants to destroy the imbecile who looks at the finger pointing to the moon. Diogenes and others had already put forth every theory (Antisthenes's works comprised ten volumes, Crates left behind many letters, Metrocles burned his own books, Menippus wrote some fifteen texts). They all theatricalize their thought, which is to be found not only on paper, but also in their physical acts. The body theatricalizes thought; it puts ideas on stage.

A veil is not an end in itself; it is an invitation for an unveiling. The same goes for codes. The Cynic acts as an ontological street artist; she knows we will understand her story. The works, meetings, and exchanges that took place in the Cynosarges—a dog cemetery that played the role of Plato's Academy or the Stoic Portico—all preserve something. They were all interconnected. Irony relies on the intelligence of the spectator—the viewer sets the agenda. Then, in a kind of

methodological revolution, the philosophical scene leaves the School, leaves the esoteric, confined space that is closed in on itself, and it opens up to the world. It goes outside, in public, and philosophy becomes an exoteric practice.

The same thing can be said for contemporary art. The artifact is not an end in itself; it indicates something beyond itself, theoretically something greater than itself. The aesthetic movement has meaning when there is an initiation in a specific place, where codes have been handed out, and where those who embark on an aesthetic journey are given the means to understand the code. The general public often repeats Hegel by saying, about a piece of contemporary art, “This is anecdotal, useless, meaningless, foolishness, nonsense.” They say this because they ignore the moon and look at the finger. So how should we look at art, if nobody has told us what it’s about?

Form is not an end in itself. It carries, supports, and reveals a depth—if such depth is there. If it lacks depth, the form is formless because the depth allows the form to appear. Formalism has had deleterious effects for too long: form for itself, the cult of form…In the Structuralism of the 1960s, the container preceded the content. The signifier was a step ahead of the signified, which, at times, did not even exist…For value to again make sense, the two instances must coincide: there must be a configuration and something configured.

Conceptual and structural formalism is largely responsible for the public’s disillusionment with contemporary art. The religion of pure combination has generated devotees, clergy, castes, and sects.[4] This is detrimental to the majority, who see the logic of the temple where the cult of the Single Form gathers, and who must validate this celebration of emptiness and the lack of content. Nihilism rejoices in the veneration of the carcass.

Bringing form into the service of a depth sends art down an aesthetically inverted path. Worldly art—in other words, the use of aesthetics—appeals to our predilection for surfaces over depths. Decoration justifies itself in this. When a work’s sole allure is its appearance, it can integrate itself into the landscape as an element of finery or ornamentation. The bourgeoisie are masters of these codes, which require absolute depolitization.

A work’s value is measured by the sum of intellectual exchanges it generates, be they ethical, political, philosophical, metaphysical, or, of course, aesthetic. Abstraction, the quintessence of pure form and form

that is pure, makes things pretty.[5] It rarely carries a political or military message. To repoliticize art (I do not mean a political art in the militant sense of the word) there must be an infusion of content able to produce a communicational act, to us the term of Habermas.

The untransmittable, the unspeakable, and the ineffable, as well as the singing-saw of transcendence,[6] are all part of religious people's conceptual equipment. They are also very Kantian concepts. Very often when invoking the untransmittable, it's really just that there is nothing to transmit. The obscurity and false profundity of so many commentaries betray a confusion, a paucity of content, a work's inconsistency. Restoring content goes beyond mere aestheticism and validates the power of art. In order to accomplish this, our spaces, occasions, and circumstances must conduce to transmission. The Université Populaire de Caen takes this as a formula for its seminars on contemporary art.

A Rematerialization of the Real

The twentieth century was a time of rarefaction: dodecaphonic and serial music, through Webern, leads up to Cage's silent concerts; painting abandons subjects for light, and then light for abstraction, and then abstraction for nothing at all, a vacuum, from which we get Malevitch's *White Square on White Background*; the Nouveau Roman declared war on characters, on plots, on psychology, on narration, on suspense;[7] Nouvelle Cuisine, also marked by Structuralist thinking, breaks with flavors and the mouth's palate in favor of impressing the eye with color schemes and architectural structures on the plate. All of that bends toward less, nothing, and then less than nothing.

The twentieth century's output went backward: music rediscovered tonality, florid orchestral colors, symphonic instrumentariums, and neo-Romantic melismas, and churches were filled with the neomedieval music of the Baltics. Painting resurrected the purest tradition of color and classical composition, mixing it with a bit of poetry. The novel once again took up bourgeois adultery, narcissistic stories, the character and his states of mind, and descriptions of emotions. (Even though the pope of the Nouveau Roman spurned the saber and the cocked hat, he did all he could to gain his seat at the Académie Française.)[8] At the same time, the culinary industry made a fortune selling tête de veau…Then as much as

now there was a celebration of reactionary virtues.

It was a mistake to move toward nothingness. It was also a mistake to try to push it away by reactivating old values. Neither Zen nor kitsch was the answer. What is the alternative then? A taste for the real and the matter of the world; a desire for immanence and the here and now; a passion for things' textures, for tactile softness, and for the corporeality of substances. The answer is not limited to the opposing paradigms of angels and beasts. Where should we look then? Men, individuals, nominalist entities, singular, indivisible identities. No more grand rhetoric; we must move to a place completely beyond grand rhetoric…

When Christianity and Marxism end their shared reign, we will need visions of new possibilities. There is always one fixed point: the body. Not a body of Platonic ideas, nor a body cut in two, carved out, mutilated, and dualistic, but a body of postmodern science: flesh that is living, amazing, meaningful, rich in potential, bearing forces still unknown, and worked on by still unharnessed powers. Instead of this, art has always served the sacred, that which seems to be beyond the pale of reason.

These days we seem to think of the body as something beyond reason. Spinoza wrote that we have not yet taken full advantage of it, to the point that we are still ignorant of what we *can do*. Deleuze and Foucault put that same concern at the center of their philosophies. The body is still Christian, marked by more than two thousand years of civilization; but it contains amazing powers.

In the chaos of a crumbling civilization, among the nihilistic ruins of the end of an era, there in what lays before the Faustian body, art can be a kind of conceptual, ideological, intellectual, and philosophical laboratory. After the death of God and the death of Marx, and after the deaths of smaller idols, everyone just has their body and it's back to the drawing board. Considering all its modalities, how do we define, understand, train, tame, and master the body? How can we sculpt it? What can we, and what must we, expect from it? How far can we go with this irreducible ontology?

There are already artists working on cloning, genetic engineering, transgenesis, the production of a man-machine with the machine providing at least one of its vital functions: ingestion, digestion, excretion…They are working to redefine corporeal identity through surgery, to construct a heathen soteriology by mastering the corpse and thus death, and to digitalize matter through virtual-reality imaging. These and so many other undertakings are no less artistic for being

postmodern.

These artists are forming a new kind of beauty. It is not a Platonic Beauty or a reality measured by some fictive reference. It is a beauty of objects, new forms, and new appearances that make up a sublime percept. Why a *percept*? In the Pragmatic tradition this term indicates that which appears to a sense, before the perceptual judgment. And why *sublime*? Because in the Romantic tradition, the word indicates that which overwhelms a person through its power and force, and that which judges the object in question by means of that sensation. This world of sublime percepts suggests something greater than concepts, something that can influence the content and structure of reality. This begins of our escape from nihilism…

PART V

A PROMETHEAN BIOETHICS

THIRTEEN

De-Christianized Flesh

The Angelic Model

We still have too much of a Platonic body. What does that mean? It's a schizophrenic body, cut in two irreconcilable pieces. Moreover, we're told that one reigns over the other: the flesh dominates the soul, matter possesses the spirit, and emotions submerge reason—all of which affirm the tenets of the ascetic ideal. On the one hand, we have the evil of incarnation; on the other hand, we have the possibility of salvation in immateriality, which, in a nonsensical paradox, we are told is invisible, impossible to identify or to locate, yet it resides *in* the substance all around us.

The Western body suffers from this dichotomy not only in everyday life, but also in even more problematic planes: healthcare, medicine, hospitals, caregiving, and anything having to do with bioethics. This emerging discipline questions and refutes the idealist philosophical tradition, which is incapable of responding to the challenges these new questions propose, questions that can only be resolved through Utilitarian and Pragmatic philosophy.

A ghost haunts our consciousness; even more, our unconscious. It's an angel-ghost, the strange model of the Platonic-Christian ideal. What do we mean by an angel? It's a creature of ether and mist, something alive but without life, a fleshless incarnation, an immaterial matter, an antibody that escapes the usual laws that govern a body. It neither is born nor dies; it neither thinks nor copulates. It is thus preserved in itself, unaffected by wear, so we understand it to be eternal, immortal, incorruptible, and undecaying.

None of those things would be significant if they did not still constitute the idea of the Western body. Even for Freud, we comprise a body and a

soul—the materiality of flesh and the immateriality of an unconscious psyche. We have noble organs (heart, brain, and the like) with active symbolic qualities (courage, intelligence, and the like), as well as ignoble organs (the guts and entrails, and the like). From Plato's *Timaeus* all the way to postmodern hospitals, not much has changed.

The real body, the opposite of the angel, drinks, eats, sleeps, ages, suffers, digests, defecates, and dies. Far from the ether, it comprises blood and nerves, muscles and lymph, chyle and bone: in short, matter. It has no concept of the nobility of an immaterial principle through which it could enter into a relationship with the Self, guaranteeing its health—a contact with God and the divine, which are coextensive. It triumphs in pure immanence.

The Western body's constitution is the legacy of Paul, the great despiser of the self who transferred his own self-hatred into a contempt for the present and the world, which he invites us to get angry with. After many centuries of Greek and Latin patristics, medieval scholasticism, and philosophical idealism passed on by priests, sermons, and discourses simplified by the clergy for the consumption of the lowest common denominator, and also after more than a thousand years of art as propaganda, we have been left with the legacy of a mutilated body still in search of redemption that can only come through a recovered unity, part of a monism rich in new existential possibilities.

A Heuristic of Audacity

To get over the angel, let us say that the body is nominalist, atheist, incarnate, and mechanical. However, this mechanicalness, which is much more subtle than its spiritualist adversaries aver, deserves some conceptual and theoretical refining. Let us demystify the flesh and get rid of ghosts, fictions, and other magical representations. Let us put an end to the era of primitive thinking in favor of a true age of reason.

The dominant kind of philosophy, the kind practiced by Ethics Committees, avoids the ridicule it would get from an outright dismissal of the Charter for Healthcare Workers published by the Vatican.[1] To make this conservative—if not reactionary—pill go down, we refer to Ricoeur and Lévinas, we bring scholasticism back into our age in the form of Jean-Luc Nancy's phenomenology, for example. We delight in people like

Hans Jonas, who theorizes about technophobia and comes to the conclusion that we must slow down in the name of a “principle of responsibility.”

