

Phaenomenologica 220

Alexandru Dragomir

Gabriel Liiceanu
Catalin Partenie *Editors*

The World We Live In

Translated by
James Christian Brown

 Springer

The World We Live In

220

ALEXANDRU DRAGOMIR
THE WORLD WE LIVE IN

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This book has been translated as part of the project of promoting Romanian philosophy implemented by the Romanian Society for Phenomenology with the support of the Romanian Cultural Institute and Volvo—Life-for-Life Foundation. Please visit www.romanian-philosophy.ro.

Paul Balogh checked the English translation in all its stages; his observations and suggestions contributed significantly to its final form.

ISSN 0079-1350 ISSN 2215-0331 (electronic)
Phaenomenologica
ISBN 978-3-319-42853-6 ISBN 978-3-319-42854-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-42854-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016948209

Translation from the Romanian language edition: Alexandru Dragomir, *Crise banalități metafizice*, published by Editura Humanitas, Bucharest © Humanitas, 2004. All Rights Reserved.

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Alexandru Dragomir in the mid 1980s, during one of his lectures
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About the Author

Alexandru Dragomir was a Romanian philosopher, born in 1916. After studying law and philosophy at the University of Bucharest (1933–1939), he left Romania to study for a doctorate in philosophy in Freiburg, Germany, under Martin Heidegger. He stayed in Freiburg for two years (1941–1943), but before defending his dissertation, he was called back to Romania for military service and sent to the front. After 1948, historical circumstances forced him to become a clandestine philosopher: he was known only within a very limited circle, and even his friends did not know whether or not he was writing down his thoughts. He died in 2002 without ever publishing anything. It was only after his death that Dragomir's notebooks came to light. His work has been published posthumously in five volumes by Humanitas, Bucharest. Two of these volumes have been published in French translation by Jean Vrin, Paris, *Banalités métaphysiques* (2008) and *Cahiers du temps* (2010), the latter being the fruit of his lifelong research on the topic of time (to be published in German translation by Königshausen & Neumann, 2017). The journal *Studia Phaenomenologica* has devoted a complete issue to Dragomir (IV, 3–4, 2004), including accounts of his personality and work (in French, German, and English) together with a series of texts by him translated into French and English. In 2009, the Alexandru Dragomir Institute for Philosophy was founded in Bucharest as an independent research institute under the auspices of the Romanian Society for Phenomenology.

Preface

This first volume of the work of Alexandru Dragomir, which marks his posthumous literary debut, brings together some of the lectures that he gave between 1985 and 2000 in Gabriel Liiceanu's house, in the presence of a audience initially consisting, in addition to the host, of Sorin Vieru, Andrei Pleșu and (until 1989) Thomas Kleininger. From 1995, these three were joined by Horia Patapievici and, in 1998–1999, Catalin Partenie (who had known Dragomir since 1987).

Not all the lectures have been preserved. Of the earliest ones, given in 1985–1986, nothing remains but the participants' notes. Those given between 1986 and 1988 were all recorded on magnetic tape by Gabriel Liiceanu, though not all the recordings are now extant. Of those given after 1989, only a very few were recorded on tape, mostly by Sorin Vieru. Of the rest of the lectures, whose number and subject matter can no longer be precisely determined, nothing remains. The lecture 'About the Speck of Dust', given in the spring of 1987, which the two who heard it then—Sorin Vieru and Gabriel Liiceanu—remember as being one of the best of all Dragomir's lectures, is completely lost.

The present volume thus brings together all that has been preserved of these lectures and that could serve as raw material for subsequent working up. By working up, we mean that neither the existing notes nor the audio recordings have been reproduced exactly. Starting from the raw form, the two editors have proceeded to reconstruct the text, with the aim of obtaining a final result as coherent, clear and concise as possible. This reconstruction called for the following types of operation: (1) the elimination of certain redundant or excessively digressive passages; (2) the working up of certain passages, ranging from slight stylistic adjustment to complete reformulation; (3) the combination of certain passages in an order different from the initial one and, at times, the addition of passages further developing an idea and in the spirit of Alexandru Dragomir's thinking; and (4) the identification and checking of certain quotations and the exact indication of their sources.

In reconstructing the text, we have in a number of cases used the notes Dragomir made when preparing the lecture in question. The reconstruction has deliberately kept the colloquial tone of the lectures, together with that direct manner of attacking

a problem that reproduces the impression of ‘raw thinking’ characteristic of their author.

Like any thinker, Dragomir keeps returning to certain ideas. Thus, on several occasions, readers will meet, in new formulations, ideas with which they have already been familiarized.

All our interventions in the raw material of the lectures are mentioned in detail in the explanatory note that precedes each text.

The reconstruction of the first part of the volume was made by Gabriel Liiceanu and that of the second part by Catalin Partenie. The lectures in the two parts of the volume have been arranged on a chronological basis.

One lecture included in the Romanian edition, on the play *The Lost Letter* by the nineteenth-century Romanian writer Ion Luca Caragiale, has been omitted from this volume as it presupposes a good knowledge of the play, a well-known text in Romania but unfamiliar to non-Romanian readers.

We would like to thank Cristian Ciocan, the Romanian Cultural Institute and the Romanian Society of Phenomenology: without their generous support this English translation would not have been possible. We would also like to thank James Christian Brown, for his accurate translation, and Paul Balogh, whose pertinent comments and suggestions contributed significantly to the final form of this translation. Last but not least, we would like to thank the editorial team at Springer, especially Dr Cristina Alves dos Santos and Anita van der Linden-Rachmat, for their interest and support.

Bucharest, Romania

Gabriel Liiceanu
Catalin Partenie

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The Notebooks from Underground

Gabriel Liiceanu

On 15 June 1944, a postcard from Freiburg arrived at number 45 Strada C.A. Rosetti, Bucharest, addressed to Alexandru Dragomir. On it was a single sentence, followed by 11 signatures: *Lieber Sänduc, verdient haben Sie einen Gruß nicht, darum viele Grüsse.* ('Dear Sänduc,¹ you don't deserve a *single* greeting, so here are *many* greetings.') One of the signatures was Heidegger's; the others were those of the doctoral students with whom Heidegger customarily drank red wine at the end of each semester in the *Zum Roten Bären* pub—'the oldest in Germany' according to the caption on the postcard, which shows an imposing bear and above it the year from which the Red Bear pub had functioned without interruption: 'erected around 1120'. The card had been posted on 16 May 1944 (so it had taken a month to arrive), and it is easy to imagine how it had been passed from hand to hand around the long table of varnished oak, gathering the signatures of those ten young people, few of whom could have been much over the age of 25, and their professor, who, at 55, was at the height of his university career. 'I wonder what Sänduc's up to?' one of them had called across the table. Or perhaps Heidegger himself, taking out the black notebook in which each member of his doctoral seminar was listed, had asked: '*Und Herr Dragomir? Haben Sie Nachrichten von Ihm?*' Is there any news of Mr. Dragomir? Obviously there was none.

The Start of the Race: From Transylvania to the Old Kingdom and on to Freiburg im Breisgau

Alexandru Dragomir had left Heidegger's seminar, and thus ceased to be a part of the *Zum Roten Bären* ritual, 6 months earlier, in October 1943. He had clearly been very dear to his colleagues and especially appreciated by Heidegger himself, whose

¹A diminutive form of Alexandru. [Trans.]

seminar reports (*Scheine*)—carefully preserved among Dragomir’s papers as traces of his passage through a world that in time had become unreal—record each time that the doctoral student had participated in such and such a ‘seminarial exercise’ *mit großem Fleiß und ausgezeichnetem Erfolg*, ‘with great enthusiasm and exceptional results’.

Dragomir had arrived in Germany, at the University of Freiburg, in September 1941. He was 25 years old, and had already graduated from two faculties in Bucharest—the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, the former in 1937 and the latter in 1939. He had come to the capital from Cluj, attracted both by the resonant names of the professors of the University of Bucharest, and by the need to get over a certain ‘provincial complex’ which more than a few young Transylvanian intellectuals felt after the creation of Greater Romania.²

Dragomir came from an excellent family of Cluj intellectuals. Both his paternal grandfather, who came from Gurasada, and his maternal grandfather, from the village of Domini, were notaries. The latter was particularly well off. He owned a veritable country estate, with vineyards spread over the hillsides, a large orchard, and a tennis court in the garden. When the young Sănduc came with his brother Virgil (‘Bubu’), his elder by 1 year—later a professor at the Polytechnic—, to spend vacations there, at Domini, a carriage would be waiting for the children at the station. Not long after the birth of the two boys, their father, Alexandru Dragomir, was appointed advocate to the Central Bank in Cluj, and a few years later he became head of the Cluj Bar. Sănduc’s uncle, his father’s brother, was the well-known historian Silviu Dragomir. His mother (‘Maya’, as her husband called her in his letters) was heir to her family’s property, so in 1940, when Transylvania was partitioned after the Vienna Diktat and many Romanians from Cluj took refuge in the south, the Dragomirs were well able to buy two apartments in Bucharest: that at 45 Strada C.A. Rosetti (where the whole family, the parents and their two children, were to live for a while, and where the postcard from Freiburg was to arrive), and another at three Strada Arcului, in his mother’s name, which was to become Dragomir’s home from 1974.

The young Alexandru, who had received his high school education between 1926 and 1933 at the University Pedagogical Seminary in Cluj, where he was graded ‘exceptional’ in Romanian, Latin, Greek, French, German, History, Physical-Chemical Sciences, and Gymnastics, arrived in Bucharest at the age of 17 in 1933. He had some difficulty in adapting to the atmosphere of irreverent frivolity that characterized the student community of the Old Kingdom, that Bucharest style of knowing superficiality that, as he once told me, put all Transylvanians, at their first contact with this world, into a state of acute stupefaction. Mihai Şora, who knew him at the end of his period of philosophical studies, and especially during his military service at Craiova (which Dragomir completed between November 1937 and November 1938), describes him as a reserved young man who was then living

²Previously part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Transylvania had been united at the end of the First World War with the ‘Old Kingdom’ of Romania (created in the second half of the nineteenth century by the union of Wallachia and Moldavia). [Trans.]

through his first important sentimental experience. (Later, in the 1940s, echoes of an agonizing amorous sequence appear in the journal of Jeni Acterian—*Journal of a Being who is Hard to Please*—, where, towards the end, there appears a mysterious ‘S,’ whose dazzling irruptions followed by prolonged absences filled the young author with anguish and perplexity.)

1939, the year of Dragomir’s graduation from the Faculty of Letters, was also the year of his first call-up. He managed, at the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, to pass his examinations for a doctorate in law, but he was called up again in July 1940, and remained ‘under arms’ throughout the flight from Transylvania. Realizing that because of these repeated call-ups he would not be able to complete his doctorate, he came to the conclusion that the only solution was an extended period of studies abroad. His first stop was at Breslau (Wrocław), where for 4 months, from March to June 1941, he attended lectures and seminars in Greek, Latin, and German. His aim was to obtain certification of his knowledge of Greek, without which he could never aspire to become a member of Heidegger’s doctoral seminar.

He returned to Bucharest for the summer, and in September 1941 we find him a doctoral student of Heidegger, enrolled in the *Philosophisches Seminar* (Faculty of Philosophy) of the Albert-Ludwig University in Freiburg, where Heidegger had been giving lectures and holding seminars every year since 1929. On 31 October 1941, he received his ‘*Studienbuch*’, or student record book, in which all the classes attended by the student are recorded, with the professor’s signature alongside each subject. His philosophical studies in Romania were recognized as equivalent to four semesters (2 years), so he was enrolled in Freiburg in semester five. He lived at number 52 III Schillerstraße. He held a scholarship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

The Paradise of Freiburg

What did Dragomir study at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Freiburg? In the first place, the lectures and seminars of the ‘master’, as Heidegger’s doctoral students called him. In the 2 years (four semesters) that Dragomir spent in Freiburg, Heidegger delivered a lecture of 1 h and held a seminar of 2 h every week. Dragomir’s student record book records his attendance at the following courses: *Hölderlins Hymnen* (two semesters), *Parmenides und Heraklit* (one semester) and *Heraklit* (one semester). What were Heidegger’s seminars? Winter semester 1941–1942, *Einübung in das philosophische Denken*; summer semester 1942, *Hegel, ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’ I*; winter semester 1942–1943, *Aristoteles, ‘Metaphysik’ IX*; summer semester 1943, *Hegel, ‘Phänomenologie des Geistes’ II*. The seminars were particularly useful to Dragomir, as the thesis that he was going to write under Heidegger’s supervision was precisely about the concept of spirit [Geist] in Hegel.

What did the Heideggerian seminar look like? How many people took part? Were they all trained in philosophy? Did they come from all corners of the world? Was

there any other Romanian in the seminar? What became of Dragomir's colleagues later on?

Neither from Dragomir's archive, of which I shall speak more later, nor from our discussions after I came to know him am I able to give answers to all these questions. The truth is that, since we can never imagine our future curiosities, we do not know how to take full advantage of the chance to cohabit in time with the people we meet. There is in any relationship with contemporaries a sort of inertia fed by the way in which we have become accustomed to spontaneously prolonging the present, as if those with whom our destinies intersect are going to be there all the length of our existence. We are basically unable to decipher in the present the consequences of a future absence, and the disaster brought on by the silence of those who depart from the stage before us always takes us by surprise. Sometimes we are even inclined to accuse *them* of not anticipating our questions and of not fulfilling, in their lifetime, the duty of witnesses, not having had the reflex of writing their memoirs *in time*, so to speak.