What is the engine of all of this? It is a heuristic of fear. According to this Cassandra from across the channel, it is important to keep people in a state of fear, assuming that the worst is certain and inevitable if we consent to modernity’s progress. It teaches an ontological terror in order to effect a technological immobility. The result is the triumph of the principle of precaution, which amounts to a victory for conservatism.

I argue for the inverse: a heuristic of audacity. Jonas’s logic would advise against the invention of the airplane, citing crashes; it would reject boats under the pretext of shipwrecks; it would ban trains, crying over the danger of derailment; it would discourage the automobile, prophesying accidents; and it would ignore electricity for fear of electrocution. This philosopher would have dissuaded God himself from creating life, since it would end up in death.

In the dialectic of progress, the negative aspect does not conserve, but integrates. It should not impede us from looking further than the conceptual abscess we have just discussed. The heuristic of fear is the clever formula of one of Husserl and Heidegger’s pupils, designed to justify a generation’s technophobia, their refusal and rejection of modernity. We may prefer Ernst Bloch’s *The Principle of Hope*.

The heuristic of fear results in a series of dangerous consequences: it holds the public in ignorance, it encourages stupidity, it carries the masses’ reactionary and primitive instincts to their peak, it celebrates obscurity and condemns the principles of the Enlightenment, it keeps the people at a distance from knowledge, and it burns bridges between the world, science, and the nation.

On the subject of cloning, Jonas’s disciples nurture the attitudes of the lowest common denominator, consisting of those who are either little informed, uninformed, or badly informed of the technical facts of the matter. However, they are quick to give their opinion without reflection. They are intellectually conditioned by science fiction—to the detriment of science—and dwell among books and films like *A Brave New World*. The root of the heuristic of fear is contempt for people, elitism, and impermeable caste aristocracy, which subjects people to propaganda that appeals to their feelings, instincts, and passions—fear, worry, anguish, terror—while completely turning its back on reason and its correct usage.

By contrast, a heuristic of audacity looks directly at the cumbersome

questions of our postmodern era without dismissing them a priori: reproductive and therapeutic cloning, postmenopausal maternity, embryonic selection, ectogenesis, eugenics, face grafting, brain surgery, sexual reassignment surgery, assisted medical procreation, postmortem transmission of genetic material, and so on.

An Expansion of the Body

A Promethean bioethics once again challenges the face of Zeus—in other words, it challenges all transcendent justifications of the established order. Prometheus—the inventor of men, the stealer of fire who tricked the gods, humanity's benefactor who avoided danger and procured the golden apples of Hesperides's garden (that is, immortality)—gives us a model for our post-Christian society.

Hence, the need to redefine the body, to think of it freshly, outside of the Christian schematic. Let it be an atomic substance—not a black box of original sin carrying its immaterial antidote—consisting of a nomadic part capable of abandoning its support and a reasoning part that can accommodate variations; let it consist of an extended visible substance and a stream of electromagnetic vibrations; let it be a swirl of energies and forces. It is a single substance, of course, but it changes in diverse ways, following modalities that are, for the time being, inexplicable.

The post-Christian body incorporates what the tradition has pushed to the outskirts and margins, refused, or else cast into the categories of pathologies, mental affects, hysterias, and other symptoms. Indeed, what about trances, catalepsies, epilepsies? How do we approach the phenomena of telepathy, thought transmission, and intuition? Sleepwalking? Magnetism? Dreams, paradoxical sleep? Unconsciousness, Freudian or otherwise? How do we understand or explain glossolalia? Yogic practice? Hypnotherapies? And so many other acts dismissed to the periphery that suggest a body with unexplained potentialities—and unexploited.

Some things falsely appear to be beyond matter, but somehow they still affect it. Therefore, some take this as a reason to mistrust medicine, since they demand that it live up to its billing as a science in the narrow positivist sense of the term. However, medicine is an art. Before so many ascertainable facts, why such a refusal to consider them? For every

Feyerabend—who does not exclude anything from his intellectual curiosity, who affirms in his *Against Method* that there is something to learn from every discipline, including those that are most patently false, such as astrology—how many Monsieur Homais are there who act like ostriches, thinking they can solve a problem by submerging their intelligence in the sand?[2]

Parallel alternative fields—those of Asian medicine, Chinese wisdom, African techniques, Caribbean sapience, shamanic therapies—still look at the body as a machine, but one more subtle than we are accustomed to. Indeed, we often think of the mechanism's details, the number of its components, and the structure of its system, but we forget whatever runs between all of it. The post-Christian body demands a Dionysian materialism.

How can we justify, for example, what narrow positivist logic sometimes says about Western medicine? That each organ must have its specialist—the neurologist for the brain, the proctologist for the rectum—and that no one should bother with the neuro-vegetative system that underlies the body's homeostasis, its rhythms, its temperature, its changes, and the cadence of its breaths? Why ignore what seems to contain a large part of the mysteries of the flesh? If intellectual habit is not to blame for this neglect of what could (perhaps) afford real progress in our knowledge of pure flesh, then what is?

FOURTEEN

An Art of Artifice

Transcending the Human

Ever since humans started humanizing themselves, they made themselves artificial, emancipating themselves from their natural condition. The first trepanations and cataract procedures proved that nature was not to be celebrated as a sweet and good provider of nothing but positivity, like some cornucopia. It also contains death, sadness, suffering, conflict, claws, beaks, and condemnation of the weak to death.

Transcending nature creates humanity. In its first stuttering movements, medicine rejected physical and psychic suffering; it invented conjurations involving different concoctions and crushed plants; it combined powders, herbs, and essences; it brought together brews with incantations and magical thinking; it used touch and ritualized gestures; it intervened, not leaving things to nature. It imposed human will. Antinaturalism is the essence of medicine.

What does it mean to transcend the human? It is not about ending humanity in favor of some sort of inhumanity or superhumanity. Rather, it entails a posthumanity that preserves humanity while transcending it. What is the point? It's the sublimation, realization, and perfection of humanity. The old body that was at the absolute mercy of the dictates of nature remains just the same, but it is supplemented with tricks and culture; we inject it with human intelligence and Promethean substantiality so that it can liberate itself as much as possible from the determinisms of natural necessity.

What could be a means of achieving this posthumanity? One is transgenesis. Of course, surgery can also help us achieve it if we allow it to (ontologically), but the possibility of interfering with genes opens a radical new perspective in the global history of medicine. We should not

sacrifice to a genetic cult or build a genomic religion. Genetics does what it can, which is to say, not everything, albeit quite a bit. However, we can find in it a great highway leading to the posthuman.

That said, we can now understand why the apostles of the heuristic of fear have such an interest in allowing magic thinking to proliferate around the subject of cloning. Cloning would mean the industrial production of identical individuals leading to the fascist dream of an oppressed mass commanded by a powerful elite. Bravo to this kind of science fiction! But it simply has nothing whatsoever to do with science.

Reproductive cloning would be content to artificially produce identical genetic capital. Yet we are not just our genetic capital. We are the product of its interaction with the substance and thickness of the world. If that were not so, in the case of twin homozygotes—which is how reproductive cloning works in nature—we would have nothing but absolute duplication. We know that it is not that way at all. Education in the large sense of the term, interactions, influences, chances, and formatting that happens in the first hour of birth sculpt our being more definitely than the modalities that, though essential, escape our understanding. Sartre knew this well when he attempted to dismantle Flaubert. The project eluded him and ended up filling more than three thousand pages, finding nothing.

What's to be gained through a heuristic of fear? Conflating reproductive cloning—which is neither monstrous nor cost-effective and is thus without any future—with therapeutic cloning, which would allow us to prevent, fight against, take care of, or suppress illness. Under the pretext of precaution, we give free rein to the negativity at work in nature, even though it is in our power to slow it down, thwart it, and avoid it. Morally and juristically, this attitude manifests in not helping people who are in danger—millions of people.

A Preventative Eugenics

A Promethean bioethics does not propose the creation of monsters or chimeras. Neither does it wish for pure *race*. It does not in the least aspire to a cyborg humanity. It instigates not a project of abolishing nature (what a feckless plot!), but a continuation of the old Cartesian project of mastering it. It would make us like "masters and possessors."

René Descartes, not Adolph Hitler.

In itself, eugenics is a technique allowing us to produce offspring (*genics*) with the best possible conditions for the individual (personal health) or the community (public health). It could be *capitalist* if it acts for the profit of the laboratories that invent its processes; *racial* if, like the Nazis, it aims for a supposedly regenerated humanity that is purified of what is presumably holding it back; *Catholic* when it promotes a strict respect for life that in time gets transformed into a cult fetish of the peasant class, to the point of celebrating nature's pathological productions as trials sent from God; *consumerist* when it is used for the production of skins that conform to the canons of the moment—the young and pretty blue-eyed blonde with larger mammaries than brains and the like. We can all agree pretty easily that any of these uses is indefensible.

If eugenics is condemnable, it is not so in itself, in some absolute sense, but because of the name that qualifies it. What about a *libertarian* eugenics? What would that mean? It would be a strategy of avoidance with a simple aim: to *increase* the chance of a happy presence in the world. It would do away with the idea that some sickness, suffering, handicap, or physical or psychological wretchedness vitiates any joy that might issue from our existential potentiality. Therefore, it is to *decrease* the chance of a wretched presence in the world.

Without engaging in Byzantine debates, most of us can agree on what makes a happy or wretched presence in the world. For any future being in the world, it would seem that health is preferable to sickness, ability to disability, form to deformity, normality to abnormality. Anyone who would prefer sickness, disability, debility, deformity, or abnormality, that is, whoever would deny the existence of those categories, seems to me to be ontologically criminal in their refusal to act when given the possibility of transgenetic avoidance.

Health, which is at a minimum understood to be the absence of illness, offers us the sweetest ataraxia. Why, then, would we opt for trouble when it is within our means to have corporal peace instead of a suffering body? Why, before a being is even born (no need to speak of the *suppression* of a being that by definition does not yet exist), would we deny *election* so that someone could have the best possible existential potential among the millions of combinations available?

This libertarian eugenics would produce not subhumans or superhumans, but simply humans. It would rectify the injustices of nature and begin an era of cultural fairness. Subsequently, once the being finds

itself in the world, it would provide a kind of medicine that would predict the onset of an illness and be able to prevent it. Thus, it would do away with painful and debilitating treatments, many pathologies that result from treatments, and the side effects that are ignored by the pharmaceutical industry.

The transgenetic medicine that would accompany libertarian eugenics would undermine the domination of agonistic medicine, which most of the time fights pain with another inversely proportionate pain. It would provide an alternative, peaceful medicine that would neutralize, in the style of the martial arts, the appearance of negativity in the world.

A Metaphysics of Objects

The power of this Promethean bioethics creates new lands populated with completely novel philosophical objects. Outside of physics as we have habitually understood it—the kind used by cartographers for a long time—we can discover a series of original topics that bring up brand new questions and lead to future answers.

Such a new metaphysics—in the etymological sense of the word, "what is beyond the physical"—has the strange feature of being able to define what are actually very physical themes, because they are totally immanent! There is no pretext for new nebula or verbal sophistications, nor is there a need for neologisms. Rather, we need a new orientation to solve the problems generated by our unique epoch.

Thus, we have the creation of a new epoch—an era of frozen genetic material. When we extract spermatozoids, ova, or embryos, they act according to the law of time as it works in our planetary system. Each cell's vessels will expire—they are within time. Since the advent of cryogenics, they obey two laws of time simultaneously: the law within the incubator and the law outside of it. The living being's time ends, giving way to the trick of a frozen and suspended but still social time. The arrested cell enters into an open time, which preceded the social time it enters upon reimplantation.

In concrete terms, a donor's sperm escapes natural time and enters an artificial suspension of time during which the donor persists in social time. Hypothetically, a century after his death, once the body that had carried him has become a skeleton, his nomadic body continues to live.

Hence, the introduction of new metaphysical problems.

In these new times we have new configurations. Living persons are conflated with machines when, for example, we speak of neurons as if they were information cards. We implant machines into living beings in the case of prostheses—steel screws in titanium hearts, cardiac stimulators, and arterial stents. Or we incorporate parts of a living being into our human being as we use loanwords: pig mitral valves in human hearts or the use of skin and insulin—no need to speak of the inverse compatibility. We are surrounded by the animalization of man and the humanization of animals—there are lab mice that are physiologically compatible with homo sapiens…

In the same way, we can rethink the pharmacopeia that asks chemical molecules to produce behavioral effects. With the rise of such soul-chemistry, psychoanalysts watch nervously while their territory shrinks. This conflict signifies a partial decline of shamanic techniques—those that are useful, though unscientific—in the face of the irrefutable and irrecusable evidence of postmodern pharmacology.

These new forces can be put to the service of the death drive just as much as the drive to life. All the anxiolytics, antidepressants, and sleeping pills are less about treating manifest pathologies than about subjects' general incapacity to exist at peace in a civilization that indoctrinates or destroys those who resist. This chemistry achieves the submission and subjection of the recalcitrant through chemically transfiguring them into zombies.

A libertarian bioethics would apply the hedonist perspective to the manufacture, prescription, and consumption of these substances. The point is not to negate, extinguish, or pacify someone to the point of rubbing out their subjectivity, but to increase the possibility of having a joyous presence in the world. Viagra, for example, insofar as it gives spirit to the flesh, demonstrates something like a Dionysian pharmacopeia oriented toward the drive for life.

FIFTEEN

The Faustian Body

Between Two Nothings

Every existence entails an emergence from nothing, and the only prospect is to return to it someday. Life unfolds between two nothings. But the boundaries are blurred; it is very difficult to speak clearly about later, previously, down the way, before, and after. Nobody denies that a being comes from a spermatozoid and an ovum, but what are the philosophical statuses of those two separate objects? Half-alive things? Things that are potentially alive? Are there two complementary forces that are alive, but that must come together to produce another living being, one that is finally real, finally true?

Our millions of spermatozoids are alive, and they are rejected as soon as one of them penetrates the female gamete. The bacteria that go to work on the corpse after death are also alive. Before life, there is already life. After life, there is still life. In the swarm of reality, the mixing up of life and death, everything that emerges from the nothing and returns to its breast, how can we see anything other than multiple modifications of life?

Therefore, the human part of man is inscribed in that living being suspended between two nothings. It is not consubstantial with living itself; it emerges, and then disappears, as part of the vital process. Thus, just hours after its formation, the egg, while living, is not human. Christians speak of potential persons. But there is a world of difference between potentiality and reality. Everyone is very much alive, while their mortality is potential.

There is a hierarchy when it comes to giving respect to a potential person. It becomes a person when it becomes real. But its reality is pending, since it is potential. It is just a scholastic, Thomistic sophism. The potential person is missing something, which keeps it from becoming

a real person, namely, humanity.

Sperm is not a person, neither is an ovum or an embryo. Humanity emerges in a person not through its (human) form, but in its (human) relation to the world. Mere existence in the world is not enough. Cockroaches also exist in the world. There must be a connection, an interactive relationship, a link to tangible reality.

Above all, a being's humanity requires at least a basic capacity to perceive the world, to feel it, to have sensual apprehension. To have this, one must have a degree of nervous system development. The first days and weeks are not enough time for the aggregate of matter and cells to come together to render it more than something other than life without personal reality. The brain must be able to have two reactions to stimuli: the capacity to feel pleasure and the capacity to experience suffering. This is the foundation of Hedonism. Scientifically, this anatomical possibility shows itself around the twenty-fifth week of fetal development. That is the time that the person emerges from the nothing and enters into humanity, even though it had been alive since the spermatozoid first met the ovum.

Then, much later, an individual's humanity is defined through the combination of a consciousness of self, other, and the world. It is further defined by interactions between self and self, self and other, and self and reality. Whoever loses sight of what he is, what others are, and what the world is abandons his humanity, even if they remain alive. But what precedes humanity and what comes after it do not carry the same ontological weight: a neutral embryo weighs less than a corpse saturated in memory, affection, and history.

In the stages before and after the emergence of humanity, all human actions are ontologically justified and legitimate. Before it, there may be genetic selection, embryonic treatment, sorting, contraception, abortion, and transgenesis. After it, as in the case of cerebral death, artificially prolonged life, and an exceedingly long coma, we may opt for euthanasia and organ donation.

Neuronal Identity

These are the novel worlds: constructing a new body out of exterior elements; mixing together the animal and the human; artificializing nature

and transgressing it with surgery and genetics; abolishing the Christian flesh; distinguishing the nomadic body and the critical body, the sickly ideal body and the healthy materialist and vitalist body, the atomic body and the Dionysian body. These are what it would take for an expansion of the body, for the de-Christianization of the flesh, for the transcendence of humanity, for the creation of a metaphysics of artifacts. In this new metaphysical field, how do we define identity? Where is it found? What is it?

Theseus's paradox furnishes a response: the Greeks piously preserved their hero's boat. To repair the wear and tear on the wood, they changed one plank, and then another, and then more and more. They still venerated the boat even after they had replaced every plank of the original. When did it stop being the original boat? With the first piece of wood replaced? The second? The last? Exactly half?

Let us change the casuistry: we can cut off a man's leg, and then the other, and then an arm and the other arm, and he does not cease to be. We can remove an ill organ from him and replace it with another one—a heart, a liver, a lung—and he remains himself. We can even graft a new face onto him if his is somehow lost, ruined, burnt, mutilated, or otherwise harmed. He still remains himself. So when does he lose his identity?

Leibniz provides a useful fable in response to this: he imagines transplanting the brain of a shoemaker into the head of a king, and vice versa. After the operation, who would know how to repair shoes? The one with the body of a cobbler and the brain of a sovereign? Or the other way around? Which one would be able to attend to matters of State? The flesh of the powerful man and the grey matter of the old boot maker? Or vice versa?

In the era of German philosophy, this fable was merely a thought experiment, but today it can almost be a laboratory reality. Brain transplants are feasible, and quadriplegics may one day disappear when neural grafts are made possible with the aid of cell transplants that reconstitute the physiological conditions of neural integrity.

In light of this example, we can make a conclusion: we are our brain. We can change everything else, or almost everything. All those modifications change our bodily schema, but the brain, in fact, is what reconstructs and reappropriates this new image. It's not possible for another brain to impede it from going through these reconfiguring operations.

Our brain is the site of memory and habits; it's where neuronal

formatting occurs in small infants and in adolescents; it contains all habitus, all memories, and the factors needed even to recognize faces and places; it stores up everything so that we don't have to learn the most basic, banal, or elementary functions again every time that we do them. All the traces of individual and collective time get folded into it. Language is wrapped in it, as well as culture. Our entire body then encloses it, manages it, lives for it, contains it. It is thus the site of identity, the fundamental element of being. All else follows it.

The Pedagogy of Death

How do we broach the subject of death in regard to this Faustian or Promethean body? For centuries, religion tried to answer the problem of death. Their answers are well known. Once mythology no longer satisfies even those who are still committed to the scraps of such children's stories, what ontological solutions are there to this cardinal terror? Must we fall back, conspiratorially, on creating gods and heavens?

Theology must give way to philosophy; Christianity must efface itself so that more ancient wisdoms—chiefly Stoic and Epicurean—can have their say. Thus, we support voluntary death: necessity exists, but there is no obligation to live according to necessity, and one is free to choose to abandon life of one's own volition. Our body belongs to us and we can use it according to our understanding; an existence is judged not by its duration, but by its quality; it is better to die well than to live badly; we must live only as long as we must, not as long as we can; a good death that is chosen is worth more than a (bad) life that is merely submitted to.

In light of the ancient teachings, euthanasia is part of a lineage running from the Stoic Colonnade to Postmodernism's desire for sovereignty. By contrast, the Judeo-Christian calls for palliative care, which brings up old religious tools: salvific suffering; redemptive pain; death as a passage demanding permission and reconciliation with one's entourage, the only thing keeping you from the serenity and inner peace that will allow you to be comfortable *after* death; and agony as the existential Stations of the Cross. Would you prefer Seneca's suicide or the Passion of the Christ? The choice is easy.

Recourse to ancient pagans also allows us to confront death, which we cannot master. Twenty-three centuries later, Epicurus's argument

maintains its force: Death should not be feared, because when it arrives you are no longer around. In the same way, as long as you are around, death is not. Death should really not concern us at all. For my part, I wouldn't say *at all*, but it concerns us only as an idea.

Epictetus distinguishes between that which depends on us (and on which we must act) and that which does not depend on us (which we must learn to love). We can extrapolate from this valuable idea: We are powerless because we must die one day, so deal with it. On the other hand, we can act on the reality of death, which Epicurean reasoning shows us is always just an idea, a representation. So let us act on this representation: It's not here yet, so we should not give it any due before its time. We can show contempt for it by activating all the forces that resist it—the forces of life. We should live it fully, completely, voluptuously.

Materialism leads to serenity. Death entails the dismantling of any conditions for enjoying or suffering. Thus, there is nothing to fear about death. Yet its effects precede it: it terrorizes us with the thought of what awaits us. But there is no need for this negativity. It will come in a single moment, which will be quite sufficient. The most important thing is to not die while living, not to have a living death—which is precisely what happens to many people who have never learned to live and therefore have never truly lived.

PART VI

LIBERTARIAN POLITICS

SIXTEEN

Mapping Poverty

Liberal Imperialistic Logic

Two centuries after the French Revolution, as an extraordinary marker of the bicentenary, the Berlin Wall toppled—torn down between the East and the West. The pope had nothing to do with it, nor did Western leaders, still less European intellectuals. The drive behind it came not from the outside, but from the inside. The Soviet system did not explode; it imploded like a machine whose internal parts had corroded. Falsely revolutionary—neither socialist nor communist—and wholly totalitarian and bureaucratic, the Soviet Union and its empire collapsed because it was not dialectical, that is, it failed to appreciate the lessons of History.