Fortunately in our case, one of the leading members of that seminar, who set out for Freiburg almost at the same time as Dragomir, has spoken at length about the period in which we are interested. Moreover, I have met him, and so have been able to ask him all the questions that, from lack of fantasy, I failed to ask Dragomir. The man in question is Walter Biemel. A native of Braşov, Biemel arrived at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest a year after Dragomir. They only got to know each other in Freiburg, but the fascination of the adventure which they shared quickly brought them together. Being on the spot, it was they who made the first translation into Romanian of a Heideggerian text—the 1929 lecture *What is Metaphysics?*—, which was published in the '50s in a journal of the Romanian exile in Paris.³ After the war, Biemel worked for some years in Belgium as a researcher in the Husserl archives, before returning to Germany, where he became for a time a close associate of Heidegger, and one of the most authorized commentators on the

³The story of the translation, as Walter Biemel reported it to me, is as follows. As soon as the two had decided to put into Romanian the inaugural lecture (*Antrittsvorlesung*) that Heidegger had delivered in the Aula Magna of the University of Freiburg on 23 July 1929, on the occasion of his appointment as full professor (*Ordinarius*) in the post left vacant by the retirement of Husserl, they began to work at Biemel's lodgings, in a two-room apartment in Dreisamstraße. They had received Heidegger's blessing in advance. What amazed Biemel about Dragomir was his extraordinary feeling for language. It is clear that the two of them, working together, became close friends. When it was finished, the translation was sent to Nicolae Bagdasar, who worked in a Bucharest publishing house, but the response was not long in coming: the publication of a text by Heidegger in Romanian was not possible as Heidegger was *persona non grata* in the eyes of the German authorities. For Biemel, this was no more than a confirmation of what he had already experienced in Bucharest, at the German Embassy, when he was about to leave for Freiburg. Asked which particular professor he intended to pursue his doctoral studies with, Biemel named Heidegger. 'He is very ill', came the reply. 'He gives a lecture from time to time, but they have to bring him into the lecture theatre on a stretcher. You'd do better to think of someone else.' Great was Biemel's surprise when he arrived in Germany and saw Heidegger entering the lecture theatre with his air of an Allemanic forester (thanks to the appropriate costume), as fit as could be, vigorous and sun-tanned. The translation was eventually published in Paris, where it had of course been sent by Biemel, 13 years later in 1956, in Virgil Ierunca's journal *Caiete de Dor* (Notebooks of longing). [G.L.]

latter's work. In the last year of his life, Heidegger established with him the general lines of the more than 80 volumes that were to make up his famous *Gesamtausgabe* ('Complete Works').

I had the good fortune to meet Biemel in 1971 in Aachen, where he was professor in the *Philosophisches Seminar*, when I was sent to him with a recommendation from Noica.⁴ He later agreed to be my *Betreuer* (supervisor) in 1982–1984, when I was in Heidelberg with a Humboldt scholarship. In the meantime, I had read his text *The Professor, the Thinker, the Friend*, written in 1977, a short time after the death of his master, for *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* and reprinted in 1983 in the issue of *Cahiers de l'Herne* dedicated to Heidegger. In these pages there was an excellent evocation of the atmosphere surrounding Heidegger's lectures and seminars at the beginning of 1942, when Biemel arrived at Freiburg for doctoral studies, as Dragomir had done the semester before. And yet I was still missing the *details*. And so I decided to write to Biemel. I did so as I prepared to start writing about Dragomir, at Christmas time, with dozens of questions in my mind about that moment in their lives that seemed more and more to me to have been the paradise of Dragomir's life, or in any case the *place* from which the fall was soon to come. Together with that text from the German philosophy journal, the pages of the letter that I shortly received back from Biemel at last opened up for me this world that had begun to occupy my thoughts, and from which, after exactly 60 years, that postcard from the Red Bear pub had reached me as a unique sign. Those 11 collegial signatures, which—apart from that of Heidegger himself—had hitherto lacked any real correspondent for me, were now instantly transformed into beings of flesh and blood, and, by a miraculous reflex, they conferred on Dragomir, isolated in the abstraction of his solitude, that identity that an individual can only obtain through relating to others, and through his particular way of emerging from the communal being that contains him.

From Biemel's letter, I discovered that Heidegger's seminar was made up of 15 members and was a veritable closed community, for express admission and constant attendance were obligatory: occasional participation and sitting in were not permitted. The 'fifteen' took up their places around three tables arranged in a horseshoe, while for Heidegger himself there was a small table placed in the open side. Behind this table there was a blackboard, on which from time to time he would write an important word. When Biemel first saw Heidegger, at the beginners' seminar, the latter's clothing took him by surprise: 'Against the background of murmuring that filled the room, there appeared a man of small stature, with a sun-tanned face, dressed in trousers fastened under the knee, three-quarter length stockings, and a traditional jacket, in other words the costume of the Black Forest, to which I was

⁴Constantin Noica (1909–1987), Romanian philosopher. A member of the interwar generation that included Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, and Eugène Ionesco, he suffered periods of forced domicile and imprisonment after the Communist takeover. In the latter part of his life, while living in modest seclusion in the mountain resort of Păltiniș, he played a leading role in the formation of a new generation of Romanian intellectuals, including the author of the present chapter. Gabriel Liiceanu recounts the discussions that he and Andrei Pleșu had with Noica in this period in *The Păltiniș Diary: A Paideic Model in Humanist Culture* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2000). [Trans.]

quite unaccustomed...’ The seminars were based on a text announced beforehand, but each time the emphasis was not on previous knowledge and cultural references, but on the capacity of the participants to think for themselves and to express themselves beyond the level of clichés and conventional terminology.

Who, apart from Dragomir and Biemel, were the other 13 participants at the seminar? First of all there was Heidegger’s assistant, Therese Gisbertz, who was preparing a doctoral thesis on Kant and whom Biemel described as a ‘sensitive and discreet’ person. After the war she became a teacher of philosophy in a high school in Ruhrgebiet. Then there was Georg Picht, the director of the Plato archive in Birklehof Hinterzarten, whose signature appears in Dragomir’s student book for a seminar on Plato in the seventh semester. Picht’s wife, Edith Picht-Axenfeld, a well-known pianist, also attended from time to time—the only exception to the rule. Later, in his evocation of Heidegger, Picht would tell how, immediately after the war, in his ‘retirement’ from Freiburg to Meßkirch, he stopped briefly with the Picht. ‘At Heidegger’s request, my wife played Schubert’s sonata in B flat major. When the final chords of the music had died out, Heidegger turned to me and said: “We, with philosophy, are not capable of such a thing.”’

Perhaps the most brilliant member of the seminar was Margherita von Brentano, who occupies a special place in the letter, perhaps due to the fact that she was the best friend of Marly Wetzel, another member of the seminar and Biemel’s future wife. Thus it was that Biemel himself would remain close friends with Margherita until her death in 2001. Among the papers that Dragomir kept from his Freiburg period are two superb photographs of Margherita von Brentano. Her face, dominated by a smile at once friendly and distant, is framed by her chestnut hair, which pours wildly over her shoulders after it has been prevented by tight clasps from falling on her forehead. Margherita came from a distinguished family. Her father, Clemens von Brentano, had been German ambassador to the Holy See. Sensing already in 1932 the disaster that was about to fall on Germany, he resigned from his post, and was able to return to Rome after the war in the same function and with his dignity intact. Her uncle, Heinrich von Brentano, would become Foreign Minister. The doctoral student herself, who was working under Heidegger on a thesis on Aristotle, had, according to Biemel, ‘a sharp mind’ and ‘an excellent capacity to formulate’. After the war, she worked for a while as a radio journalist, at Südwestfunk, and then at the end of the 1950s she was invited by Weischedel to be an assistant lecturer in the Freie Universität Berlin, where she made a special study of anti-Semitism and became active in left-wing politics. Biemel describes her as ‘a fascinating person’, unhappy in marriage, smoking heavily, and living her last years in total dependence on an oxygen tank.

The other members of the seminar were: a Dutch doctor in love with philosophy, Jan van der Meulen, who later published a book about Heidegger and Hegel; a Yugoslav (Biemel had forgotten his name), who remained in Germany after the war as a forestry worker; a Catholic priest, Schumacher; an art critic, Dr. Bröse; a Hellenist; a young assistant lecturer from the Department of Germanic Studies; a philosopher who was preparing his doctorate and later became professor in Vienna;

a Japanese diplomat, Takesi Kanematsu; and finally another Romanian, Octavian Vuia.

It is worth saying a few words about Octavian Vuia, as a reminder that even Heidegger did not work miracles, that mere presence in the vicinity of his mind could not transform a mediocrity into a genius. Certainly in Paris, where he became a researcher at the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques, Vuia made much for a time of the capital of excellence with which he was automatically endowed by his membership of the Heideggerian seminar. He entertained Romanian émigré circles with his well-told tales of how Heidegger used to ski, how he put on his coat, or how he coughed. A 50–60 page booklet of his about the pre-Socratic philosophers once came into my hands; it was, at best, of secondary school level. He was tall and good looking, and according to Virgil Ierunca, the Parisian Romanians with whom he came in contact nicknamed him ‘Vuia-the-Majestic’. Heidegger once told Biemel how, long after the closure of the Freiburg seminar, he received a letter from Vuia. Since he liked to follow the progress of his students and to know their destiny, he eagerly opened the letter, hoping that he would learn of Vuia’s development in the philosophical environment of Paris. But what had Vuia thought fit to write to Heidegger? ‘For some time now I have been letting my beard grow, and people say I look like a patriarch.’ In Dragomir’s archive there is a photograph in which he himself, dressed in a double-breasted striped suit, poses beside another equally elegant young man, with a long face and a watery-melancholic look. Behind the two of them is a curtain of fir trees. Dragomir sits perched on the stone balustrade of a terrace with his feet hanging in the air, but even then his head is only slightly higher than that of his well-built colleague, who leans nonchalantly with one elbow on the balustrade. This is undoubtedly Vuia. For us today, looking at these two young men of 26 in knowledge of what was to follow, the photograph provokes bitter reflections on the strange games and arrangements of destiny. For one of them would walk the streets of Paris clothed in the faded and quite unmaterialized glory of having been ‘Heidegger’s pupil’, while the other, in a Romania in which philosophy was studied from texts by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, would have to hide the Freiburg episode as best he could and to accommodate, God knows how, his need to pursue phenomenology with his role as ‘head of supply services’ for the V.I. Lenin Hydroelectric Power Station at Bicaz. But that comes later.

As for Dragomir himself, Biemel confirmed for me that he enjoyed Heidegger’s especial appreciation. He was in any case one of the leading figures of the seminar. When a prolonged silence reigned in the room after a difficult question had been addressed to the participants, Heidegger would turn his head in Dragomir’s direction and say: ‘*Na! Was sagen die Lateiner?*’ (‘Well, what do the Latins say?’) And ‘Dragomir the Latin’ loved to provoke Heidegger, and, whenever he got the chance, to contradict him. When, for example, the master affirmed, along the lines of the paragraphs on *Zeughaftigkeit* in *Being and Time*, that there are no such things as pure objects, but only objects given significance in a context of use—a chair, for example, is ‘something for sitting on’—, Dragomir retorted: ‘How can you explain then, Herr Professor, that there are chairs in the museum with the inscription “Please do not sit here”?’

I often wondered, in his late years when I knew him, why Dragomir almost never felt the need to return, in a commemorative sense, to his Freiburg period, and to tell us stories of ‘back then’. He was probably afraid that the almost mythical proportions of the moment that had constituted his life might fix him, in the eyes of others, in that single determination of the beginning. He did not want to remain ‘the one who was lucky enough to be in Heidegger’s proximity for a while’. And yet, how had he felt then, caught in the ray of the personality of a thinker like Heidegger? Once only, he told us with a laugh: ‘At the start of one lecture, Heidegger said to us: “To think means compromising yourself.” That put me at ease: right, I said to myself, I can manage that, sir!’

Apart from philosophy, students in the *Philosophisches Seminar* also studied art history and European literature intensely, with a special emphasis on Greek culture. In his first semester (Semester V), Dragomir’s *Studienbuch* mentions Professor Paatz’s course of *Kunstgeschichte* (Art History)—4 h per week—, and a course of 1 h per week on *Don Quijote* with Professor Carvallo. In his second semester (Semester VI), Paatz has a 2-h course on ‘Roman Art’, and Professor Schuchardt, a 2-h course on classical Greek sculpture (*Polykleitos und Phidias*). The next semester (Semester VII) is dominated by Paatz’s course on German gothic and Picht’s seminar on Plato. Finally, in Dragomir’s fourth semester (Semester VIII), there is a 1-h course with Schuchardt on the Greek temple, and a 3-h course with Professor Nestle on Sophocles. Apart from Heidegger’s lectures and seminars and the Plato seminar, the philosophy programme also included, in Semester V, a synthetic course of 2 h per week on the history of modern philosophy with Professor Reiner. That was all. There were never more than 8 h of lectures and seminars. The rest of the time was devoted to preparing seminar reports (at the start of a seminar, one of the students, *à tour de rôle*, had to present an account of the preceding seminar—in this way the texts of Heidegger’s seminars have been preserved), hours of individual discussion with the professor (*Sprechstunden*),⁵ and reading for one’s thesis.

There was of course, also plenty of free time. And Dragomir loved walking, swimming, tennis, skiing, dancing. Three photographs from the Freiburg period show him in emblematic sporting postures: either in a spectacular turn on the ski slope, or taking a back-hand stroke on the tennis court, or in the middle of a trampoline jump, projected into the air, with his arms wide open, his body impeccably arched. One photograph shows him standing at the pool, in a black swimming costume (trunks and tee-shirt in one piece), beside Margherita von Brentano. He is short, extremely supple, with well-formed muscles. In another photograph he is dancing, *très assuré*, with his hair combed back over his temples—he is seen in profile—, a high forehead and a prominent nose, looking solemnly and dominantly

⁵Alexandru Dragomir once described to me a *Sprechstunde* with Heidegger. He had gone to the professor with eight questions relating to his doctoral thesis. Heidegger told him to ask them all at the beginning. He did not make a note of them, but after he had heard them, he began to answer each one in turn with a precision, a finesse and a depth that astonished the Romanian student. ‘I had never before seen, and I have never seen since, such a display of the splendour of the human mind. I emerged from my first *Sprechstunde* stunned, convinced that I had had the good fortune to meet a genius in flesh and blood.’ [G.L.]

at his partner, who seems to let herself be completely taken possession of, as though hypnotized. All the photographs give a feeling of something lively and agile, the air of a wild cockerel, a sort of well reined-in frenzy that knows that it must submit to an intelligence sure of itself and ultimately capable of controlling everything. This explosion of proud vitality spiritually diverted probably explains the impressive power of seduction that Dragomir enjoyed. If to this portrait we add the gaze of blue eyes with a metallic inflexion, a permanently good disposition (*er strahlte Fröhlichkeit aus*, according to Biemel) and the *witzig* quality of his personality (that ease with which he could always come up with a witty turn of phrase), then we can well imagine what his presence for 2 years meant in a Germany almost emptied of its male population. Among the photographs are two ‘artistic’ portraits (by *Kunst-Photo, Lemberg, Akademiestrasse 12*) showing a feminine beauty of the Ingrid Bergman type, severe and warm at the same time. On the back of one of them is written in blue ink: *Ich bin immer Dein. Weihnachten '43. Rosita* (‘I am ever yours. Christmas '43. Rosita’), and on the other *Für Alex, zum Weihnachten '43, von Deiner Rosita* (‘For Alex, at Christmas '43, from your Rosita’).

Strangely, for all Dragomir enjoyed participating in the group life of his little academic world, he was quiet and reserved when it came to his own work. They all knew that he was working strenuously, that he was preparing a thesis on Hegel, and that he considered it a veritable godsend that Hegel happened to be the main focus of Heidegger’s seminar just in the period when he arrived at Freiburg. But while other members of the seminar let it be known what they were reading and kept talking about the themes of their papers, Dragomir showed an almost pathological discretion when he was asked how his work was going. He would become suddenly bashful, and whoever had been imprudent enough to ask about the stage of his research would get a vague answer and be left feeling that they had unwittingly penetrated his space of supreme intimacy. This particularity, which was to find its theoretical expression in his description of life as a territory sharply divided between the ‘secret’ and the ‘common’ (the ‘intimate’ and the ‘public’), would last until the end of his life: he never spoke to anyone about ‘what he did’, and until his death no-one could answer the question whether Dragomir had ever practised any of the generally known genres of writing, either philosophical treatises, studies, essays, or simple notes.

Farewell, Heidegger! The Closing of the Ways

From this paradise, at once academic, sporting, and erotic, Dragomir was snatched in October 1943, when he was recalled to Romania for mobilization. In vain Heidegger provided him on 26 September with a *Bescheinigung*, an attestation that ‘Mr. Alexandru Dragomir has progressed significantly’ with his thesis on Hegel’s metaphysics, and that only ‘a few months would be sufficient for him to bring his paper to a fitting conclusion and to end his studies in Freiburg with a doctoral examination crowned with success.’ He was enrolled in the 7th Army Corps, and later in

the Battalion of Guards. He was demobilized, with the rank of sergeant, in November 1944, having served, immediately after Romania's volte-face on 23 August, on the western front from Dumbrăveni to Cehul Silvaniei.⁶ He would find the postcard that his seminar colleagues sent from the *Zum Roten Bären* pub on 16 May waiting for him in the house on Strada C.A. Rosetti 6 months later, as if putting a seal on a period which, as time passed, would become like *another life* for him.

In 1945, a strange period began for Dragomir, as for most of the Romanian intellectuals who remained in the country, a period in which, cast in a new play on the stage of history, they tried to preserve the reflexes of life that they had hitherto acquired, without having much idea of the sort of world they were heading for. Obviously there was no way back to Freiburg. A letter sent by Walter Biemel to Dragomir on 26 August 1946 from Louvain in Belgium (where he had started working on the Husserl archive) gives a very clear picture of the way in which, a year after Dragomir's departure from Freiburg, the glittering world that surrounded Heidegger and his students had fallen apart for ever. On the night of 27 November 1944, Freiburg was bombed by the British and 80% of the town was destroyed. The 800-year-old cathedral escaped by a happy combination of circumstances. (It was in a dead angle for the bombers, which always appeared abruptly over a hill.) The last seminar, dedicated to Leibniz, which Heidegger had started in the autumn of 1944, was interrupted when the professor was called up into the *Volksturm* ('people's army'). However he managed to take ill after a short time, and when he was demobilized he withdrew to the castle of the Princess of Sachsen-Meiningen, who had been his student. Meanwhile, the University too had moved into a castle, on the other side of the Danube, where Heidegger went from time to time to read extracts from his works to a handful of students. At the beginning of 1945, Freiburg fell within the French occupation zone, and as a result of intrigues and denunciations set in motion by some of his colleagues, the French occupying authorities launched an investigation centred on Heidegger. The case was to be judged in Paris, and the philosopher, permanently removed from his university chair, withdrew to his chalet in Todtnauberg. In his letter to Dragomir, Walter Biemel quotes some lines that Heidegger had written to him not long before in Louvain: *Ich denke gern an die Zeit unserer gemeinsamen Versuche zurück. Es war ein Teil jenes unsichtbaren Deutschlands, das die Welt wohl nie erfahren wird.* ('I think back with pleasure on the time of our common efforts. It was a part of that unseen Germany that the world may never know of.')

With the way to completing his doctorate with Heidegger permanently closed, Dragomir turned for a while to the philosophical preoccupations that his native setting offered. Noica had opened (in 1946?) a 'school of wisdom' in the Andronache Forest (on the edge of the Colentina district of Bucharest) and he invited him there to give some presentations on Hegel. To this period belongs an essay by Dragomir, *On the Mirror*, preserved in a typewritten copy with notes and observations by

⁶On 23 August 1944 the pro-German regime of Marshal Ion Antonescu was overturned by a coup d'état led by the young King Michael, and Romania immediately aligned itself with the Allies against Germany. [Trans.]

Mircea Vulcănescu. There is also a surprising letter sent to Heidegger early in 1947 (the draft of which survives), probably in response to Biemel's encouragement in the letter quoted above, in which he assures Dragomir that Heidegger remembers him perfectly and asks after him from time to time. Surprising, because Dragomir here tells Heidegger (giving details) that he is working on a doctoral thesis on Plato (?!)—but who with?—entitled *Über das Verhältnis von Anschauen und Dialektik bei Plato* ('On the relation between intuitive seeing and dialectic in Plato'). Heidegger's reply is dated 7 May 1947. In it he gives Dragomir some indications and references relating to the new theme (with not a single question about the Hegel thesis!), and says that he is glad Dragomir is able to work. He announces that he is no longer at the university and does not know if he will ever be able to publish again, and that his two sons are prisoners in Russia. With the letter is a photograph of Heidegger, with the following dedication on the back: *Für Alexander Dragomir zur Erinnerung an seine Studienzeit in Freiburg im Breisgau, Martin Heidegger* ('To Alexandru Dragomir in memory of his period of studies in Freiburg im Breisgau, Martin Heidegger').

Heidegger's letter of May 1947 and the photograph enclosed with it represent the last 'item' in the Heidegger–Dragomir file. 'The time was out of joint,' and the two men would henceforth belong to worlds that would never again meet. The imperatives of the new period of history that Dragomir had entered required him to forget 'his period of studies in Freiburg' and as far as possible to deny it. It would undoubtedly be the hardest burden to bear in his *curriculum vitae*, the capital sin to be purged by successively adopting professional hypostases as remote as possible from the philosophy with which he had started. Officially, all his later life would be one long effort to 'wipe clean his tracks', and thus an uninterrupted professional travesty. For the next 31 years, Dragomir would in turn work as an apprentice welder, a sales clerk, a proofreader, a copyreader, an editor, a quality controller, and an economist. In the first 13 years after the war, he had to change his job seven times. Each time the 'personal files' of staff were checked, his employment contract was terminated. Thus from 'apprentice welder at the Tilcam workshop at 70 Strada Pantelimon' he became a clerk at Romanian Anchor, and then a welder at Wire Industry in Câmpia Turzii. Thus from 'head of sales at Metarc', proof-reader at Editura Tehnică, 'literary editor' at Editura Energetică (?!), and as crowning glory 'principal editor' at Editura Politică in the Encyclopaedic Dictionary department (1956–1958), he came to be 'head of the supply services office' for the V.I. Lenin Hydroelectric Power Station at Bicaz. For the last 15 years of his working life, until his retirement in 1976, he worked as an economist for the timber export company ISCE Exportlemn, travelling the world (he got as far as Nigeria!) alongside his director, who needed Dragomir's knowledge of English, German, French, Italian, and Russian in order to settle contracts for the sale of timber with foreign partners.⁷

⁷In fact the Heidegger–Dragomir file finally closes in 1974, when Dragomir's ex-wife Ina Nasta (they had divorced the previous year) took refuge in Germany and settled in 'Sânduc's town', Freiburg. She wrote to Heidegger with the idea of giving him news of his former student, 'in the event, of course, that the Professor still remembered him.' A few days later, she received a letter

It is clear that from 1948, Dragomir knew that in Romania philosophy could no longer raise its head. And in his own case, he understood that he was entering this world in which philosophy was forbidden bearing the mark of his studies in Hitler's Germany. The Freiburg years, the association with Heidegger, which in a normal life would have propelled him into a brilliant academic career, had suddenly become a curse. Since everything that could draw attention to that past had to be suppressed, nothing could henceforth link Dragomir, officially, to philosophy. And on the outside, as we have seen, nothing did.

Entering the Underground: Noica and Dragomir

But how strange! An authentic vocation cannot be liquidated overnight, just because history claps its hands. And moreover, a philosopher can enjoy the benefit of the *discretion* that accompanies the vocation of thinking. Unlike a pianist, who is annihilated if his piano and concert hall are taken from him, a philosopher can go on thinking perfectly well without publishing, content to spend his life close to the essential books of philosophy and well able to limit his needs to a few notebooks and a pencil. Driven from the world, threatened, harassed, and mocked, could philosophy not become once more 'commerce with the dead' (as one Greek philosopher liked to say when he was asked how he spent his time) and withdraw into the intimacy of its essence? Cast out into the incommunicable, could it not become a *secret preoccupation*, which, far from diminishing and weakening it, would only serve to nurse all the more its essence, its madness, and its pride? Thus what might easily have become a disaster was to transform itself, in the case of Alexandru Dragomir, into one of the most fascinating adventures of philosophy in the history of Romanian culture: philosophy as pure solitary thought, as infinite soliloquy, as the joy of thinking all that surrounds one *for oneself*. For this to take place, Dragomir had to fulfil a single condition: to make cultural clandestinity a profession of faith. And he fulfilled this condition so well that for 55 years nothing was known publicly about him.

As I write today for the first time about Alexandru Dragomir, I am inclined to explain him as the product of a microclimate of history, as a cultural *ab-erration*, a 'wandering', a *deviation* from the mould in which culture takes shape in normal ages and worlds. Arriving in 1831 in the Galapagos Islands, Darwin was faced, as a result of the special conditions which had been created and preserved there, with species that did not exist in other parts of the globe. Darwin in the Galapagos had come upon a biological enclave. In the same way, in totalitarian worlds, when the

from Heidegger's wife announcing that he would be expecting her. Heidegger was now 84. Ina Nasta-Dragomir arrived before the venerable figure and so measured for the first time 'in the flesh' the whole disaster of Dragomir's life projected on the monstrosity of history. She started to tell Heidegger what Dragomir's days were like at Exportlemn, but before she could finish she burst into tears and had to make her excuses and leave. [G.L.]

spirit does not accept the rules that the meteorology of the new history dictates to it, veritable cultural microclimates are born, Galapagos Islands of the spirit that flagrantly contradict the species and specimens of the mainland of official culture. Embarking on a long exile, the spirit is obliged to find strange ways of functioning through which, to the extent to which it preserves its freedom, it also manages to protect itself from the vicissitudes of history. In fact it buries itself, goes into the trenches, disappears from the public surface of culture where there is room only for the display of an ideology with which no negotiation is possible.

However this operation of folding inwards is not without risk: who can guarantee the person who has hidden so well in a cranny of history that his spirit will emerge one day into the light, that he will be recovered, and that others will be able to say of him what Hamlet says about the ghost of his father: 'Well said, old mole'? Who will guard him from the danger that he will disappear unknown, buried alive with the work he has generated in secret, of which no-one has ever managed to find out anything? Emergence from assumed clandestinity of culture is only possible through chance, or through the existence of a God who loves culture.

In the underground space that he had entered, Dragomir was not alone. Already on his return from Germany, with the halo of these 2 years spent in the proximity of Heidegger, he had immediately been taken up into a 'gang' of intellectuals with philosophical preoccupations. He became close friends with Mihai Rădulescu, 3 years younger than himself, the future music critic of *Contemporanul*.⁸ Then there was Mircea Vulcănescu, 12 years older, whom Dragomir met at the swimming pool in the summer of 1945, the very day in which he had collected his essay *On the Mirror* from the typist. His former teacher, Tudor Vianu, had requested it for a 'Notebook' of the National Theatre, where Vianu had recently been appointed director. The next day, Vulcănescu gave him back the text with his observations written in pencil on the back of one of the pages. It was Dragomir's first (and last) commissioned work.

And above all, there was Noica. The drama of Noica's life could be reduced to the desire, eternally unfulfilled, to hold a teaching post. He had failed in this when he finished his studies in philosophy and was only offered a post in the Faculty library, and he had recently failed again, in February 1944, when he lost the competition for Gusti's post (in 'philosophy of culture') to the mediocre Ion Zamfirescu. Noica had three qualities that would have made him an ideal philosophy professor. Firstly, he had the quality of availability, the rare ability to enter into the needs, aspirations, and troubles of the other, and each time to propose solutions for their *cultural* transfiguration. In the second place, he had a huge didactic vocation, the gift of being able to make the inaccessible become friendly and to convince the other that what he 'had to learn' concerned him directly, that what was at stake this learning was his life itself, and not some abstract book-knowledge. And finally, Noica possessed the 'magic' quality of investing the philosophers' thought with his

⁸ 'Picked up' with the 'Noica batch' in 1959, Mihai Rădulescu died several weeks after his arrest. For a time after Noica came out of prison in 1964, Alexandru Dragomir refused to meet him, as he considered him directly responsible for his friend's death. [G.L.]

own thought, of appropriating them for himself, teaching you the technique of becoming *you* at the end of your journey through the others and how, ultimately, you could take possession of the world by your own one idea. At the end of Noica's didactic method, the system was lying in wait, and each of his pupils was 'prepared' to end up a philosopher in his own right.