This event is just like the fall of many of the police states, military juntas, and fascist dictatorships in the twentieth century. Though it was allegedly founded in the name of the people and leftist principles, the Soviet regime was, for more than sixty years, comparable to Hitler's and Mussolini's military dictatorships. After so many years in power, what remains? Nothing—a country in disarray, crippled by mass poverty, deeply traumatized, bled to pallor over many generations. There has been zero literary, philosophic, cultural, artistic, or scientific production worth any mention. In short, it was an unmitigated catastrophe.

The Western opponent won without even showing up for battle. What was the outcome of the Cold War? The winner replaced Soviet poverty with liberal poverty. Of course, prison camps closed and the markets opened, but there were more important changes: prostitution became more widespread; dirty money rules everything; the strength of the mafia increased; hunger rose; there is mass homelessness; the only consumers are elites produced by the markets; the logic of consumerism dominates; there is rampant international arms dealing, ethnic wars, and

the brutal suppression of terrorism; power is recycled by those once in the secret service, military, and police. All over the world, Marx and Tocqueville are considered nuisances.

In our time, it seems that liberalism is the one horizon we cannot go beyond. Just as in the once flourishing Soviet system, it has its intellectuals, guard dogs, and idiots who serve it. The media is full of countless supporters of America, despite the way it violates international rights, flouts the rules of war, denies human rights, scorns global legal conventions, floods the world with violent acts unaccountable to high courts, and supports regimes that have been condemned by human rights associations.

In the United States, some have even declared nothing less than the end of History![1] What else could we imagine after the global triumph of American liberalism? The world has become One, and no viable alternative has arrived to hold the victor accountable. When History realizes itself through its own conclusion, what remains is to ruminate on the winner, to erect temples to him, to celebrate his glory, and to collaborate with him.

Then what? 9/11 proved that History continues. Like Diogenes's reply to Zeno,[2] 9/11 demonstrated the futility of arguments denying the movement of History. The destruction of the symbolic World Trade Center attested to that. And what a result! We were soon to find out how History continues to move in the tidy form of a new enemy of the liberal West: Political Islam, which, in its way, unites those left behind by the arrogance of the Western market. Fighting promises to be rough against this enemy who carries God in his back pocket and believes that death in battle instantly opens the door to a sweet, opulent, and definitive paradise.

It has been clear for a long time what side Europe has chosen. The governmental socialist Left has ideologically supported the liberal conqueror's troops. It feigns arrogance, inventing a verbal resistance meant to hide its actual collaboration. Moreover, the Right has no problem claiming its natural territory. Democracy is long dead. All we find anymore, in France and Europe, is oligarchy in the first sense of the term: rule by a minority, whether the Right or the Left, who share the same dogmas about the free market and the excellence of liberalism. Thus, contemporary Europe is a useful link in the chain of a future global government.

In France, rallies are now pointless. There could be no directory large

enough to list all the former Maoists, Trotskyites, Situationists, Althusserians, Marxist-Leninists, and other activists of 1968 who have renounced old ideals and converted and rendered services to liberalism in its most strategic sectors—business, journalism, media, publishing, obviously politics, banking, and so on. We know their names and about their careers, their journeys, and their self-importance. In their stubborn arrogance, they lecture today with the same unchanged aplomb that they had thirty years ago. What's the difference now? Today they praise what they once mocked from the mouths of their parents!

Yet there is still and always a Left that has not betrayed itself and has stayed faithful to the ideals it had before it enjoyed power. It still believes that the socialist ideas that were valid before May 10, 1981, are still valid, as well as those of Jaurès, Guesde, Allemane, and Louise Michel.[3] Of course, they have to be reformulated, tightened up, and passed through postmodernity's sifter. But that only makes them more active and operational; it does not take away from their substance. Public sovereignty, defending the poor and the outcast, the common good, social justice, protecting minorities—all of these remain defensible ideals.

Evidently, this *Left that remains on the Left* is called not a *true Left* (*gauche de gauche*), but rather an *extreme Left* (*gauche de la gauche*), or in other words, *leftist*. One suspects that this semantic trick is organized by liberals concerned with discrediting the ideas of the Left and turning them back into immature and irresponsible cerebral utopias. Those people think like the right wing, defend right-wing ideas (the law of the market as an unsurpassable horizon), live like the right wing, socialize in the right-wing world, and speak to the Left in ways that dissimulate (from themselves) the radicality of their denial. They say, "I have not changed so much. Look, I still vote for the Left!" Sure, but what Left? To such people, anyone who speaks of the People is a populist; anyone who talks about Democracy is a demagogue.

When will we admit the sources of our national hopelessness, as well as the sources of the last quarter century's tendency to vote for the extreme Right? It's because of these denials; it's because of the reigning Left's defection to the liberal enemy, this oligarchy that uses the media to intellectually terrorize any champion of realistic leftist ideas, this renouncement of sovereignty followed by a provision for a third-party authority (the United States or Europe); and it's because of the failure of the elites in charge of the principal values passed down from 1789 (the Nation, the State, the Republic, and France—rallying points for Vichyism,

Pétainism, fascism, and so on).

Inconvenient Poverty Versus Tidy Poverty

French Intellectuals speak poorly of Billancourt.[4] What is Billancourt? you might ask. It represents a working class that doesn't exist like it used to—the one Simone Weil wrote about in *The Working Condition*, the one Sartre dedicated so many dense pages to in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the one Camus dedicated his *Notebooks* to. Billancourt is the new version of these kinds of poverty that Pierre Bourdieu analyzed, laid bare, and dissected in *Weight of the World*. It is something more. It consists of secretaries and caretakers, farmers and the unemployed, small-business owners and public school teachers, people from the outskirts and immigrants, single mothers and menial laborers, nightclub bouncers and part-time performers, laid-off steel workers and those whose unemployment benefits have run out, temporary and full-time community police—people who have been forgotten by politicians, victims of liberal violence, people left to fend for themselves by consumerist society.

Must we blame Bourdieu if he does not discover some secret about that poverty? Must we make a scapegoat of the man who gave a voice to those forgotten people? Must we drag his name, work, honor, methods, career, and reputation through the mud, as was done by almost every journalist and their intellectual friends? They kept it up until the hour of his death. I said what I thought of their garbage in *Obituary for Pierre Bourdieu: A Celebration of the Splenetic Spirit*.

They cry, "Down with those who hold up a mirror!" But we do not call out those responsible for the state of affairs—this widespread poverty. Rather, we spare them; we avoid mentioning them or naming them. Then we raise a hue and cry when someone carries out the work of an engaged intellectual and philosopher, a sociologist who talks about the problems, identifies them, formulates them, and appeals to the testimonies of the faceless and nameless victims. "Damn him who does not collaborate, who resists!" We set on him like dogs that will stop at nothing to discredit, refute, and lie—just like Jean Kanapa in his finest moments.[5]

So let's ignore the smelly peasants selling newspapers and those we

step over in the street on our way back home. Instead, let's take a plane to Tehran, Kigali, Sarajevo, Algiers, Baghdad, or Grozny—those models of tidy poverty where we can send news reports while standing between two five-star hotels. Then, three days later, we can read lessons about humanism, human rights, and international politics in the columns of newspapers that welcome these reports into their pages out of professional habit, like some other professionals open their legs. What about Billancourt? Too lower class, too trivial, too provincial…

Poverty is in the background, in our cities, and all over the world, so we can orient ourselves in the world like Malraux,[6] dedicating our bodies, talents, and energies to chronicling the conditions of the world. We can convert that poverty to hard cash by turning ourselves into a valuable commodity in publishing, syndication, and the marketplaces of worldly, sensational, and media-savvy intelligence. Marx tried to warn the greenhorns that history unfolds according to a merciless law: tragedy repeats itself, for sure, but as comedy. René Char and George Orwell did not get their material out of nowhere.

In *Rebel Politics* I describe a new kind of hell using the image of the ditches in *The Divine Comedy*. There are the *enervated and physically incapable*: the elderly, the insane, the ill, the incarcerated; *the unable*: immigrants, illegals, political refugees, the unemployed, menial laborers, migrant workers; *those exploited by society, nomads, and the unsure*: contract workers and apprentices; and the *sedentary but unfree*: adolescents, wageworkers, prostitutes, proletarians, part-time workers. These are the millions of people excluded from society and left out by purportedly democratic logic. The oligarchs don't want to acknowledge the existence of those who are proof of the waste of a system working in full order, so they are banned from visibility. They are never represented, never called on, always marginalized. They are invisible within culture, politics, literature, television, media and publicity, film, reporting, academia, and publishing. The oligarchs are incensed by any pushback from them, and they authorize any means to annihilate them, impede them, or break them down. This includes radically immoral solutions.

So this suffering part of the population is negated, and lights are put on the tidy poverty of the third world. Our intellectuals lose their connection to society, and we deny the inconvenient poverty in our own backyards. The leftist government has fallen apart and there has arisen a tendency toward libertarian liberalism in which we observe plenty of liberalism, but very little libertarianism. These conditions lead to three

possibilities: abstention from politics and voting; the refuge-seeking vote in the most idealistic protestors; and the growth of the nebulous extreme right wing. Denying inconvenient poverty brings a return of repressed nihilism.

Micrological Fascism

We are no longer in the age of the helmeted, armed, and jack-booted fascist; but at least that formula had the advantage of being visible. Its exploitation played out in the street, commissariats, military academies, the media, universities, and other sites of civil society. We no longer see any lawless coup d'états coming out of beer gardens, aided by a column of tanks and a troop of elite soldiers. While the United States acted like old-fashioned fascists in their handling of Latin America at the end of the twentieth century, and certain African countries continue to act in this way, fascism generally no longer manifests so crudely. The *fascism of the lion* has given way to the *fascism of the fox*, and this needs to be analyzed.

The fascism of the lion was first. It was banal, classical, chronicled in history books, built on the supposition of a mystical national community that visibly ingests and digests individuals for the profit of a mystical national body: Race, People, Nation, Reich. Under such rule, private life disappears within the athanor of the all-powerful collectivity. Propaganda invades every area of life and makes people read, think, eat, dress, and behave in a clear, determined, and singular manner. Every alternative discourse is made difficult, censured, maligned, and essentially prohibited. Reason counts for nothing. It is presented as an element of decadence, a rotting ferment. One prefers the national instinct, popular drives, and the irrational energy of the masses riled up through impassioned speeches and the media's techniques of subjection. Such pure unreason requires a charismatic leader, a great organizer around which the movement can crystallize.

Then we have the fascism of the fox. It learns from the past, constructing formal structures and symbolic revolutions. Liberalism is fluid, which is precisely how it gets its power. Coups are not popular: they are too visible and too indefensible in this era of global media dominion over images. Coups are the wrong kind of thing…Hence, we put aside

the Machiavellian lion's violence in favor of the fox—part of the same bestiary, but celebrated for its cleverness, cunning, and knavery. The lion uses the power of the army; the fox the force of subtle schemes.

In terms of content, things have changed very little. It is still about reducing diversity into unity and getting individuals to submit to a community that transcends them. We still use magic thinking and instincts more than reason. There is still intimidation and we still justify terror by calling it a fight against enemies we have turned into scapegoats. Our bodies are not really constrained, but our minds are dominated. Our flesh is not mistreated, but our spirit is pummeled. We don't step away from the group; our minds are told not to think, or to think more. Nothing is new, and if it is, we repackage it.

The enterprise is validated by its own success. In the areas now under liberal domination—the territory of Maastrichtian Europe, for example—publishing and the press serve up the same insipid broth. The politicians in power on the Left and Right defend the same program, orchestrating false differences as a spectacle. The dominant way of thinking celebrates the thought of those who dominate. The market has power over every area—education, health, and culture, of course, but also the army and the police. Parties, syndicates, and parliaments join in an oligarchy that reduces social issues to a oneness. We discredit public use of critical reasoning in favor of irrational logics of communication—cleverly theatricalized and choreographed by monopolistic financial consortiums. Every day the lives of the masses are manipulated by a use of television that gathers people in. Every constructive project is halted for the benefit of a consumerist religion. And so on.

The fox's fascism is micrological because it manifests in subtle and tiny moments. As Michel Foucault taught us, power is everywhere. It is in the intervals, interstices, and gaps of reality: here, there, outside, on the tiny surfaces, in the narrow spaces. The fox's cleverness produces thousands of effects in a single day.

La Boétie taught us another magnificent lesson: In *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* he argues that all power unfolds with the consent of those who are subject to it. This kind of microfascism does not descend from on high, but propagates like a rhizome with the help of passersby—perhaps each one of us—who become like electric conductors of its negative energy. We have to recognize this before we can build a logic of resistance. When we know where to find alienation, how it works, and where it comes from, we can finally have some optimism about what is to

come.

SEVENTEEN

Hedonist Politics

Splenetic Libertarian Spirit

Where is the Left? It is an appropriate question, but there is something more fundamental about it. When was it born? How do we find it? What defines it? What battles does it pick? What does its history look like? Who are its great figures? What are its watershed events? What are its failures, limits, and blind spots? Of course there is Socialism, Communism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, and Bolshevism, but what is there in common between Jaurès and Lenin? Stalin and Trotsky? Mao and Mitterrand? Saint-Just and François Hollande? *Theoretically*, they share a desire to eliminate poverty, wretchedness, injustice, and the exploitation of the many by a handful of the wealthy. *Practically*, we have the French Revolution, 1848, the Commune, 1917, the Popular Front, May 1968, and Paris from 1981 to 1983.[1] Yet, also under the auspices of the "Left" were the Terror of 1793, the Gulag, the Kolyma, and Pol Pot. There is its history—a mixture of death drives and life drives.

What is the spirit of the Left? If you look only at its manifestations in the history of France, you would find the *legal equality* of citizens in 1789, including Jews and non-Jews, men and women, blacks and whites, rich and poor, Parisians and provincials, nobles and commoners, men of letters and artisans; the *social fraternity* of workers, such as public housing and universal employment in 1848, and the forty-hour workweek and paid leave in 1936; and *expanded liberties* for the great number of people who once tended the barricades of May 1968. The energy that runs through these three centuries makes up what I call a *mystique of the Left*. It's an architectonic force that either you feel in yourself or you don't, and to which either you adhere or you don't. It comes less from a rational deduction than from an epidermal self-orientation. Here again, existential

psychoanalysis can make some sense of the presence of this wind in oneself or its absence.

Leftist Nietzscheism

I take leftist Nietzscheism as the high point of the splenetic spirit of the twentieth century. The religious establishment has always associated Nietzscheism with right-wing thinking. Many of the uninformed assume that Zarathustra must appear as a blond Aryan with blue eyes, taking at face value the texts that were tampered with by his Nazi sister. Read his body of work and you will never again be mistaken about this slayer of the State, this frenzied anti-anti-Semite, he who shit on the Reich, this enemy of military violence. A Nazi? He's not even a traveling companion on the path of National Socialism.

From the very start, historiography has ignored the existence of a leftist Nietzscheism. But it is there in *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Human, All Too Human*, and in *The Dawn*, which lay out his surprising connection to leftist thinking. In them we find a radical critique of every Judeo-Christian ascetic ideal, and violent attacks on the Catholic Church—this is good news to advocates of anticlerical freethinking. We find a fundamental critique of work itself—labor as a social construct that inhibits the will to freedom that is consubstantial with man—which should please those who fight for the shortening of the workweek and those who refuse to turn the compulsion to labor into a virtue. We find a critique of the family and the bias toward monogamy, and thus of the logic of engendering, which should please those who want a more encompassing freedom. We find, already, a critique of that which was not yet called "consumerist society," but which already showed signs of fetishization and object-religion, which should delight militant supporters of Zero Growth.[2] We find a critique of the State, along with a praise of the power of individuals, which should please the individualist tradition of libertarian leftism. We find a critique of nationalism, which should win the votes of internationalists. We find a critique of anti-Semitism and a praise of the Jewish spirit, which will please the supporters of Dreyfus,[3] then and now. We find a critique of capitalism, liberalism, and the bourgeoisie, to please the leftist voter. We find a criticism of enrichment through capital and the suggestion to nationalize all sectors, such as transport and commerce so as not to

produce profits that are too large or too rapid and that would harm public security and the good of the poor—a decisive rallying point.

Gystrow initiated leftist Nietzscheism in Germany, Eugène de Roberty in Russia, and Bracke-Desrousseaux, Daniel Halévy, and Charles Andler in France. Jaurès wasted no time jumping on board. In Geneva in 1902, the socialist tribune drew on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to celebrate the aristocratization of the masses and the identity of the proletariat with the overman. Nothing became of those conferences, except the press that they garnered. This was the first generation—before World War I, when Nietzsche was transformed into the Super-German.

During the abattoir of 1914–1918, a second generation purged the philosophy of all hints of responsibility. The College of Sociology returned to the texts and interrogated Nietzsche to make sense of the times and to fight against European fascism—Roger Caillois, Michel Leiris, and Georges Bataille, who, after World War II, led a superb rehabilitation of Nietzsche, the once hated author of *Ecce Homo*.[4] In 1937 the Marxist and Nietzschean loose cannon Henri Lefebvre wrote an unfortunately ignored synthesis of these two philosophies, titled *Nietzsche*, which was published two years later. A third generation put Nietzsche back on the scene in Royaumont:[5] Deleuze, author of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* in 1962, and Foucault. The work of those two and others after May 1968 did not exhaust the Nietzschean spirit. There is room for a fourth generation.

Some structures seem necessary for applying this leftist Nietzschean logic in today's world. I believe these structures should be libertarian. We take little notice of the leftist libertarian tradition in the history of political thought. When it comes up, we appeal to a historiography that has frozen the history of anarchism into a series of negligible clichés. Its chronology, great figures, books, acts, stories, and heroic positions—all of these are like the catechism in the hands of militants: they employ it religiously and immoderately.

Is William Godwin a founding father?[6] That remains to be seen…Did Proudhon invent it? His thought goes well beyond it, but it is also inferior to it since it does not do away with a number of things that contradict the libertarian spirit: misogyny, anti-Semitism, warmongering, and deism. Stirner? Really? He whose *Ego and Its Own* served as Mussolini's breviary? And who can, with book in hand, claim that this was due to a misinterpretation? Do we look to Bakuninian anti-Marxism? On the surface, and judging from personal quarrels, it seems to dominate the

current political climate, but its roots are not so deep. Outside of these, what link is there between Ravachol's murders and the gentle pedagogical communities of Sébastian Faure?[7] These disparate anarchists need a red thread to connect them.

Here again, we should think dialectically when taking lessons from history and readjusting theory in light of practice. Of course, Kropotkin meant something to candle-lit czarist Russia, but not necessarily to digital postmodern Europe.[8] These days, militant liberals look to the anarchist corpus like a Christian looks to the Church Fathers: they look at them like a child looks upon their grandfather with veneration and respect. They want the candles of the nineteenth century to illuminate our present era.

I hope to connect my work to what is still missing in the pages of anarchist history published these days—those that integrate May 1968 and after. I'm not necessarily concerned with the acts themselves, but rather with the ideas that produce them, accompany them, and result from them: hence, the need to reconsider Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*, Raoul Vaneigem's *Treatise on the Good-Life: For the Use of Younger Generations*, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*. These writers do not necessarily stake out a libertarian position, but their work helps us analyze contemporary anarchism better than the archives of Jean Grave, Han Ryner, or Lacaze-Duthiers.

Finishing May 1968

What is the aim of such libertarian thinking? It is to finish May 1968. But not like one would with a sick animal. Rather, in the sense of *completing* it: to complete a piece of work not yet accomplished. Because May's spirit provides us with an important and necessary moment of negativity: the metaphysical revolution that happened—not the political one—radically changed the relationship between beings. They swept clean the places where the hierarchy located all intersubjectivity: the power of divine right crumbled out of the relationship between parent and child, husband and wife, professor and student, young and old, boss and workman, head of State and citizens. Everyone was put on an equal ontological footing.

The destruction struck many areas without distinction: schools,

factories, offices, studios, bedrooms, households, universities, and many others. The negativity indiscriminately conquered those things that structured the ancient world: authority, order, hierarchy, power. Coercion was dispelled, prohibitions abolished, and desire liberated. But for what? To produce what? Without alternative values, the will to dismantle the old world only manifests as negativity, which paradoxically feeds contemporary nihilism.

Political power has killed the Father—ancestors, old republican law, History incarnate in the person of General de Gaulle—but only to offer its power to a creature of a lesser order. Pompidolism united the Right, reassured investors, restored order for the sake of the banks, for progress, and for modernity.[9] We left a metaphysical shambles to the ’68ers, and then we built Beaubourg out of concrete on the banks of the river and prepared a place for Giscardism, soon to be reincarnated in Mitterrand, who would just recycle all the old leftists.[10] The adventure ended.

Since May 1968, no new value has seen the light of day. It seems like twilight has fallen on morality. We have rejected the morality of our daddies and the civic instructions of our granddaddies. We have mocked many pillars of ethics and criticized old principles like obedience, learning, reputation, and law. We have laughed in the presence of old jewels like the Nation, State, Republic, Right, and France. And one day, while watching television, we discovered that our era has the haggard look of a hangover.

Let’s be done with this miserable state of affairs. Let’s aim for a Gramscian reconquest of the Left—the Left that died from renouncing its ideas and selling itself to the highest bidders who could help it enjoy presidents’ palaces and positions of power within the Republic. There are ideas out there to help us resolve contemporary problems that face the Left in the areas of ethics, politics, and economics.

EIGHTEEN

A Practice of Resistance

The Revolutionary Transformation of Individuals

Nobody believes anymore in Blanqui's method of insurrectional revolution. Even liberal capitalism has renounced the coup d'états theorized by Malaparte.[1] There is zero credence in the Marxist idea that changes to the economic infrastructure automatically lead to modifications of ideological superstructures. Collective and violent appropriation of the means of production doesn't change anything: ideology originates from a logic different from the physiological processes of the modes of production.