The problem was that, as I have said, Noica had never managed to get a university post. His thirst to teach others, to take them by the hand and lead them towards the goal of philosophy as he in fact imagined it, had to be quenched in a different way, in informal settings that departed from the usual academic ritual. Hence the 'school of wisdom' in which, it would appear, no-one studied anything, and all that was taught was 'states of mind'. When Dragomir returned from Germany at the end of 1943, Noica was about to send to the press his *Philosophical Diary*, in which the project of the School floated over the world like a restless spirit, impatient to settle somewhere and to acquire a body. The book came out in 1944, and the following year saw the start of the construction of the chalet in the Andronache Forest, intended as the 'base' of the school, where Noica was to move with his wife Wendy and their two children, leaving three rooms free on the first floor for pupils. From then on, everything seemed ready for the opening of the School. All that was missing was the pupils, or more precisely, those who would have, according to Noica's scenario, *the vocation of becoming pupils*, of responding fittingly to the vocation of their teacher and the strange requirements of the school. The net that Noica had thrown far and wide had, of course, made some catches: there was Mihai Rădulescu, who, although initially trained as a lawyer, had agreed in 1942 to translate with Noica Augustine's *De Magistro* (the text appeared the same year in *Izvoare de filozofie*); and the actor Omescu, a complex personality who was open to theatre directing, acting, and philosophy alike, and whose dream of a *καλοκαγαθία* Noica systematically censored. There were others too, for example the actor and theatre director Dan Nasta. But the 'big fish,' those with purely philosophical training and aspirations, were missing from Noica's net. We can easily imagine how Noica must have felt when Dragomir, 7 years his junior, arrived from Freiburg with all his panache, with engines fully revved up, with Greek, Latin, and German, with a good knowledge of Hegel, with thorough notes on Plato and Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant—the very authors Noica was interested in! God had thrown into his net the golden fish that would grant his burning wish of recent years, by actually offering himself as the ideal disciple.

All the greater was the disappointment! Dragomir was invited periodically to Andronache, where he did all he could to upset the ritual of the 'school'. What probably irritated him about Noica, just as it had irritated Mihai Rădulescu too at first (as he confesses in *The Game with Death*), was a certain 'outward clumsiness' of the master's, the spats that he wore almost all the time, the affected smile with which he would greet one, the detailed stage-managing of every meeting, the programmed discussion that would only touch on serious subjects, the obligatory 'musical moment', in short the lack of improvisation, of pointless conversation, of gratuity. When Noica, with his head leaning slightly towards his left shoulder and his honeyed voice, proposed a Bach toccata immediately after dinner, Dragomir—he told

me this himself—would demonstratively walk out into the garden, throw his jacket on the grass, and practice a merciless ‘destruction’ by sitting out the musical interlude in the children’s swing, mischievously savouring the way the squeaking of the chain rose above the background of music emanating from the house.

As far as discipleship was concerned, Noica had clearly got things wrong in Sănduc’s case. Psychologically, in the first place. It is hard to imagine that, after his time with Heidegger, Dragomir would have agreed to start a new period of training under Noica. Certainly, Noica had translated Latin and German texts, and had published five or six volumes. He was ‘someone’, he was *the* philosopher of the younger generation, and his work was already substantial. Dragomir, on the other hand, had not published a single line, his body of work consisting only of the four or five pages of his essay ‘On the Mirror’. However Noica, with his ‘mild mastery’, with his roundabout manner, his smile and his muted tones, implicitly called for a ‘mild submission’. And this hardly fitted the personality of Dragomir, who was disinclined to model his judgements on anyone, and very much inclined—published work or no published work—to think for himself, cutting in his assessments, sure of what he knew, using his intelligence sometimes to strike sharply like the end of a whip and sometimes like a scalpel to dissect mercilessly the discourse of the other, exposing their haste, inadequacy, and pretension.

Shortly after his return to Romania, thanks to the sharpness of his mind and the philosophical culture he put at its service, Dragomir became something of an adjudicating authority, and often a troublesome one, in any intimidating case. In 1946, to get access to him, Jeni Acterian resolved ‘to reread Kierkegaard and to read Heidegger’. In the name of the demands of ‘adequate thinking’ (as opposed to ‘beating about the bush’), Dragomir was tough, hard, even merciless. Mihai Rădulescu gives a superb portrait of him in a letter of 8 November 1956: ‘You are always “in things” [...], never for a moment on the outside, illuminating them from within, giving them the foundation of meaning and truth that afterwards seems always to have been in them: nothing conjunctural, circumstantial or “interchangeable”. The words say this, but behind them lies the guarantee of your being: you do not lie, you do not spare for the sake of comfort; you are strong, often rough, and just.’

But above all, Noica and Dragomir were totally incompatible in that they belonged to different ages in the history of philosophy. This meant that their ways of ‘doing philosophy’ and of understanding the mission and embodiment of philosophy in the world were also different. Noica belonged to ‘traditional philosophy’. Its categories were second nature to him; he had a prejudice towards the system (of German idealist type), and practised subjectivizing hermeneutics, the opposite of the ‘ethos of neutrality’: at the end of every undertaking of knowledge and interpretation, the thinker was destined to meet his own image. Noica’s god was Hegel. Although Dragomir had worked intensely on Hegel, seeking to make explicit the sense of *wir* (‘we’) in the latter’s discourse, he was a philologist in philosophy; when he dealt with the thinking of a philosopher, he wanted to find out what exactly the writer had said in the letter of his text, and when he dealt with a determined ‘thing’ (the mirror, for example), he wanted to find out what its ‘is’ was, its intimate and irreducible way of being. While Dragomir wanted to *understand*, Noica

'Noica-ized' everything; he was subtle, inventive and 'feminine'. Dragomir would gather up all his strength, philosophically speaking; he was lacking in grace and set out to conquer his objective as if on a tough winter campaign, cautiously weighing every step and every stage of the journey. For ever since 1948, when the first wave of repression had broken over the country and especially over its intellectuals, Dragomir had been unable to see what could be achieved by 'making culture' in the traditional manner; for him, 'being a writer' had lost its sense before it had even acquired one. While Noica, in forced domicile from 1949, wrote volume after volume and hurried towards the first form of his system, with the vague intuition that public recognition would come later, Dragomir limited himself to plain notation and rare philosophical commentary, occasioned more by the doings of his friends. Dragomir seemed to 'lose his way' in the new world of history, to 'adapt', to give up and 'change his trade', while in Noica's case, the greater the adversity of the new world, the more philosophically focused he seemed to become, to the point where he would be willing to do philosophy standing on one leg. When Dragomir emerged from underground, the surprise was total, precisely because there had been no suspicion of the 'harvest' to come, while for Noica, emergence to the surface came naturally, as if Noica had gone willingly into the nooks and crannies of history in order to seek there the form of his future work.

I only understood how dramatic was Noica's attempt to catch Dragomir in the net of his philosophical model, when, a few days ago, there fell into my hand as if by a miracle from a corner of Dragomir's writing desk the six letters that Noica wrote to him in the first 3 years (1949–1951) of his forced domicile in Câmpulung. Distance made Noica see his relationship with Dragomir as if projected on a screen, and thus, by this distant contemplation, to evaluate it. Everything is said here.

Noica was at a turning point in his life. His wife Wendy, née Muston, had managed, thanks to her British citizenship, to return to England and so escape the horrors of history. Their two children, Răzvan and Dina, would follow her in 1953. In the meantime, all Noica's wealth was confiscated. (He had recently inherited a stud farm. 'I felt it as a blessing,' he told us later, 'when the Communists relieved me of the burden of those hundreds of horses!') He lost all his 'rural castles', as he would later refer to them (his country house at Chiriacu, and of course the newly built villa at Andronache). Now he lived in Vișoi in the periphery of Câmpulung, at 'Madame Veta's', occupying one room in a peasant house with a veranda. He ate what he could get by giving private tutoring: milk, a piece of cheese, eggs, maize flour. In this way he was freed from the burden of money. On 8 May 1950, he began a letter to Dragomir, but he interrupted it after a page, realizing that he did not have enough money for stamps. He picked it up again on 18 May, explaining the circumstances, and warning 'Sănduc' that there was no reason to pity him. 'You might even envy me. Up to a point, this means being free, that is to say living in the state of nature. Everything I earn is given to me in kind, and this fact of being able to satisfy basic needs directly, and not by the elaborate route of 'means' of exchange, may constitute a privilege for the spirit, inasmuch as it is no longer engaged in anything else.'

With his spirit at last free (in fact liberated by the Communists), because of his release from the burden of money, and having met, on the very day in which he

reached the age of 40 (on 24 July 1949), the woman who was to become his second wife in 1953 (Mariana Noica)—‘In the meantime,’ he wrote to Sănduc on 18 December 1949, ‘I have found a girl to patch my socks and my soul.’—Noica was free to undertake one last siege of the Dragomir fortress. His tone becomes frequently pathetic, and sometimes desperate (‘But I want what’s good for you; don’t you believe me?’).

First of all, there is a review of the exceptional qualities of the person in question. Dragomir is, above all, the vocation of philosophy incarnate: ‘You ‘live’ the philosophical in its purest form and, at least for me, you are the most gifted philosophical mind I have ever met.’ This is why, Noica tells him, ‘I have asked for your hand in marriage (in this case, you are the only person I would really like to collaborate with).’ Elsewhere (on 7 October 1949), Noica claims: ‘You have managed with us—and I see this once again from Mihai [Rădulescu]’s letter—to be both what you are and what you ought to be; and the latter ‘haunts’ us, for you are, in a way, our best conscience. It was in *this* sense that I told you before that you are for us a *Begriff*.’

Thus Noica sees in Dragomir what he will and perhaps should become, this final and ideal form that both justifies the others, grounding them deeply (‘our best conscience’), and serves them as model. Only that Dragomir hesitates to bridge this gap between ‘what you are’ and ‘what you ought to be’. And at the same time it is Noica, who stands to profit (together with ‘the others’) from this ‘fulfilment’, who can take Dragomir along this still unmade path. On the one hand, Dragomir is declared to be the ‘best conscience’, and on the other, Noica proposes to be his master. What is it that separates Dragomir from his ultimate fulfilment? Certainly no lack of the power of performance (since he is already what he ought to be, the announcement of future perfection), so much as the *incapacity* to realize it. In fact, to Noica’s despair, Dragomir, a philosopher to the marrow of his bones, refuses to do philosophy, meaning that he refuses to construct a system. And the ‘system’ means ‘committed intelligence’. Dragomir’s intelligence, on the other hand, is ‘free, dizzyingly free. Somewhere, above you, there is a meaning that attracts you; but you want to climb vertically, instead of believing, like me and like modest Hegel, that the shortest route is the roundabout one’ (7 October 1949). What is this ‘roundabout route’? It is the bypass through your *own* mind towards the being of things. In vain does Dragomir stubbornly believe that metaphysics means ‘calmly seeing what *is*’. Our mind is not a mirror that moves over things, but one that brings together, integrates and includes its own movement in the image of the final ‘reflection’. In this sense, the mind is dialectic; it does not fix. Things fall into line—and they always find their order—along the thread that the mind holds out to them. ‘Without a system, and without dialectic, metaphysics is vanity.’

But entry into this movement of the mind automatically means creation, and creation means *a work*. The written work is not a cultural vanity, but the figure to which, through the intermediary of the system, metaphysics must necessarily lead. What is vanity is to believe that you can fix the world by the verticality of a neutral thinking. Not even the philosophers can be understood in this way, in their presumptive ‘in itself’. ‘For, as you too know well, after you have understood exactly what

each one wants, you have to be able to Kantianize Plato and to Platonize Heidegger, if not actually to Dragomirize the lot. Otherwise how can you do the history of philosophy?' (10 April 1951).

In short, Noica reproaches Dragomir that *he*, as Dragomir, is nowhere, is just a whip, 'the whip in itself that strikes everything'. The problem of his own creation appears in the context of this discussion as a direct problem of salvation. Unlike Herod, who was foreseen in the plan of Creation, unlike 'all the Herods of today' (the great ones of the Communist world, foreseen in the project of History), you, Sănduc Dragomir, have not been foreseen anywhere, and so you have to affirm yourself through the thought that does not just 'mirror' and 'reflect,' but thinks by swallowing and integrating everything. In order to begin to be, you have to create. As the ordinary people that we are, we are condemned to creation (and—to return to the theme—to the work, the system, to metaphysics understood as it should be, that is to say dialectic...). And Noica closes his last letter, on 10 April 1951, with this terrible summons: 'And so I say to you once more, in a different form I say to you the same thing that I have been throwing in your face in vain for almost 10 years since I first met you: what are *you* doing, man? Understand once and for all that you were not foreseen in the plan of Creation and that those above will call you to account. And if they find your answer unsatisfactory at the terrible judgement, the Angel Gabriel will take you by one hand and the Archangel Michael by one foot, and they will throw you into the hell where all the analytics and all the exact-understanders of this world lie, with Aristotle at their head! In the name of your good angel, Dinu.'⁹

Dragomir's letters to Noica have not been preserved. They were confiscated, together with those of Cioran to Noica, on the morning of 12 December 1958, when the *Securitate* made a final search of the house in Cămpulung the day after Noica's arrest. And so we do not know how Dragomir answered the angel or Noica. He probably had no answer to give, *then*. To get the answer, Noica would have to wait for Dragomir's emergence from underground.

The Meeting on Strada Arcului

I first met Dragomir at his home in 1976. Some time before, Noica had given him my book on the tragic, 'a phenomenology of limit and transcendence', which had just been published by Univers. I suspect he wanted to show him what was going on in the 'philosophical world' of Romania, and probably to show off the achievements of one of his 'children'. 'Dinu, Dinu,' Dragomir later told us he said to Noica, 'mind you don't land them in jail like you landed the others!' (He was referring to those who had made up the 'Noica batch' at the end of the 1950s.) In any case, he took the book, probably attracted by the daring with which the word 'phenomenology' (full of nostalgic connotations for him) appeared on the cover, in a cultural context that

⁹A diminutive form of Constantin. [Trans.]

was officially defined as ‘Marxist’. One day Noica told me that we were going ‘to visit Sănduc Dragomir’: ‘Gabi, dear chap, he’s a pupil of Heidegger; he’s just retired, and he wants to get started seriously on philosophy again; he’s been reading a lot over the years, but in a desultory sort of way, just for his own pleasure, without any particular thought in mind. For a while, after I came out of prison, he didn’t want to see me, either because he was afraid or because he was angry with me because of the death of Mihai Rădulescu. I asked him through a mutual friend to lend me the Diels–Kranz edition of the pre-Socratics—he was the only person who had it; he brought it back with him from Germany—and he send me word not to look for him. In the meantime he has mellowed; I sometimes take him books, and, I don’t hide it, from time to time I give him to read the odd chapter of what I’m writing myself, because he’s such a ruthless judge that he’s very useful to me. In fact he’s read your book too, and he has some things to say to you.’

We arrived around 6 pm on a winter evening. He lived at number 3 Strada Arcului, in an old 1940s block with seven storeys. It was the very first building on the left-hand side of the street, so that one row of flats opened onto Strada Armand Călinescu. From the one-room apartment on the sixth floor where he lived—which had once been part of his mother’s flat, sold in the meantime—you could see the little streets that link the former Strada Italiană to Piața Rosetti and the back of the Intercontinental Hotel: Săgeții, Caragiale, Popa Rusu, Speranței, Constantin Nacu, Batiștei, Dianei... The block suffered seriously in the earthquake of 1977, and as it has never been consolidated, both its facades still bear the scars of that event across the dirty plaster. Being a block of pensioners, its condition had gradually deteriorated. The two-person lift, with the eternal dirty cardboard in place of a broken window, struggled to drag itself from one floor to the next, and broke down about once a month. The ancient heating boiler used to fail sometimes in the depths of winter, leaving the inhabitants to scatter to wherever they could. The bins were sometimes left in the stair well, right beside the lift door, so that you had to hold your breath or keep a handkerchief over your nose while you waited for the lift to come down. I noticed all this gradually, in the course of the hundreds of visits I made over the years to 3 Strada Arcului, as if the concrete carcass was decaying, getting uglier, aging, along with the discreet and fatal decline of its illustrious occupant.

There was none of this, however, back then in 1976. Dragomir, who had just turned 60, received Noica and myself in his minuscule flat with the relaxed manner characteristic of people whose centre of gravity is never *outside* themselves. None of the ‘great people’ that I have met, from Noica and Cioran to Dragomir, gave two-pence for their external comfort. All the great deeds by which the culture of a country or an age had been moved from its place had come to birth on an ordinary table (if not on a board supported on someone’s lap), in notebooks of poor-quality paper, scribbled with failing ball-points and badly sharpened pencils. I saw some of them living almost in squalor (Noica at Păltiniș, or Țuțea in his one-room flat behind the Cișmigiu Park) and none of them ever rose beyond a minimum level of decency in their dwelling place (Cioran in his mansard in the rue de l’Odéon, or Heidegger in his chalet at Todtnauberg, the interior of which I inspected room by room in the

summer of 2003, taking advantage of open curtains and, of course, the absence of the owner). Regardless of whether or not they had been in prison, they all had a certain ease in coping with scanty and poor material resources, an ease that sprang not from any impulse to 'slum it', nor from negligence or dirty habits, but simply from their power to separate themselves from the world of comfort in the name of values and imperatives that demanded everything of them and that were in any case, from the start, very far in the order of existence from what is meant by 'ordinary life'. What is strange is that all these people were, in their own way, elegant, which surely resulted to a large extent from their spiritual standing and their belonging to that human category that is best defined, regardless of origins, wealth and historical period, by the word 'aristocrat'.

Alexandru Dragomir was an aristocrat who welcomed us into a sixteen-square-metre room—his bedroom, office and living room in one. Along the wall opposite the door there was a large bed. At its head there was a bed-side table, and continuing along the wall to the left of the door, a narrow sofa on which two people could sit. In the middle of the room, next to the foot of the bed, there was a huge sagging armchair, covered with a blanket. Under the window there was a tiny work table, with another armchair facing it. On the wall to the right of the door there was a bookcase, with no more than a couple of 100 books, almost all of philosophy: Hegel (the Glockner edition), Plato in 'Belles Lettres', Aristotle, Jaeger's monograph, a massive Latin edition of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa*, Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des XIXen Jahrhunderts*, a French edition of Kierkegaard's *Journal* in four volumes, the Pre-Socratics in the Diels-Kranz edition, Descartes, Leibniz, the *Journal* of the brothers Goncourt, a few dictionaries, etc.

The man himself was thin and short of stature, with a small head and skin like parchment. He had fine hands, which he would run one after the other through his ever-rebellious hair, which formed an eddy right over his forehead. What was impressive was his look, with its metallic inflexion and its appearance of extreme hardness, especially when Dragomir was talking us through a demonstration, concentrating and looking somehow into himself, contaminated by the very severity of the thought he was unfolding. Never before had I seen in someone's eyes, mirrored with such precision, the sequence of small steps that seemed to make up his thinking. Dragomir's look, turned inward, took over that hallucinatory walk along the unseen corridors of the mind, and then let it be seen on the outside. Because it was transmitted through his eyes, because it became *visible*, there was something unsettling and savage about his thinking. Dragomir was terribly like a 'thinking animal', like a thinking snake or feline. This sensation completely disappeared and his look immediately became mild as soon as he emerged from the world of his reasoning, as often as not 'deconstructing' it with a joke or saying that what he had constructed was within the power of anyone that was willing to concentrate—as he had just done—along the (single) direction of their thought.

A Lesson in Thought

Of course in the hour that followed, he demolished my book completely, taking it apart from the foundations, that is to say starting from the very definition of *peratology* ('the theory of limit considered in its relation to consciousness') on which, full of the philosophical pride of youth, I had raised my entire theory about the tragic. I still recall that the discussion began with the fact that neither 'limit' nor 'consciousness' had been adequately defined in my book, with the result that, as Dragomir pointed out, I used them indistinctly, as the context dictated. 'Consciousness', for example, was sometimes used in the sense given to it by Pascal and Kierkegaard, namely that of a suffering individual, and sometimes in a Kantian sense, as a property of the human species ('consciousness in general'), or a Hegelian one (the historical consciousness of an age). My tragic hero was consequently sometimes Werther (or Hamlet), sometimes the indefinite representative of humankind (mortal in their very essence), and sometimes Nicolae Bălcescu¹⁰ or Götz von Berlichingen. Correspondingly, 'limit' was sometimes the interior limit of the hero, sometimes corporeality as finitude ('nature'), and sometimes a boundary of history. Dragomir then went on to pull apart a sentence of which I remember I had been very proud, at least in the context, when I wrote it: 'The maximum degree of difficulty in overcoming limit becomes, at the limit, a limit that in principle cannot be overcome.' 'What do you understand here by "difficulty"?' Dragomir asked me. 'Stumbling block, obstacle, condition? In the preceding sentence, you speak of "the possibility of overcoming", and then, after all that, we find ourselves in the region of "it's hard, kid, it's very hard, in fact sometimes it's actually impossible." In fact, limit itself doesn't have the "quality of being overcome-able", in the sense of being easier or more difficult to overcome, and—at the limit—impossible to overcome. "Hard" or "difficult" come only from the person and differ from one person to the next.' I protested, saying that in my book 'limit' is 'transcendental', and thus is only considered in the field of consciousness, and that, in my 'peratology' with tragic valences, there is no limit 'in itself'. Then he attacked me at another point, telling me that I did not distinguish between 'the self-consciousness of limit' and the 'self-consciousness of limitation', and that, in general, I practiced a 'technique of amalgam'—'The most dangerous thing in philosophy! For example you mix Greek tragedy with modern tragedy, transferring in an impermissible way the categories of modern philosophy into the ancient Greek universe.' His conclusion was that overall it was all right, but as far as 'thinking' was concerned I still had a thing or two to learn.

¹⁰Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–1852), Romanian revolutionary. He played a leading role in the liberal revolution of 1848 in Wallachia and was a member of the Provisional Government set up in June of that year. In 1849 he tried unsuccessfully to negotiate peace between the Hungarian revolutionary government and the Transylvanian Romanian leader Avram Iancu. After the failure of the revolution he went into exile and continued to work for collaboration between revolutionaries of different nations. [Trans.]

We parted—Noica stayed longer—and I left convinced that the ‘old men’ had set up a plot which, undoubtedly, formed part of Noica’s ‘paideic programme’: Dragomir had been the ‘cold shower’ that had to be administered to me preventively so that my debut with the book on the tragic would not go to my head. I muttered to myself all the way home, turning Dragomir’s objections around in my head and considering them from all directions. Then at night, before I went to sleep, I kept asking myself what it could mean that I still had a thing or two to learn where ‘thinking’ was concerned.

About 10 years passed. From time to time, Noica would come and complain to us that Dragomir had pulled to pieces another chapter of the *Treatise of Ontology* that he was working on. I saw him seldom, generally by accident, and had only a vague notion of how he spent his time. I knew, also from Noica, something about a ‘paper’ concerning time that Dragomir had been labouring at, apparently, since the ‘50s, but I knew nothing about what results he had produced, or even if he was ever going to finish the task. I had managed to find out that he ‘didn’t write’, and that his refusal—which could only be perplexing to us as pupils of Noica, raised in the cult of effectiveness, of publication, and of the ‘work’—had its basis in a sort of egoism of understanding, in the idea that all that matters, if you have landed in this world, is to try to be clear in your own mind about it, ‘not to leave it like an ox’. Sometimes when I came to his home in the morning with a book he had asked me to bring him, I would find him with a Greek edition of Plato or Aristotle open on the table and beside it a notebook of cheap paper on which from a distance I could make out closely written lines written in ballpoint. ‘So, you’re writing!’ I teased him happily. ‘No, I’m not writing. I’m confronting those who have looked at the problem before me.’ ‘And why don’t you publish?’ I began again. ‘Because it doesn’t *interest* me, can’t you see, Mr. Liiceanu?’ ‘But if this lot hadn’t published either—Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz—I mean, your people—, who would you have been confronting today? It’s clear that you are a great egoist!’ I concluded triumphantly.

This game was repeated dozens of times. Sometimes I would just find a little notebook on the table with a ballpoint beside it. ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I’m noting down a thought or two. Like Wittgenstein. I mean like me. It so happens sometimes that I think.’ As he raised such a screen of bashfulness around the matter, I never asked him to show me or read me anything. And still less did he ever offer to do so. Somehow or other, one fine day his youthful essay ‘On the Mirror’ fell into the hands of Andrei Pleșu and myself, the essay that, it was said, had been annotated by Mircea Vulcănescu, and then ‘judged’, in Noica’s presence, in a meeting at the chalet in the forest of Andronache. Exasperated by so much ‘Dragomirian mystery’, and happy that at last we had a chance to judge the man who judged everyone else, Andrei and I dived greedily into the seven or eight pages. At last we had a ‘sample’ of Dragomir. We quickly concluded that it was nothing special. Then we took it round to Petru Creția, who was our ‘mirror specialist’ (for the past 10 years he had been throwing pieces of paper with notes either ‘on clouds’ or ‘on mirrors’ into two large cardboard boxes): ‘For someone who hasn’t gone into the subject thoroughly, it’s quite good,’ he declared categorically, and that was the end of the discussion. We had been put at ease. Now we *knew* who Dragomir was. It was clear that we had

nothing to fear. We had got worked up for nothing. The man hardly wrote, or anyway ‘didn’t know how to write’. From Noica we had learnt that a philosophical idea had to overturn the usual way of seeing things, to *surprise*. Whatever the cost. The rest was *how* you said it. And so we did somersaults and competed with one another in stylistic pedantries. We wrote *beautifully*. And ultimately that was what counted. We turned our backs on someone who, with an uncompleted doctorate under Heidegger, was unable to tell us anything except that we had to *understand* the world in which we lived and to learn to *think*.

The Lucaci Cul-de-sac Lectures

And so, as I said, 10 years passed. At the end of 1984, Pleșu and I returned home after a long Humboldtian sojourn in Germany. Our Alpine spiritual idyll had in the meantime been exposed¹¹: *The Păltiniș Diary* had been published the previous year, and this divulging gesture had itself completed the ‘rite of parting’ from Noica. We were, so to speak, free from the master, and neither of us had much idea in which direction to go next. All that was in my mind was that I had to rewrite the book on limit, but in a different way, ‘freely’, without being able to say exactly *how*. And then, early in 1985, in a superb ludic episode, Alexandru Dragomir asked Noica to ‘lend’ him his disciples, who had in the meantime become ‘characters in a novel’ (Sorin Vieru, Pleșu, and myself), with a view to ‘using’ us as an audience for a series of private lectures. Noica was delighted at the idea, thinking that in this way he was making Dragomir emerge from his burrow, making him *manifest* himself. In a solemn meeting at my home in the Lucaci Cul-de-sac, Noica ‘handed us over’ to Dragomir. To start with, three weekly meetings were planned, and at the first of them, Dragomir shocked us with the announcement that he was going to present ‘a Platonic interpretation of Caragiale’s *A Lost Letter*’.¹² (‘I hesitated between a Leibnizian, an Aristotelian, and a Platonic interpretation, but in the end I have settled for the third,’ he began, in an absolutely serious tone.) He spoke for an hour, occasionally glancing at a sheet of paper in his hand or reading a quotation from it. We each sat in an armchair, and all of us, I think, took notes. We had certainly never experienced anything like this. Dragomir spoke, with that look in which was reflected the pilgrimage of a subtle logos towards a place known only to him; he affected preciosity (‘for the misshapen is something nasty, isn’t it?—something “yucky”’); he moved from a general overview (‘Caragiale’s whole play sets up a relation between εἰκὼν and εἶδος, between periphery and centre, what is comic being simply the fatally skewed form of the εἰκὼν—the local, the provincial—in its unhappy relation to the εἶδος—the centre, the capital’) to juicy hermeneutics of

¹¹ i.e. their discussions with Noica at his retreat in the mountain resort of Păltiniș. [Trans.]