Capitalism is fluid. It does not give up its existence or admit defeat without first having recourse to all kinds of tricks and means. We still need to do a history of these metamorphoses: the affection, intimacy, and feelings involved in *paternalist capitalism*; the appeal to grand fetishes—beginning with liberty—in its *hardcore liberal variation*; the convocation of the social fiber in the case of the *social-democrat version*; the brutal crudeness of the *helmeted fascist*; the *consumerist impulse's* seduction by means of desirable objects; *libertarian liberals'* permissive mirage; and the porous and insidious infiltration of *micrological fascisms*. In each case, new packaging and bundling look novel, but the merchandise is the same.

Does this renunciation of insurrection and its possibilities mark the end of all practice? Must we now mourn revolutionary action? Or is there still some hope? And if yes, what form would it take? Is revolution still a defensible ideal? At what costs? To accomplish what? By what means? Aiming at what? How would Blanqui improve our time? Would he still call for a coup d'état that turns against public opinion when a simple trick would suffice to install oneself in power for a long time? Auguste

Blanqui's lessons are not learned from the letters of his texts or in the drama of the barricades, but in the spirit of his existence: he was always aiming for revolutionary results.

Let us dwell for a moment on the notion of revolution: What does it mean these days? We should not understand only its astronomical meaning—that every revolution entails a rotation, of course, but only to return to its point of departure. This is often the way it goes: the Russian revolution abolished czarism, sure, but only to establish a regime even more brutal than the whip of the czars. Such a false change is not desirable; it is illusory, hopeless, and always disappointing.

Revolution no longer consists in radical change, the abolition of the past, or a blank slate. There has never been a way to destroy memory and also build something with merit and duration. Hating the past, History, memory—all symptoms of our degenerate age—leads to mirages, ghosts, and sterile historical periods. Auto-de-fés, the provocations of iconoclasts, burning buildings, and all kinds of vandalism bring us closer to beasts but do nothing for the progress of reason.

So where do we find revolution? In Hegel's logic of the *aufhebung*: conservation *and* sublation. In the dialectical process that allows us to build on the given, the past, history, and memory, driving to go beyond them to generate new possibilities for existence. This dialectic is not a radical rupture, but a handover, a clear evolution into distant horizons. Believing in the progress of human Spirit, we redeem Condorcet's still relevant project,[2] and by doing so we lend this radical spirit the means for considerable advancement.

So what should we do? We should reread La Boétie and reactivate his major thesis: that power can only exist with the consent of those on whom it acts.[3] So what if this consent ends? Power has no locus; it loses hold. The Colossus with its feet stuck in the clay—a central image in the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*—stays standing only through the assent of the exploited people. This friend of Michel de Montaigne wrote the sublime sentence "be resolute in no longer serving, and then you will be free." But nothing changed during the sixteenth century. Liberalism's brutality is only possible with the acquiescence of those who submit to it. If they refuse to collaborate—an important word—the fortress will be reduced to a heap of rubble.

Liberal violence is not Platonic, descending from on high and proceeding from pure ideas. It comes up from the ground, emerges from

the earth, incarnates, and takes human form, entering identifiable paths taken by men with real faces. It exists because of those who contribute to its genealogy and to the perpetuation of this monstrosity. It takes form in places, persons, circumstances, and occasions; it rises up. It is visible, and thus fragile and delicate, achievable, and exposed. Therefore, we can fight it, prevent it, and deny it.

The very nature of microfascisms obliges us to use microresistances. There are so many opportunities to stop the diffusion of dark energy by opposing negative forces with reactive forces. Let us be nominalists: liberalism is not a Platonic essence but a tangible, incarnate reality. We don't fight concepts as we would concrete things. On an immanent terrain, revolutionary action defines itself by refusing to become a conveyor belt for the transmission of negativity.

We must act here and now, not tomorrow or in some bright future. Tomorrow is never today. Revolution does not wait and attend the will of History with a capital *H*. It takes form among the many situations that unfold in the space where we are active: in our families, in our shops, in our offices, in our relationships, in ourselves, in our households, and once a third party is brought into the relationship (that is, children). In short, everywhere. There are no excuses for procrastinating when it comes to what never gets done in the end. What is the place, time, circumstance, and opportunity for revolution? Now. Deleuze called for a *revolutionary transformation of individuals*, recognizing the end of all possible insurrectional revolutions. That invitation remains potent and promising.

Of course, this refusal benefits from not being lonely. Liberal power and domination quickly overwhelm, crush, and replace the isolated rebel. Every divided action leaves itself open to immediate repression. Except in the martyr's vocation, which is useless and counterproductive, heroism without cooperation expends a precious energy in vain. Martyrdom is indeed a permanent resistance, and it is noble to construct our existence so as to prevent its being a cog in a harmful machine; however, in reality, we should cooperate, combine forces, and increase the chances for our ideas to prevail. We should slow down, hold back, impede, and make the machine ineffective and unusable. Inertia is sabotage.

The Partnership of Egoists

Max Stirner, who understood himself through the preservation of his subjectivity and uniqueness, also understood how limited the actions of the Ego are in the face of the powers that be. He who brooked no restriction to the free expansion of his Self, who thought of his *I* like a devotee thinks of his divinity, also took care to invent this powerful idea: *the partnership of egoists*. Of course, he celebrated the absolute freedom of the individual, but he also knew how important it is for that individual not to remain alone. It would be too exposed, too dangerous for his very being.

Since Georges Sorel and his *Reflections on Violence*, we can no longer ignore the role of myths in politics. I'm not talking about fictions, fables, or stories for the mentally slow, but the high ideals and federative utopias that are useful for orienting action. We can demonstrate how the State, the Nation, the Republic, today's Europe, before they became realities, floated around the brains of men who mobilized to act according to these archetypal ideas of reason and in order to create tangible history.

The global government to which liberals from every continent aspire—as long as it has not become a reality—begs an appropriate response. First with the creation of an ideal of reason: the *rhizomatic resistance*. Later with clearly defined objectives: a *hedonist politics*. At that point, there is an end, and a means by which to achieve it. Politics will restore itself not through the creation of great inapplicable systems, but by creating small yet formidable devices that are like grains of sand in the wheelhouse of a perfect machine. Let's bring an end to our rash history and initiate one that is more modest but more effective.

This rhizomatic resistance unfolds on the terrain of the individual—epitomized by the resistant life or the accumulation of moments of resistance—or more widely in collective spaces, among an association of egoists. These spontaneously created, voluntary, and deliberate alternative networks become immediately effective. The agreement to act within these networks is quick, synallagmatic, renewable, and subject to termination at any point. The sum of these forces must expend sufficient energy to preclude inertia and sabotage. As soon as the effect is produced, the association dissolves and disintegrates, and its members disappear into nature.

Thoreau, in *Civil Disobedience*, shows the strength that can be developed in the face of liberal capitalism's mechanical logics. David and Goliath's fight teaches us that there is no need to be bigger than your

enemy; it suffices to be more clever and inventive, smarter and more determined. The combined energies of the Lilliputians were able to defeat the giant Gulliver. By multiplying small ties and spreading a network of small actions, we can create a libertarian fabric that can damage the complicated machine that has been around for so long.

In the realm of concrete politics, these principles inspire joint action. Joint action sets the force of individuals, who are united in a single action, against the syndicates that are swallowed up by the oligarchies they claim to fight. Nomadic, dynamic, and active, they get the better of those well-established crystalizations that are sedentary, static, and intransigent. Joint action can be seen in the social realm. It turns its back on the syndicalism that collaborates with the system, as well as on those who oppose everything systematically without building anything. We don't know how to circumscribe joint actions. Their logic is opaque and they are oblivious to the customary attempts to bribe them. This new formula helps us recuperate the spirit of Fernard Pelloutier and his followers' revolutionary syndicalism.

A Hedonist Politics

What about this employment of resistance could be called hedonist? Can there even be a hedonist politics? If yes, what is it? We have to ask these things because of the habitual discredit heaped on hedonism as a justification for individual and egoistic joys, without the slightest political dimension. Political hedonism's history is not well understood. The lineage from Epicurus at least up to John Stuart Mill, passing through Helvetius and Bentham, attests to the existence of a collective, community dimension.

Marx and Foucault did much damage to Anglo-Saxon Utilitarianism. First, they harmed it for reasons surrounding the intellectual and political power struggles of their time. Second, they harmed it by promoting excessive specialization: Foucault's sole focus on the panopticon, without concern for the project's totality, inspired him to write foolish things about Bentham. Hedonist utilitarianism is much more than a grocer's philosophy or the invention of modern totalitarianism![4] In cleaning up our historiography, we shouldn't spare unexpected characters, including the authors of *Capital* and *The History of Madness*!

It's a funny kind of grocer who pushes for the decriminalization of homosexuality (*Essay on Pederasty*, 1785!), the rights of minorities (women and children), a dignified status for animals who were cruelly tortured as if by executioners, and a humanization of the conditions of incarceration in *Panopticon* (1791). The supposed inventor of totalitarianism also wrote a catalog of the crimes committed by religion (*The Influence of Natural Religion Upon the Temporal Happiness of Mankind*, 1822) and called out the hypocrisy of politicians (*Book of Fallacies*, 1824). In *Deontology*, he subordinated politics to ethics: all hedonist politics is concerned with *the greatest good for the greatest number*. The goal remains valid.

It has nothing to do, therefore, with political liberalism. Anglo-Saxon Utilitarian freedom aims at the same freedom that was desired and constructed during the French Revolution (we can note in passing that the Convention named Jeremy Bentham a French citizen). John Stuart Mill added books that should figure in any libertarian's library, such as *The Subjection of Women* (1869), a superb defense of feminism, and *On Liberty* (1859). Therefore, there is another cause for critique when the dominant historiography tosses the sensibility of political hedonism—a hedonist politics—into the dustbin of history.

Hedonist politics and postmodern libertarianism aim at the creation of distinct sectors, free spaces, and nomadic communities built on the principles laid out. They do not look for national or global revolution, but for moments that escape from the dominant models. Revolution occurs around one's self, proceeding from one's self, integrating individuals with whom we choose to participate in experiences of fellowship. These *elective microsocieties* engage in *microresistances* capable of temporarily disrupting dominant *microfascisms*. The micrological era that we live in compels us to permanent action and perpetual engagement.

Aiming for a better State, a peaceful society, and a happy civilization is a somewhat infantile desire. In the universe of powerful liberal networks, we build concrete utopias, imaginary havens like the Abbaye de Thélème that are timely and reproducible anywhere, for any occasion or under any circumstances.[5] We need nomadic Epicurean Gardens, constructed around ourselves. Wherever we find ourselves, there we should build the world we aspire to and should avoid the one we reject. Is this a minimalist politics? Yes. A wartime politics? Of course. A politics of resisting a more powerful enemy? Clearly. But it is still politics.

Of course, these solutions may at first appear rather weak. In fact,

they are, just as you can speak of weak art. But are these micrological initiatives any weaker than degenerate parliamentary democracy? Than presidentialism constructed upon a media spectacle, a theater of oversized egos? Than universal suffrage in a time of general ignorance? Than the spectacularization of petty politics? Than the professionalization of the political class? Than popular depolitization? Than the permanence of old and obsolete historical schemas? Or are they more or less the same?

The libertarian position proposes an existential practice on all occasions and in all circumstances. Anarchy that wants to create and organize society according to a preestablished model would inevitably result in catastrophe. What is an anarchist society? That is something quite sinister and improbable. On the other hand, libertarian conduct, even within a society claiming to realize anarchy, may be a valid ethical solution. Ethical and therefore political! Because the goal, here and elsewhere, is the same: to create individual or collective moments of real ataraxy and effective serenity.

NOTES

Translator's Introduction

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 120.

2. Ibid., 129.

3. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 178.

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

5. Camus, *The Rebel*, 297.

6. Michel Onfray, *L'ordre libertaire: la vie philosophique d'Albert Camus* (Paris: Grasset, 2012), preface.

7. Alexandre Kojève (1903–1968): An influential Russian émigré who taught a seminar on Hegel from 1933 to 1939, which was attended by Jean-Paul Sartre, Raymond Queneau, Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, André Breton, Jacques Lacan, and Raymond Aron. His interpretation of Hegel was highly idiosyncratic and can be characterized by its conservative bent and emphasis on Hegel's teleological philosophy of history, embodied by the metaphor of the struggle between master and slave. Jean Hyppolite (1907–1968): Along with Kojève, one of the most influential interpreters of Hegel in early-twentieth-century France. His approach to Hegel down-played the aspect of teleological history, instead focusing on Hegel's subtle metaphysics and its existential import.

8. A neologism coined by Derrida connoting a deep and thorough understanding of one's own self.

9. Nicolas Chamfort (1741–1794): A French writer—mostly of witty aphorisms and epigrams—and Jacobin political figure.

10. Allen Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 42. This refers to the famous passage from Plato's *Republic* in which the philosophical searcher is compared to a man inside a cave, with his back to the mouth of the cave, watching shadows dance on the wall. He takes these images to be all that there is, ignorant of the more vibrant world that exists outside of the cave. Gradually, he wanders outside and beholds the sunlit world of truth. This is a parable describing the philosophical journey, in which one trains gradually to understand the metaphysical ground of all things, which remains invisible to empirical vision and can only be grasped by the eye of Reason.

11. Ibid., 30.

12. Jeremy Bentham, *"Nonsense Upon Stilts": Bentham, Burke, and Marx on the Rights of Man*, ed. Jeremy Waldron (London: Methuen, 1987), 46–69.

13. Colin McGinn, "Philosophy by Another Name," *New York Times*, "The Stone" blog, March 4, 2012, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/philosophy-by-another-name/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.

14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 27.

15. J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

16. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 30.

17. Georges Palante, "The Secular Priestly Spirit," trans. Mitch Abidor, September 1, 1909, www.marxists.org/archive/palante/1909/secular-priest.htm.

18. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2007), 15.

19. Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto* (New York: Skyhorse, 2011).

20. Michel Onfray, *La crépuscule d'un idol: l'affabulation freudienne* (Paris: Grasset, 2010).

21. Slavoj Žižek, "Robespierre of the 'Divine Violence' of Terror," www.lacan.com/zizrobes.htm.

Preface

1. One of Virgil's major poems, centered on the theme of agriculture.

2. *Bovarique*: Having the characteristic of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, marked by a feeling of emptiness in provincial life and a longing to transcend it through a romantic and idealized but ultimately self-destructive lifestyle.

3. May 1968 refers to the cataclysmic leftist general strikes in France. Much more on this in subsequent chapters.

4. A geological massif covering much of Northwestern France. It comprises metamorphic and magmatic rock that was metamorphosed or deformed during the Hercynian or Variscan orogenty (400 to 280 million years ago) and the earlier Cadomian orogeny (650 to 550 million years ago).

5. A well-known French story, *Le diable amoreux*, written in 1772 by Jacques Cazotte.

6. Jacques de Voragine (1230–1298): A compiler of biographies of the Christian saints. Uderzo: Creators of the wildly popular *Asterix* comic strip.

7. BEPC: A now obsolete French examination, Le Brevet d'Études de Premier Cycle, taken around age fourteen, covering basic math, French, and history topics.

8. A popular French clarinetist.

9. The talented German filmmaker who became a Nazi propagandist before and during World War II.

10. Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937): A French aristocrat, who was a historian, an educator, and the founder of the International Olympic Committee, and is thus considered the founder of the modern Olympic Games. He was convinced of the benefits of physical education for young people, believing, for example, that the propagation of rugby in England contributed to its imperial success and that the greatness of ancient Greece emanated from its love of sport.

11. *Bob Morane* is a series of adventure books in French created by French-speaking Belgian novelist Henri Vernes, the pseudonym of Charles-Henri Dewisme. More than two hundred novels have been written since his introduction in 1953.

12. "Carrot Head," a long short story published in 1894 by Jules Renard about an unloved young red-headed boy who overcomes all kinds of humiliations and indignities with courage and cleverness.

13. Professor Culculus: The comedic absent-minded professor in *The Adventures of Tintin* books.

14. *Schéhérazade*: A symphonic suite composed by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. *On the Steppes of Central Asia*: A symphonic poem by Alexander Borodin.

15. A French children's song, *À la Claire Fontaine*.

16. An undulating aquatic grass.

17. *Le Pèlerin*: A weekly journal.

18. A French biologist, writer, philosopher, and activist who was influential in the development of cryogenics.

1. A Philosophical Side Path

1. The story of Thales of Miletus, an ancient Greek astronomer who fell into a well while strolling and gazing intently at the stars. The story was originally recorded by Plato in the *Theatetus*. It was later adapted and absorbed into Aesop's Fables. The moral of the fable is that one better keep one's mind on things on earth.

2. Empedocles (495–435 BCE): *On Nature* is a poem that argues that the universe comprises four material elements that are motivated by the forces of Love and Strife.

3. Abderitan atomism refers to the form of atomistic materialism argued by the philosophers of the region of Abdera in Greece, the most famous of whom was Democritus (460–370 BCE).

4. Parmenides (515–540 BCE): His famous poem *On Nature* argues that the universe is made up of a single eternal substance and that all change is only apparent and not real.

5. Milesians were a Greek school of thought founded in the sixth century BCE. Three philosophers were central to it: Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. All of them taught a materialist, scientific style of philosophy in which the universe is composed of observable entities. Ionians were a larger, more diverse group of philosophers also in Miletus, Ionia, in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. They are all considered physicalists who privileged reason over belief. They include Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Archelaus, Hippo, and Diogenes of Apollonia.

6. Chaldeans were ancient Babylonians. Indian gymnosophists, "naked philosophers," were Indian ascetics, not unlike modern Indian sadhus.

7. Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947): An important English philosopher and mathematician.

8. Plato's Socrates put forth a vision of the universe in which reality is split into two realms: What is available to our sense is known as the sensible world. It is illusory, a mere shadow of reality. Reality itself abides as the intelligible world. It is not apparent to the senses but is only accessible through the philosophical training of the soul.

9. A school that promoted pleasure as *the* absolute good. By pleasure, they did not just mean the absence of pain (*ataraxia*), as Epicurus taught; they meant the accumulation of positive sensual and emotional enjoyment.

10. Kant's philosophy posits a bifurcation of reality. The things we see are *phenomena*, and thus they correspond to the entities that populate Plato's sensible world. However, phenomena are not the things-in-themselves; they are emanations of things-in-themselves, which remain forever inaccessible. Those inaccessible building blocks of reality are called *noumena*, and correspond roughly to the Ideas or Forms that populate Plato's intelligible world.

11. This was the aspersion cast at Epicureans, since pigs only look down at the ground, rooting around at the earth rather than looking up to the sky.

2. Bodily Reason

1. *Hapax*: A word or form that occurs only once in a recorded corpus of a language; a singular event. *Kairos*: A Greek term meaning the right or most opportune moment for something.

2. Anacrusis: One or more unstressed notes before the first bar of a piece or passage.

3. Benito Feijóo (1676–1764): A Spanish monk and scholar who criticized superstition and encouraged scientific inquiry.

3. A Philosophical Life

1. The period between Irenaeus and Aquinas: from the second to the twelfth century CE.

2. This refers to the main figure in Rembrandt's painting *Philosopher in Meditation*. The philosopher sits alone in a quiet room.

3. The *Letter to Menoeceus* is one of Epicurus's surviving writings.

4. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is one of Hegel's major works. Like most of Hegel's writings, it is renowned and infamous for its abstract impenetrability, and it may be argued that it fails to provide a clear path of ethics, if any at all.

5. Proust believed that through his introspection, confessional writing, and exploration of emotions he constructs his self, and that self is only one of many possible selves.

6. *For Sainte-Beuve*: A book by José Cabanis (1922–2000) defending the views of Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–1869), a literary critic who argued that to understand a work of literature, it is important to know about the life of the author.

4. An Atheological Morality

1. Hesiod: A Greek poet and contemporary of Homer (circa 750–650 BCE). Oswald Spengler (1880–1936): A German philosopher and historian most famous for his book *The Decline of the West*.

2. This refers to the law decreed by Pope Pius X that created a new lay organization. Pius commanded that all Catholic lay organizations submit to greater ecclesiastical authority or risk censure or excommunication.

3. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937): An important Italian political philosopher imprisoned by Mussolini. He was heavily influenced by Marx and believed that States worked to establish "cultural hegemony" over the people. They do so by controlling discourses; therefore, the opposition must engage in an ideological battle with the State.

5. A Rule of Immanent Play

1. Attributed to Sartre in his lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism" from 1946.

2. A book by Jean-Pierre Changeux, published in 1983.

6. A Hedonist Intersubjectivity

1. Jean-Paul Sartre theorized about a certain kind of person, "the bastard," who knows that he is unethical, but persists in being unethical.

2. The random motion of particles suspended in gas or liquid observed by the botanist Robert Brown in 1827.

3. Vladimir Jankélévitch (1831–1903): An influential Neo-Platonist philosopher known for his abstract subtlety.

7. The Aesthetic Ideal

1. Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (1707–1777): A French novelist; writer of *The Sofa: A Moral Tale*, in which the soul of a young courtier is condemned to inhabit a series of sofas, only being allowed to return to the human realm once two virgin lovers make love upon him.

2. The thirteen books of the New Testament that are attributed to Paul.

8. A Libertarian Libido

1. Neuwirth Law: A law passed in 1967 in France that legalized birth control methods. Veil Law: A law passed in 1975 legalizing abortion.