¹² Ion Luca Caragiale (1852–1912), writer and journalist. His comic plays, especially *A Lost Letter* (1884), a satire on small-town political life, are among the most well-known and often quoted classics of Romanian literature. [Trans.]

detail ('The reflex response of the subaltern Pristanda—"absolutely"—represents the *echo*, which is simply the empty response that the boss needs in order to hear an amplified version of himself'). Quotations from Plato's *Timaeus* and from Augustine's commentaries on the *De Anima* of Aristotle, the 'master-servant' sequence from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, details on the configuration of the province in the Roman empire, the Hungarian word *világ* (origin of the Romanian expression *dare în vileag*, meaning loss of privacy, making public), sentences of Ennius... all were mobilized in the interpretation of Caragiale's play, together with a huge quantity of intelligence, verve and depth. In contrast to Noica's demonstrative hermeneutic treatment of Eminescu's 'Lucaferul' or the folktale 'Youth without Age', made to illustrate (and confirm) his own ontological model, Dragomir did not seek to demonstrate anything (any preconceived idea or theory or doctrine of his own), but, in a Heideggerian manner, allowed the thing to speak through itself, to manifest itself, to appear in the full light of day, to emerge from the hiding place in which it had hitherto lain. And as for us, how could we not have seen before what Dragomir had 'shown' to us? He ended the first lecture (out of three devoted to the interpretation of the play) by saying that ultimately he had not communicated anything original, and that anyone who was willing to think things through attentively would find there exactly what he had just told us.

It was the first time outside Heidegger's writings that we had seen phenomenology 'at work', and without any of the epigone's laboured imitation, but simply in the way that, having once learnt to play a musical instrument, one can choose one's own melodies to play on it.

At the end of the three lectures, my enthusiasm was so great that after a while I felt the need to give the whole thing the coherence and fluency of a written text. Typed in standard format on the Swedish typewriter I had brought back from Germany, the text came to 30 pages. I was in love with it. I had no idea, of course, that in this way I had brought into the world the pages that, 18 years later, would open the first volume of the 'works' of Dragomir. Several times I tried to give it to him to read. Each time he refused. As for publication, not a chance.

The Opening of the Archive

Our 'working' meetings with Dragomir continued at very irregular intervals until the year 2000. They almost always began with a lecture by him, followed by discussion. It sometimes happened that one of us opened the meeting, and on other occasions the discussion was 'free', without any starting point or particular theme. At a certain point I stopped taking notes, as Dragomir agreed to have a cassette recorder on a little table beside him while he was speaking. After 1995, Horia Patapievici joined the team, and, from time to time, when he was back in Romania (he was doing a doctorate in Scotland), Catalin Partenie would also turn up at my home in the Lucaci Cul-de-sac. Patapievici unnerved me with the eagerness with which he always wrote down *everything* in a notebook on his knee.

For those of us who for 15 years had been confronted with Dragomir's *orality*, it remained until his death in 2002 a mystery whether he actually wrote or not. With the exception of that translation of Heidegger's lecture *What is Metaphysics?*, published in a journal of the Romanian exile and signed together with Walter Biemel, he never published *anything* in his own name. Whenever one of us asked him if he wrote, the standard answer would always come: 'That isn't important. I just try to *understand*.' That 'understanding' might sometimes involve notes, annotations, a written page or even a few pages in succession, was, for him, a quite unessential matter. After his death—he had no heirs, and left 'everything' to Nina Călinescu, with whom he had shared his life since 1973—, I was able to take his whole 'archive' home. What did I discover in it?

Notebooks, over 90 of them, each with an air of the years it dated from: some of them were hardback, with the cover bound in fabric, from the Freiburg period; others, the majority, were 'socialist' notebooks, some in large 'student' format, some normal sized, some thin, with 100 pages, some thick, with 300, in vinyl covers of different colours. Curiously, all had been numbered from the start, by drawing a little square in the top corner of the right-hand page and writing an odd number in it. (Most of the notebooks began with the number 1 or 3.) That the numbering was done from the beginning, and not as the writing advanced, was clear from the fact that not only were the pages of the notebooks not all filled, but as often as not the writing stopped well before the last numbered page. The intention of writing at least as far as the numbered pages went was belied each time by the abandoning of the notebook long before. Thus, as a result of this 'horror of the full', many of the notebooks were almost empty, as if they had been hastily rejected as soon as they were begun, in favour of a new notebook that could then expect to be thrown aside in its turn, with most of its pages numbered. On the other hand, there were various pocket notebooks, of different sizes, shapes, and colours, that were packed full of writing. They gave the feeling that the person who filled them had been driven by an unseen hand away from the 'big notebooks' to take refuge, bag and baggage, in a minuscule space, in which everything was tightly squeezed and piled one thing on top of another. Here you could find extracts from the Greek, Latin, and German philosophers (with exact references to the sources)—sometimes commented, sometimes not—reflections of one or two lines or developments of a thought over three or four pages, notes on current events, families of words, schemas, bibliographies, quotations. Some of the notebooks had titles that acknowledged this inexhaustible bric-a-brac: *Seeds, Odds and Ends, Scribblings...* Judging by the modest dimensions of the pages, Dragomir seemed to have preferred to do battle with the problems that would not leave him in peace not on an open field, but by setting up ambushes, attracting them into scrubland, valleys, and narrow defiles.

Some dozens of the notebooks had a well-defined content and a title written clearly on the cover. Among them were those with notes from Heidegger's seminar, the notebook summarizing Hegel's *Logic* (also from the 1940s), the book of notes from Nestle's course on Homer, and an avalanche of notebooks resulting from Dragomir's reading of the great European philosophers up to the 1950s and again starting from the '70s: 14 notebooks on Plato, eight on Aristotle, four each on

Descartes and Leibniz, two on Wittgenstein, and then various notes from reading of Kant, Hegel, Tarski, Russell, Freud, Jung, Lacan, and Eliade, some of them with a notebook to themselves, others gathered together in the same notebook. Under the title *I and the Others*, a notebook started in 1986 assembled together quotations from Plato, Aristotle, the medieval logicians, Thomas Aquinas, Galileo, Kepler, Kant, Fichte, and Freud—most of them with commentary. Then there were summaries and quotations taken from secondary literature, from Gilson to Koyré or Janik and Toulmin, and other notebooks dedicated to geometry, arithmetic, or mathematical logic. It was a huge laboratory, branching out in an endless variety of directions, which extended to the great European dynasties, traditional Romanian forenames that were falling out of use, and the typographical terminology for the principal letter forms.

Separately, in a white plastic bag, there were four large notebooks, all dedicated to the problem of time.

Chronos: The Time Notebooks

The theme of time was evidently a preoccupation of Dragomir's throughout his life as a 'thinker'. The first notebook had 160 pages (numbered by twos) with writing only on the right-hand pages. On the cover, as on the covers of the others, was written the title *Chronos*, in Greek letters, and below it a series of 5 years: 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952. This notebook, with its pages turning brown along the edges, and, like almost all the notebooks Dragomir used, of poor-quality paper, was filled with writing in pencil (at one point a blue pencil with a filed point had been used, making the writing clumsy), sometimes in German, sometimes in Romanian, with the date of writing mentioned in each case. The pages written on 2 March 1948, for example, are dedicated to the clock: 'The clock has no past and no future, not even a present. That is because the clock is not time; it just *shows* time. In fact it *shows* only the present. It is easy to imagine—even if it has not actually been made—a clock with a fixed hand and moving numbers...' On 30 August 1948, Dragomir notes: *Was bedeutet 'wie'? Was bedeutet 'so'? Jedes Vergangene ist immer wie (d.h. so) und nie Existenz. Jedes Jetzt ist immer Existenz und nie so. Was bedeutet aber 'so'? ('What does "how" mean? What does "thus" mean? Any past is *always* "how" (that is, "thus") and never existence. Any now is *always* existence and never "thus". But what does "thus" mean?)* The way of thinking—attacking the taken-for-granted, that which circulates unimpeded and unquestioned in language—and the terminology are Heideggerian; the courage to go to what is most difficult (time, existence, happening, space, etc.) is both presumptuous and juvenile.

The notebook, as I have said, extends over 5 years: from 1948 (when Dragomir was 32) to 1952. This is exactly the period in which Communism was establishing control in Romania. The principal element of its programme had already been achieved: terror had taken firm root in people's hearts. It is likely that Dragomir, who had already gone into cultural clandestinity, felt that in writing about time he

was opening a great philosophical building site in the underground of history. Set against the background of real history, of what was happening ‘on the surface’, the notebook gives the impression of a desperate gamble, almost an experiment performed on himself: how long would the reflexes acquired in Freiburg keep functioning? There is also, in this notebook, something challenging in Dragomir’s relation to his own past. Inasmuch as the notebook on time marked Dragomir’s renunciation of both the doctoral thesis on Hegel and that on Plato (mentioned in his letter to Heidegger in 1947), it abolished his status of ‘student’, and at the same time announced his intention and will to pursue original thinking. Moreover, Dragomir was entering ground in which Heidegger had spent almost a decade, thus letting it be understood that *Sein und Zeit* had not ‘solved’ the problem of time... And so, how long would the reflexes acquired in Freiburg continue to function?

The answer is given in the second notebook. It is labelled on the cover *Chronos II*, and underneath, 27 Nov. ’78–27 Dec. ’78; 27 II ’79 –... For 24 years, Dragomir had stopped working on the problem of time. This was the period in which he had successively worked as an editor at the *Energetică*, *Tehnică*, and *Politică* publishing houses, then a quality controller at the Biczaz power station and an economist at Exportlemn. Now he was retired, and miraculously he found within himself the resources to penetrate once more into a compartment of his life that had seemed abandoned forever. For 2 years—from 1976 to 1978—he ‘warmed up’, rereading the classic texts on time by Aristotle, Augustine, Hegel, and Husserl. On 27 November 1978, he picked up again the chain of thought in the 1948–1952 notebook, as if nothing had happened in the meantime apart from the passage of those 24 years. The code of traditional metaphysics (*essentia*, *Substanz*, *Sein*, *Anwesen*) was retained, and the struggle with ‘thus’ (*Sosein*) continued.

The third notebook, entitled *Chronos: Laboratorium*, covers the period 1980–1990, and represents the culminating moment in Dragomir’s development of the theme. 395 pages are numbered (as usual, by twos), and as there is writing only on the right-hand pages, the notebook contains 200 written pages, making it the most substantial document in the archive. The ‘hard’ technical language here starts to soften, and the reflection becomes simple, friendly, and reminiscent of the unsophisticated Dragomir we knew at the time of his lectures at Lucaci, who had come to think using mainly the words of ordinary language. The theme, in its turn, becomes supple and penetrates unsuspected corners of existence. The expression ‘time passes’, for example, breaks out of the perimeter of *Dasein*, and goes as far as the ‘age of trees’, which ‘measure time’ by the wrinkles on their trunks, by their rings, by the ‘marking’ of annual cyclicality, thus bearing the calendar engraved on their ‘flesh’. Again it is interesting to note how the hypostases of time here take on personality, having ‘states’ and species (at one point he speaks of the ‘perished past’, for example—which is much more than the past that has simply ‘passed’—, the past that is dead, reduced to nothing, without trace, pure non-being that goes far beyond the preserved past), and how, modulating in this way, they enter into strange resonances and correspondences with each other. The future, for example, is not simple and indeterminate, but has a structure: there is an immediate future, corresponding to what is kept from the past, which is ‘passage’, and there is a distant future,

corresponding to what is remembered from the past, which is the unknown. On page 127 there is a striking note with an apocalyptic tone about the past. Might we not somehow grasp better the being of the past, Dragomir wonders, if we tried to find out what would happen if we suppressed it? In the first place the ‘presences of the past’ would no longer exist, that is to say, the dead, graves, and cemeteries; then there would be no monuments, commemorations, or anniversaries. There would be no tradition, customs, and habits. History itself would no longer exist. But nor would there be any science or even empirical knowledge, since both presuppose the already-known. All that would be left would be the present of ‘is’, as an eternal beginning, and the future reduced to a pure unknown. It is now that Dragomir begins to feel the *enormous metaphysical charge of banality* and the fact that the centre of gravity of philosophy lies in reflection on the banal, that is, on the thousands of trivial details that make up our lives.

The discourse on time in the third notebook loses the distant tone with which it began, sheds its ‘indifference’, and acquires ‘existential’ tones and in places lyrical inflexions. (‘The sadness of the consumption of life, and with it the feeling that you are part of something that escapes you, perhaps without appeal.’) At one point on page 127, Dragomir feels taken in and devoured by the very subject to which he has dedicated his life. He writes then, under the date of 28 April 1984, insinuating himself into the text with the entire fragility of his person, the following underlined words: ‘*Because I am afraid that I shall start to forget some thoughts, I shall keep writing, from today onwards, new thoughts in whatever order they come, and—above all—what I have long known but have never put down on paper.*’

The fourth notebook, entitled *Chronos: Notes*, has 221 numbered pages (so 110 pages of writing) and is undated. It was most likely compiled in parallel with the third book (rather than continuing it after 1989). The specification *Notes* in the title points to the completely relaxed tone of the discourse which manages to ‘suck up’ thoughts on time from all directions; some are from the minds of classic authors (it is full of Greek quotations) but most are the thoughts of Dragomir himself, all collected with a view to possibly working on them at a later date. The *form* of the notes likewise varies, from schemas to discursive texts, with occasional flashes of thought, dazzling annotations. For example: ‘The lightning-flash *present* of orgasm is at the same time the procreation of the *future*.’ Or: ‘The past: the only *petrified* time.’ Or: ‘The illnesses of the past: forgetting, distortion, error.’ Elsewhere the notes concern *themes of thinking*. It is clear, Dragomir writes, that there is a temporal difference between when I *see* a movement and when I *hear* a melody. But in that case, if the three-dimensional seems characteristically anchored in sight, and music in hearing, how is it possible for them to be combined in ballet? Elsewhere he asks: how is it that in the case of the future I can either go towards it (projection) or stop and let it come towards me (waiting)? And what is more important in the future? My *desire*, the fact that I ‘tend towards’ something, or what the future *brings*? And again: every ‘now’ is repeated and yet is another. But what is the relation between repetition and passing?