2. “The Song of la Palice” (in French: “La chanson de la Palisse”) is a burlesque song attributed to Bernard de la Monnoye (1641–1728) about alleged feats of French nobleman and military leader Jacques de la Palice (1470–1525). See Thierry Klein, *Chansons populaires et enfantines* (Paris: La Palisse, 2009). From that song came the French term *la palissade*, meaning an utterly obvious truth, that is, a truism or tautology. The reference in question pertains to the following verses:

Il épousa, se dit-on,	*He married, it is said*,
Une vertueuse dame;	*A virtuous lady;*
S’il avait vécu garcon,	*Had he lived as a bachelor*
Il n’aurait pas eu de femme.	*He would not have had any wife*.
Il en fut toujours chéri,	*He was very fond of her*,
Elle n’était point jalouse;	*She was not at all jealous;*
Sitôt qu’il fut son mari,	*As soon as he was her husband*,
Elle devint son épouse.	*She did become his spouse*.
D’un air galant et badin	*A gallant and playful fellow*
Il courtisait sa Caliste,	*He courted his Caliste*,
Sans jamais être chagrin,	*Without ever feeling sad*
Qu’au moment qu’il était triste.	*Except when he happened to be gloomy*.
Il passa près de huit ans,	*He lived about eight years*,
Avec elle, fort à l’aise;	*With her, well contented;*
Il eut jusqu’à huit enfants:	*He had all of eight children:*
C’était la moitié de seize.	*That is one half of sixteen*.

On dit que, dans ses amours,	*They say that, in his love life*,
Il fut caressé des belles,	*He was caressed by beauties*,
Qui le suivirent toujours,	*Who followed him, always*,
Tant qu'il marcha devant elles ..	*When he walked ahead of them…*

9. Carnal Hospitality

1. Michel Foucault (1926–1984): An extremely important French intellectual, who, among many other things, wrote about sadomasochism in *The History of Sexuality*.

2. Phalanx: A cohort of people, which Fourier thought should be the basic unit of society.

3. *Luxisme*: The human desire for "internal and external luxury," represented by health and wealth with the ensuing satisfaction of the sensual appetites. See Nicholas Valentine Riasanovsky, *The Teaching of Charles Fourier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 41. *Angélicat*: A class of sexual nobility. *Faquirat*: A class charged with providing sexual satisfaction to the elderly. *Unityisme*: This term that "men are naturally inclined to club together in social groups and work together for mutual good, instead of fighting with one another under the system of competition." G. R. S Taylor, *Leaders of Socialism, Past and Present* (New York: Duffield, 1910), 35. *Bayadérat*: Another class with a particular sexual proclivity and function.

10. An Archipelagic Logic

1. The caves of Lascaux contain wall paintings that are approximately 17,300 years old.

2. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762): A German philosopher who held very different views on aesthetics from Kant. Baumgarten emphasized *taste* and the senses, and therefore an inevitably subjective aesthetics. Kant initially objected to this, since it would not be able to isolate objective truths, which Kant always sought.

3. Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002): A renowned French sociologist.

4. Plato's metaphysics posits a dualism of universals and particulars. Particulars "participate" in the universal Ideas or Forms, deriving their ontology from them.

11. A Psychopathology of Art

1. "Situationist" refers to Guy Debord (1931–1994), a founding member of the political group Situationist International (1957–1972), which combined Marxism with the influence of avant-garde art.

2. "Doge" was the title for the chief magistrate of the Republic of Venice. Condottieres were contractors, mercenary soldiers that were influential throughout Italian history.

3. Bouletai were members of the Athenian Boule, or Council of 500, were selected from each deme in proportion to its size. Demes are simple subdivisions of land in the countryside outside of Athens. Prytanea were the executives of the boule.

12. A Playful Art

1. Diogenes is said to have wandered around Athens with a lantern. When asked what he was doing, he said he was looking for an honest man.

2. Jena was a city in central Germany that was the headquarters of many of the nineteenth century's greatest philosophers and intellectuals, including Hegel, Schelling, Schlegel, Schiller, Fichte, and Frege.

3. The *Parmenides* is of Plato's works.

4. "The religion of pure combination" refers to the principles of formalism and structuralism, in which all fields—aesthetic, mathematical, literary, and so on—can be understood as axiomatic systems. For example, in art, this means that the essence of the work is the combination of specific material elements that can be found within it. In this orientation, an artist's motivation or biography and the historical background are extrinsic to the work's essence.

5. *La pure forme*: In this context, it carries the sense of a predicate clause applied to ideal concepts, for example, *la pure forme de l'intelligence*, "the pure form of the intelligence," which is absolute and not contingent on conditions of embodiment. *La forme pure*: This emphasizes Form itself as pure and immaterial.

6. "Singing-saw" refers to the playing of a handsaw with a bow, which produces a weird, ethereal tone.

7. A type of French novel that emerged in the 1950s that generally de-emphasized plot and character and focused on constructing a unique vision of the world's objects. Writers associated with this movement include Alain Robbe-Grillet, Maurice Blanchot, Marguerite Duras, and Georges Perec.

8. The "pope" is Alain Robbe-Grillet.

13. De-Christianized Flesh

1. A charter drafted by the Vatican in 1995 seeking recognition of Catholic values in the healthcare field. It sought to protect Catholic healthcare workers from punishment for conscientious refusal to participate in procedures like abortion or to take part in the distribution of prophylaxis and the like.

2. Monsieur Homais is a major character in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, a bourgeois businessman with great ambition, which he realizes not through personal merit but through relentless sycophancy.

16. Mapping Poverty

1. This refers to the conservative philosopher Francis Fukuyama's book *The End of History*, which takes its title from Hegel's famous idea that the teleological evolution of world history must logically end in a kind of perfect state. Fukuyama saw this as global liberalism.

2. This refers to Zeno's paradox, in which he demonstrates, logically, how motion is impossible. Diogenes's reply is to walk around in front of him.

3. Auguste Marie Joseph Jean Léon Jaurès (1859–1914): A French socialist leader. Initially an opportunist Republican, he evolved into one of the first social democrats, becoming the leader, in 1902, of the French Socialist Party, which opposed Jules Guesde's revolutionary Socialist Party of

France. Both parties merged in 1905 in the French section of the Workers International (SFIO). An antimilitarist, Jaurès was assassinated at the outbreak of World War I. Jules Basile Guesde (1845–1922): Leader of the "intransigent" wing of French socialists, who opposed the reformist policies of Jaurès, whom he denounced for supporting one bourgeois party over another. Jean Allemane (1843–1935): A French socialist politician, veteran of the Paris Commune of 1871, and pioneer of syndicalism. Louise Michel (1830–1905): A French anarchist, schoolteacher, and medical worker.

4. A colony in the southwestern suburbs of Paris.

5. Jean Kanapa (1921–1978): A French intellectual who engaged in virulent ad hominem critiques of Sartre.

6. André Malraux (1901–1976): A prominent writer and member of de Gaulle's cabinet. He is know for such books as *Man's Fate*, about the failed communist uprising in Shanghai in 1927, as well as other books about life in Cambodia and Indochina.

17. Hedonist Politics

1. 1848: Also known as the February Revolution, it ended the Orleans monarchy and led to the creation of the French Second Republic. Marx's book *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* describes the events of this revolution. It also provides the setting for Flaubert's *A Sentimental Education*. The Commune: The Paris Commune of 1871 in which a socialist commune assumed control of the government of Paris and claimed authority over all of France. It culminated in the Bloody Week in which as many as thirty thousand Parisian residents and supporters of the commune were slaughtered by the troops of Napoleon III. 1917: A year of mass army mutinies in France. The Popular Front: An alliance of left-wing movements that won France's elections in 1936. Paris from 1981 to 1983: The first years of François Mitterrand's presidency, in which he tried to implement substantial socialist policies, only to abandon them and become more moderate after 1983.

2. Zero growth is a theory that all economic activities and policies are oriented toward achieving a state of equilibrium, a steady-state economy. The theory asserts that the continuous growth model is inherently unstable, resulting in boom-bust cycles, and that continuous growth in the context of finite resources is unlikely to support current levels of prosperity indefinitely. Proponents of this theory also explicitly challenge the popular equation of economic growth with progress and posit that sustainability has inherent value.

3. This refers to the French political scandal known as the Dreyfus Affair, which took place in the late 1890s and early 1900s. It involved a young Jewish army officer accused of passing secrets to the German embassy in Paris. Progressive groups defended him and the issue of anti-Semitism was central to the case.

4. The College of Sociology: A loosely knit group of important French intellectuals who interacted between 1937 and 1939. They included Georges Bataille, Alexandre Kojève, Walter Benjamin, André Masson, Jean Wahl, and Pierre Klossowki.

5. This refers to an academic conference held in 1964 at Royaumont Abbey, the historical residence of the French monarchs.

6. William Godwin (1756–1836): An English intellectual considered one of the first proponents of Utilitarianism and anarchism.

7. Françoi Claudius Koenigstein, aka Ravachol (1859–1892): A French anarchist who perpetrated three dynamite bombings against members of the judiciary in 1891. Sébastian Faure (1858–1942): A proponent of *synthesis anarchism*, a nonmilitant conception of anarchism in which men and women are given respectful and free environments for working on self-cultivation.

8. Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921): A Russian anarcho-communist who advocated the abolition of central governments in favor of voluntary associations between workers.

9. Pompidolism: The politics of Georges Pompidou, prime minster of France from 1962 to 1968, and president from 1969 until his death in 1974.

10. Beaubourg: A colloquial name for the Centre Georges Pompidou, an important contemporary art museum in Paris. Giscardism: The politics of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, president of France from 1974 until 1981.

18. A Practice of Resistance

1. Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881): A French radical socialist who denied the proletariat's primary role in revolution in favor of a temporary transitional dictatorship by a small group. Curzio Malaparte (1889–1957): The Italian writer of *Coup d'État: Techniques for Revolution*.

2. Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794): A French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist who advocated for a liberal economy, free and equal public education, constitutionalism, and sexual equality. He died in prison during the Reign of Terror.

3. Étienne de la Boétie (1530–1563): A sixteenth-century French judge, writer, and anarchist.

4. Grocer's philosophy: A common, vulgar criticism of Bentham's Utilitarianism, which some claim must lead to an obsession with petty ethical calculations.

5. Abbaye de Thélème, from Rabelais: "All their life was spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure. They rose out of their beds when they thought good; they did eat, drink, labor, sleep, when they had a mind to it and were disposed for it. None did awake them, none did offer to constrain them to eat, drink, nor to do any other thing; for so had Gargantua established it. In all their rule and strictest tie of their order there was but this one clause to be observed, 'Do What Thou Wilt,' because men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an instinct and spur that prompteth them unto virtuous actions, and withdraws them from vice, which is called honor. Those same men, when by base subjection and constraint they are brought under and kept down, turn aside from that noble disposition by which they formerly were inclined to virtue, to shake off and break that bond of servitude wherein they are so tyrannously enslaved; for it is agreeable with the nature of man to long after things forbidden and to desire what is denied us." François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (New York: Knopf, 1994).

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