Utter Metaphysical Banalities: The Vinyl Notebooks

After I had gone through the ‘time notebooks’, which would undoubtedly make up a volume of several hundred pages, I opened the other large notebooks, which I had christened the ‘vinyl notebooks’, from the fact that they were all covered with green, black, or brown plastic sleeves. They were six in number: three of them bore the marks of that *horror pleni* that periodically took hold of Dragomir and had made him abandon them after 17, 21, or 25 pages (out of the 300 in each notebook) and take refuge in pocketbooks and notepads. The other three, however, were more substantial, and gave the best view of what had become of Dragomir’s thought latterly, up to the year 1997. The ‘green notebook’, begun after 1986, contained mini-essays of between four and eighteen pages, with surprising titles: *The Morning Awakening*, *The Immortality of the Soul* (with the specification ‘in plain everyday terms’), *The Land of the Foul and Ugly*, *Wear and Tear*, *Mistake*.¹³ The ‘black notebook’ and the ‘brown notebook’—which was entitled *Me I*—were the most substantial, and contained a sort of ‘journal of ideas’, recorded by years and days in the case of the ‘black notebook’, The notes in this book covered 12 years (from 1980 to 1992), and the other, undated, was probably started after 1994.

Both notebooks seemed touched by a sort of restlessness of thought, by a ‘noetic greed’, by the need mentally to devour each detail of life, to take it from the place where it lay (well-behaved, taken for granted and ignored), to turn it round and look at it from all sides, in order to put it aside (for a time) and then take it back, as if the first examination were not sufficient and a host of details from this essential detail of life had been missed at the first glance of thought. How had this man, who for 18 years had laboured over the great problem of time, come to meditate, after the age of 65, only on things which in relation to *Time* seemed mere bagatelles? There could only be one answer: the problem of time itself had put them in his way; *they themselves* were time, the small change into which that great banknote had to be converted in order to obtain thousands of aspects of life. For time *was* life. And the aspects of life poured as from an enormous dish into the lap of the thinker who now spent his time endlessly looking through them, as if they were the most precious treasure: about things said and those unsaid, about clumsiness in communication, about the weight of words, about old age, about the hours of time and the hours of the day and night, about loneliness, about the six movements of the person in space and their symbolism, about the utterance, about the sexual act, about the aggressivity of ideas, about the actor, about ‘know thyself’, about the meaning of the world, about lack, about sport, about the fragility of life, about what it means to know, about exteriorization, about society without God, about totalitarian regimes, about front and back, about transition, about science, about the myth of words, about life as a consumable good, about history, about my body and me, about forgetting, about

¹³ French translations of the last three of these essays have appeared in *Studia Phaenomenologica: Romanian Journal for Phenomenology*, Vol. IV (2004), 3–4, pp. 149–152, 145–147, and 135–143. [Trans.]

the astronomical calendar and the religious calendar, about signs, about the theory of 'both-and', about the body, about laziness, about the secret services, about handling the unforeseen, about talent...

'He is the very devil,' Noica once said about Dragomir. If it was the devil who took control of the tree of knowledge after the fall, then Dragomir was the very devil. What is certain is that in Adam's place he would have managed to eat from *all* the forbidden fruits. And for all that, in his frenetic desire *to understand everything*, there was something rather of an eternal student, approaching Creation as a class theme and preparing assiduously for the day in which he would be examined by God. Indeed he knew this and said it, on 8 January 1993, in a formidable note in the notebook entitled *Seeds*: 'Basically I am doing a doctoral thesis with God.' The most important thing that happened in Dragomir's life is precisely this: at a certain point he changed the supervisor of his thesis. He simply felt that any thematic content that could be imagined in university terms was too narrow in relation to everything that was to be thought. On 1 September 1979, he noted: 'The evening is falling beautifully on my conviction that I do not know how to write (I write dryly, schematically) and on a soul full of joy that there are so many problems that one has to think about and that are lying here, within our reach, like the trees, like the flowers.'

Whose Is the Task of Thinking?

But what does 'to think' mean? Is there any person who does not think? Is thinking not an attribute of the human being? Are we not all thinking from moment to moment, from the moment we wake up till we lie down and fall asleep again? Of course we are. Only that this sort of thinking is thinking *around* what we are doing and *according* to our preoccupations. We do not make thinking as such a preoccupation in itself. When we think, that is, *all the time*, we think *pragmatically*. We do not stop our activity to think about how the activity is possible. We never take a break from what we are doing to think—*without doing anything else*—about all sorts of things that we habitually do. We do not stop hammering to think about the being of the hammer and what a tool is in itself. We do not wake up in the morning to think about what it means to fall asleep and to return to a state of wakefulness. We wonder in passing at a dream, but we are not so amazed at the fact of dreaming as to start really thinking about our power to dream and the strange reality that a dream is. We consider ourselves, some of us, intellectuals, but we never come to the point of asking ourselves what in fact an intellectual is, and when he first appears in the world in the posture of an intellectual. In short, in order to think you must think of something *other* than what you are actually doing; you must think with *wonder* at the things that you usually do without first interpreting the essence of what you are doing.

This pause, which interrupts our habitual activity and into which the question and commentary of thought insinuate themselves, is not, for the vast majority of

people, a normal thing. And even if it so happens that people find something that ‘makes them think’, they do not do it systematically enough (which most often means following a particular method) to become ‘thinkers’. And then, in order really to become a thinker it is not enough to have this vocation of the pause. (In that case any shepherd standing leaning on his staff in the heat of a summer’s day while his sheep graze, lazily chewing the end of a straw with his gaze lost in the distance, would be a thinker. For he is undoubtedly ‘thinking of something’.) To become a ‘thinker’, you also have to become aware of all that has been done (that is ‘thought’) by those before you who have transformed their existence into an extended pause for thought and have faced the problems that you are facing. And that presupposes an immense struggle with the thoughts of others, with no-one able to guarantee that after all this struggle you will still be able, others’ thoughts and all, to think *for yourself*. Any true thinker must be able to cope with this situation: to avoid being a dilettante, ignoring what others have thought before you, and to avoid the risk of no longer reaching yourself, being swallowed up by the outpouring of the thinking of others. The noise of the others’ thinking must stop at some point, so that in the silence that falls you can hear the voice of your own thinking.

Latin has a remarkable pair of words—*otium–negotium*—, whose significance can help us to understand what I have just said. *Otium* is that ‘pause’ of which I have spoken, the repose that intervenes when the ‘agitation of preoccupation’ (*negotium*) ceases. Thinking is impossible in a world of ‘negotiation’, because negotiation is par excellence the world of activity in which thinking is *entirely absorbed*—and so cancelled as pure thinking—by *what* you are doing, by the object in itself of the activity. Because it requires one first to *stop*, thinking is, in its very essence, ‘otiose’, lazy, sublimely indolent.

Well, Dragomir took up this ‘task of thinking’, in a time in which in Romania no-one was thinking anymore, and in which thinking, in the sense described above, had decayed almost everywhere in the world. We might make play with the fact that Dragomir retired and ‘started to think’ in the very year that Heidegger died, 1976. In any case Dragomir was conscious that the post of ‘thinker’ was vacant. On 6 November 1983, he noted in his ‘black notebook’: ‘In our intellectual circles, the essayist stirs ideas, the logician reasons, and the professor or researcher presents papers. But who actually thinks?’

To judge by the meetings a few of us had with him, and by the archive that remained ‘secret’ until a year ago, Dragomir was a thinker, one of the very few, if not the only one, that the Romanians have ever had, if we are prepared to take the following into account: (1) a formidable meeting, *at the source*, with those who had thought about a problem before him; (2) a technique of thinking acquired at first hand in Freiburg and refined by uninterrupted (probably daily) exercise over more than 20 years. This unveiling of the object of thinking by a double operation—connecting it to the history of thinking about it, and then scrutinizing it with phenomenological sight—was the lesson which Dragomir had learnt well from Heidegger.

Heidegger's Lesson: A Technique of Thinking from Humble Things

If we are to look in detail at this lesson, then we must first stop for a moment to look at the technique of scrutiny and 'phenomenological sight'. The truth is that this gaze of special quality was preceded by the *capacity for wonder* that Aristotle had already spoken of in the first book of his *Metaphysics*.

But we must be careful! In order to be truly philosophical, Aristotelian wonder appeared rather in the presence of objects that *escaped* the sphere of our preoccupations. In other words, the more un-experienced and un-experienceable an object was, the further it lay from our everyday life, the more worthy it became of philosophical wonder. The movements of the planets were for Aristotle more worthy of wonder than the being of the sandal we put on every morning. The 'principles and first causes' of the universe: there lay the supreme object of our ignorance and our wonder, and, as such, the one true object of philosophical preoccupation. While Heideggerian phenomenology also starts from the philosophical virtue of wondering, the direction of wonder is now completely changed. And the source of this change of direction must be sought in a reappraisal of the youthful dialogues of Plato, where Socrates wonders and raises questions about the things that make up our everyday life, but which no one around him wonders at. It is precisely this technique of wondering in front of the taken-for-granted—in front of that which, through excess of use, no longer constitutes a problem for people, and as such no longer merits thought—that is given new life by Heidegger. Heidegger does not ask about 'first causes' and 'ultimate principles', but about the things that occur most frequently in our daily lives and expression. He does not wonder, for example, about the verb 'to be' in the hierophantic manner of traditional ontology (leading inescapably to 'Being'), but only inasmuch as the verb 'to be' lies at the very heart of our everyday speech, as we use it in almost every sentence we utter. Heidegger does not question the '*archei* of the world', but wonders what 'to think' means, what is understood by 'thing', what technique is: that is to say, exactly that which is represented for us all by the familiar par excellence, which determines every moment of our lives. The more familiar something is—meaning the more it is taken for granted, the more it is 'passed over'—the more *denkwürdig*, 'worthy of thought', it is. The result is a *considerable democratization of the object of thinking in philosophy*: that which is humble, unnoticed, completely lacking in the mark of prestige—ultimately even the speck of dust, rubbish, dirt (the level of the 'yucky', as Dragomir would say)—can mobilize thinking just as well (and to more use, as far as understanding the world you live in is concerned) as the traditional sublime objects of thought: the supreme cause, mind, immortality, etc. When Dragomir speaks of the joy he finds in 'the problems that you have to think about and that are lying here, within our reach, like the trees, like the flowers', he is expressing precisely this 'tropicalization of thinking', the fact that in its orchard there is a place for all the flowers (and weeds) of the world, and that all of them, subjected to our endless wonder, can provoke the exuberance of thinking. These huge deposits of problems can only be uncovered by

paying attention to the evident things that we no longer perceive precisely because they are too evident. The questioning of the familiar, of the *too familiar*, is the lesson that Dragomir learnt from Heidegger. 'To place these taken-for-granted in the light of θαυμάζειν, of the fact of wondering,' he notes somewhere. In this way *everything* can be *to be thought*, everything ultimately falls within the task of thinking. Woman is different from man. That is evident. But in what does this difference consist? *A Lost Letter*: an evident text from which we quote all the time when we speak Romanian. Evident, since it has become the spiritual environment for each of us. But if we were put on the spot, could we say what exactly the being of *A Lost Letter* is? We all live in a spatial and temporal environment; we move here and there and are 'contemporary'. That is evident, taken for granted; everybody knows it. But what does it mean to be contemporary and to move here and there?

We can already observe that an intimate relationship emerges between this *wonder* (in the face of things that are overpowered by their own familiarity) and *sight*. For the sight proposed by phenomenology lives off that which *has been passed over*, forgotten, diminished, ignored. Phenomenological vision is ultimately one that acquires its acuteness from a previous blindness. All the things around us have fallen, through excess of use, into a sort of ontological faint. The phenomenologist gifted with the freshness of the primal gaze is a resuscitator capable of giving a philosophical kiss of life to things that, as victims of our blindness, have become lethargic.

In this context, philosophy certainly becomes *originary*: it is an ἄσκησις, an exercise in the space of the primal gaze. But what is the origin of this 'freshened' gaze? Does it result from an exceptional gift that, by divine or genetic grace, is enjoyed only by philosophers and by phenomenologists in particular? Here I might bring into the discussion the fundamental hypocrisy that is characteristic of phenomenology (one that Dragomir liked to indulge in) and on which it proceeds to build its false modesty. Like Descartes's reason (*le bon sens*), the phenomenological gaze is an equally distributed good that in principle anyone can make use of. We can all, if we like, come to gaze at and see the 'is' of each thing. What distinguishes the phenomenologist from the ordinary person is thus a question of *will*. And of effort, of course. You have to *want* to see a thing beyond the layers of prejudices under which general opinion has buried it, beyond the distortions to which we subject it every day by our triviality, by our empty curiosity and our ambiguities. The phenomenological gaze is in the first place a liberated gaze, and one that in its turn liberates the thing from the (inevitable) hiding place in which it is kept from one moment to the next by the slippage of language and by routine. The effort is, as we can see, archaeological in nature: the phenomenological gaze excavates, brings to light, washes, cleans. That is all. Ultimately it all comes down to an attentive concentration on the thing that we want to recuperate by looking / thinking appropriately.

From this point of view, phenomenology, being *originary*, does not set out to be *original*. And Dragomir provided the display par excellence of this willed lack of originality. For there is nothing original about attention and concentration, is there? It is all, as we have seen, a matter of the need to understand, a technique of concentration and exercise. Dragomir never thought when he spoke to us that he was

bringing something of his own to add to the matter under discussion. ‘You throw yourself into philosophy bare, as into water,’ he notes in one of his notebooks. ‘If you throw yourself in fully dressed, your clothes and your boots will drag you down, even if you know how to swim.’ The ‘clothes’ and ‘boots’ are here the ornaments of your own mind, the pride of your foreknowledge and your ideas, and the undressing is the prior ritual that the philosopher performs in order to announce that in the act of interpretation it is the being of the thing interpreted that must appear, and not the ingenuity of the interpreter. The interpreter interprets only by deciphering, finding the cipher of the thing (its ‘is’), which people no longer see either because they are no longer looking for it, or because they no longer have a fresh view of it. In short, if you want to get to the being of a thing, you have to let yourself be guided by it.

But then, if everything is reduced to heightened attention, to the focusing of the gaze and to deciphering, it is ridiculous to want to be an author. It is pretentious to put your signature to a ‘mere’ gaze. We have seen that Dragomir used to close each lecture by saying that his ideas were the ideas that would have come into anyone’s mind if they had had the desire or the inclination to consider, as seriously as he had done, the matter in question.

Where in all this is there room for hypocrisy? In the fact that Dragomir knew very well what ‘labours of understanding’ were concealed behind the ‘mere gaze’. Phenomenological scrutiny—that examination that grasped what no one could see anymore (or had never seen before) in a thing, that ‘saw’ in any thing the hidden part of its own manifestation—was in fact the supreme difficulty of thinking, and as such something far from being available to everybody. And so the character who, in the name of the initial democracy of the ‘evenly distributed’ gaze, had seemingly been definitively expelled from the stage—the author—now reappeared, when this thinking born from the liberation of the hidden was confronted with the *supreme test of formulation*. Heidegger himself had at one time been obliged to abandon the road opened up by *Being and Time*, because his power of expression had failed him, the language had been unable to follow the thinking. And for Dragomir, writing had undoubtedly been the great burden of his life as a thinker. In a letter of November 1981 to Noica, at the end of the (unfinished) text entitled *Socrates*, Dragomir writes: ‘Dear Dinu, I am bored. My fullest admiration for those who can write; they are heroes. But how can you write when you could be thinking? Only women can give birth: we conceive.’ That this proclaimed sterility of thought (which is apparently excused the test of objectivization, of ‘birth’ through writing) is a whim, a momentary indulgence, designed to conceal if not a handicap then at least a disinclination, is made clear by another confession that Dragomir lets slip in one of his notebooks: ‘Where do I have difficulty? I have difficulty in *catching* my own thought. In order to know what you think you have to make an effort. In order to know what you think you have to formulate your thoughts. But how hard it is!’

One thing is certain, however: in these conditions of total austerity, to ‘do philosophy’ ceased to be an ‘act of culture’. When Dragomir invoked the classic names of philosophy or made reference with spectacular ease to Greek, Latin, or German sources, he was not doing it in order to show the solidity of his philosophical training, and still less to astound us or to make a display of culture. He simply knew that

for a professional thinker, at the end of its own solitude the act of thinking met the thinking of the ‘great philosophers’. In January 1996, Dragomir shared the following thought with Catalin Partenie: ‘Why do you need to read the great philosophers? Because when you look at Aristotle, for example, after thinking on your own about a problem, you see that out of, let’s say, ten things that he says about the problem you have said three, and two of them badly.’ Precisely because these philosophers were ‘great’, precisely because, through them, you can get an idea of how and at what level a philosophical problem can be asked, they become inevitable companions on the road of your own thought. It is natural that when you think of something, since you are not the first to think of it, you should think together with those who have thought about it before you. Thus every time he quoted an author it was for him a form of *mit-denken*, of ‘thinking in the footsteps of others’, together with them. And here too the lesson was eminently Heideggerian. The only non-Heideggerian aspect was that Dragomir had no ‘code’. Unlike Heidegger, he did not construct concepts, did not create an *idiom* for himself. Rather, inasmuch as in his lectures and writing he preferred colloquialism and direct formulation, he was closer to the image of that Socrates who, according to Alcibiades in the *Symposium*, philosophized in the language of blacksmiths, shoemakers, and tanners. The fragmentary character of his thinking (even the discourse on time, pursued and ‘constructed’ over the years, takes the form of a *journal* of ideas) itself speaks of Dragomir’s intention totally to de-solemnize philosophy.

We may add to all this the *authenticity* of his effort, guaranteed by the very fact that this effort as such was not caught up in any institutional cultural circuit. Alexandru Dragomir—let us recall—never set out to publish. More than that, he never set out to write with the thought in his mind that someone would discover his manuscripts later and that they would thus ultimately see the ‘light of the press’. We might even say that, in so far as writing is a preoccupation attained by way of cultural mimicry and the adoption of a definite intellectual profession, Dragomir never wrote. The thousands of notes scattered through his various notebooks and on loose pieces of paper represent the more or less systematic, more or less concentrated record of *stages of thinking*, in relation to which writing appears in a somewhat accidental, and in any case secondary position. If he had been able to remember everything he had thought, he would probably never have noted anything down. I am convinced that he sometimes dreamt of a paradisiacal thinking, one that came *before the fall into writing*, and that could advance without the crutch of letters.

A Failed Shipwreck

All this translates a sovereign indifference towards the fact that the public exists. Dragomir received nothing and expected nothing from anyone; he certainly did not expect recognition, which without communication with the other and publication was hardly a possibility. If he had not met us, the small group that he thought might provide him with an opening for some of his ideas and an excuse for thinking aloud,

the solitude of his thinking would have been perfect. And indeed his life and his 'acts of thinking' would have acquired—as perhaps he had wished—that uncertain state of existence that lost treasures have at the bottom of the sea, existing somehow without in fact existing for anyone. What is now happening to him represents the story of a failed shipwreck.

Dragomir's thirst to *find out everything for himself*, his need, which became overwhelming in time, to be clear about himself and the world into which he had been 'thrown', brings him strangely close to a thinker who lived 2500 years before him, and who is indeed the only one about whom he wrote recurrently: Socrates. The whole Socratic problematics of 'to know' (to think you know, to know that you do not know, to know that it is possible to know or that it is possible to try to know, etc.), on which ultimately depends *the way we choose our lives*, seemed to Dragomir to be the supreme enigma of philosophy, and the thing to which it was worth dedicating your life.

Like the story of Noica in his Pältiniş retreat, the story of Dragomir withdrawn into the trenches of thinking raises the problem of the roads that are open to an intellectual when he does not want to follow the only road that is officially accepted: that which ends in an obedient dialogue with the authorities. In other words—and in dramatic terms—, Dragomir's story is an answer to the following question: how can you fulfil your destiny if it is incompatible with the historical world in which you live? On page 14 of the 1997 notebook whose cover bears the title *Odds and Ends*, the following story appears under the heading 'Dictation from waking-sleep after lunch, 23 April': Three people are talking in the next world. One says: 'I didn't do much in my life, but I did do a few good deeds.' The second says: 'I didn't do good deeds, but the things I knew how to do I did well.' The third says: 'I did good deeds, and things that I knew how to do.' God hears them and says: 'What are you looking for here? This isn't the place for the things you did to be *judged*. This is the place for those who lived the life that I gave them and that was to be lived and cherished just as a gift. I didn't ask you to put right the world that I made either by good deeds or by making things.' And Dragomir ends the story of his after-lunch dream with these words: 'I asked what happens to those who could not live their life because of circumstances that brought it low and sacrificed it—but I got no answer.'

Now that the 90-odd notebooks have emerged from the underground of history and are waiting to be deciphered, published, and judged (but by whom?), it is time to ask the question: is Dragomir's destiny a mutilated one? Or is it possible that Dragomir did not know how to interpret his own life? It may be that on that afternoon of 23 April 1997, Dragomir woke up too soon, and never heard the answer that was addressed to him. Perhaps, according to some higher calculations, it was precisely inasmuch as it seemed to have robbed him of his life's destiny that the mutilated history in which he lived gave him the chance to fulfil it.

Part I

Question and Answer

Reconstructed from a lecture given by Alexandru Dragomir in September 1986, based on notes which I took at the time. In the sequence from the Sophist regarding the relation between cathartic ritual and interrogative treatment, I have expanded the quotations and made explicit some of the Greek terminology. (Gabriel Liiceanu)

The Structure of the Question–Answer Model

1. In the *Posterior Analytics*, II, 1, Aristotle says: ‘The objects of inquiry are just as many as the objects of knowledge’ (89 b 23–24).

Here is a statement whose meaning we could easily miss. And this is all the more serious inasmuch as it is not just a question of *one* meaning, but of three distinct things. The first thing we can take from the statement is that questions and answers are equal in number. Any question we can ask attracts an answer, just as any answer is an answer to some particular question. We might say that the number of questions in the universe and the number of answers correspond: for every question an answer, for every answer a question. But something else follows from this: that people do not ask just any sort of questions, but questions which they can answer.

Secondly, in the statement above, Aristotle is also saying that all we know is channelled along the lines opened up by our questions. We do not simply know; rather we know what is in reach of our questions. We cannot know in all directions at the same time, nor can we know everything all at once. When you ask a question, you are going in one particular direction, not in all directions.

Finally, in saying that questions are equal in number to answers, Aristotle is taking *the answer* as his basic starting point: he is ‘pulling’ things from what we know towards what we ask. Answers prove the existence of questions, and from the answers I can induce the existence and number of those questions. In the Aristotelian structure of the question–answer model, the answer has precedence. It is the firm ground of knowledge and its point of arrival.

2. The Aristotelian type of question–answer model is not just one among many, but actually reflects the way we have been accustomed to view the relation between question and answer. They are the obligatory moments of a *compact model* in which

any question is followed by an answer—sooner or later. According to this model, questions are always asked with a view to an answer (there is no such thing as a ‘gratuitous’ question), and questions without answers do not exist. More than that, they have no sense, they belong to the realm of the absurd, and there is no point in asking them. At the most, there may be questions that have not *yet* been answered. In the *compact* question–answer model, the two terms correspond permanently; they are in a harmony that is renewed every time a question is asked and an answer received.

This way of conceiving the question–answer model comes out of a *scientific–Enlightenment mentality*: man is a rational being capable of replying to the questions that he himself asks. And as a rational being, he asks himself questions that he is able to answer. This way of seeing things operates with a *single type of question*: that which belongs to scientific knowledge. And this is just the sort of knowledge that Aristotle had in mind. It is the Aristotelian type of question–answer model that lies at the foundation of the edifice of knowledge and is at the same time its growth mechanism: knowledge is a skyscraper that keeps rising endlessly, as, with each generation that passes, the number of questions and their corresponding answers grows.

3. However the truth is that there are *two* types of questions, and that they quite simply split the field of culture in two, between matters of *knowledge* (the distance from the earth to the moon, for example) and *problems* (for example, what is man?). Knowledge is the concern of the sciences, while problems belong to philosophy. In science, the question is preeminent as long as it has no answer. Then it falls, it dies, it is relegated, eliminated by the answer, which alone *remains*. Every science is made up of a store of answers, and a set of questions which are waiting to add to the store, by being answered. In philosophy, on the other hand, what happens to the question is quite different. Here the question always outlasts the answer, or rather survives *in spite of* each answer. While in science the answer causes the question to ‘fade away’, in philosophy the question becomes more vigorous with every answer received. Hence the sensation that the question remains for ever on its feet: *das ewige Fragen*, the eternal interrogation. Here what counts is the disproportion between question and answer: the question remains for ever on its feet, but not the answer. Thus the history of philosophy is a history of questions that return and answers that pass away.

What are we to take from this? That all the philosophical questions that have been taken up by science and answered were not really philosophical questions at all. The questions of the Presocratics, for example, concerning the origin of the world, its composition, the way in which sensation comes about, etc., were later taken up in their entirety by science and received answers which, even if they are continually being refined, are accepted as such by the scientific community.

However there are questions which philosophy cannot give up, which continue to be problematic even if science also asks them and provides answers to them. A question like ‘what is man?’ is in this sense a question of dual status. Science answers by slices, by levels. From a *somatic* point of view, genetics, anatomy, physiology, and so on are the sciences that answer this question. From a *psychical* point

of view, psychology, neurology, psychiatry. From a *cultural* point of view, cultural anthropology, cultural history. From a *social* point of view, economics, sociology, political science, history. And after science has answered the question ‘what is man?’ in all these ways, the question remains on its feet and Heidegger comes and writes *Being and Time* as though the whole labour of science had been in vain.

4. But if that is how things stand, it means that the traditional question–answer model must be modified, and that a question is not necessarily a question *to* an answer. Every answer is an answer to a question, but *a question has free-standing status*. Obviously it aims to get an answer, but the status of question initiates something. If the question is at the origin of the answer, the answer is not at the origin of the question. The question does not come about in relation to the answer, but from the *situation of questioning*, i.e. from somewhere other than the question–answer pair. The question thus escapes from the compact question–answer model and becomes *thematized*, entering a state of *Fraglichkeit*, of ‘interrogativity’, a free-standing state.

Where, then, does the question come *from*? What is its place of origin? It is clear that it does not come from absolute knowledge. When God asks Adam ‘Where are you?’ his question is purely rhetorical. Nor can it come from an absolute lack of knowledge, for if you do not know that you do not know, you do not even want to know. The source of the question is the knowledge of negativity: *you know that you do not know*, you know what ‘to know’ means and you know that you do not know what you are asking. And so I come to the second part of my talk.

The Role of the Socratic Question

Wishing to know what exactly the oracle meant in stating that he, Socrates, was the wisest man in Athens, Socrates begins an inquiry. He asks; he does not state anything because he does not know anything. And what exactly does he ask about? Τὰ μέγιστα, the most important things, the things that count most in our lives, the things that ‘weigh’, the problems whose solution determines the way we live our lives. Socrates asks the people who claim to know the answers, and has a revelation of general pseudo-science, of the illusion of knowledge—in Greek, δοξοσοφία, ‘illusory knowledge’. The questions Socrates asks begin with a denunciation of the inconsistency of the answers received and of the contradictions into which those who give them fall. The question thus makes visible their basically ridiculous position: they do not know that they do not know. Look, I am asking you, and where you thought you knew, you do not know. Of course I do not know either, but I have no illusion that I do know. I, Socrates, do not live in the night of illusion. The ridiculous state of those who ‘do not know that they do not know’, which is revealed by the question, is a veritable vice: πονηρία in Greek. Their situation is serious: for Socrates, it is a massive failing. Not to know yourself is a vice, while to know yourself is a virtue (ἀρετή).

However in revealing the wide discrepancy between the illusion of knowledge and the reality of lack of knowledge, the question opens up the possibility of a *cleansing of the mind* and thus has a paideic, educational function. It gives the mind an open field, cleansed of the illusion of knowledge; it brings about the elimination, the expulsion of illusion: ἐκβολή τῆς δόξης.

The word translated as ‘elimination’ or ‘expulsion’, ἐκβολή, has a technical sense, and refers to a cathartic ritual of medical origin: *purificatio mentis* is a *purgative* method extended to the mind, a treatment for mental constipation. This can be clearly seen in the following passage from the *Sophist*, 230b–d:

The people who are being examined see this, get angry at themselves, and become calmer toward others. They lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves that way, and no loss is pleasanter to hear or has a more lasting effect on them. Doctors who work on the body think it can’t benefit from any food that’s offered to it until what’s interfering with it from inside is removed. The people who cleanse the soul, my young friend, likewise think the soul, too, won’t get any advantage from any learning that’s offered to it until someone shames it by refuting it, removes the opinions that interfere with learning, and exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more.

This ἔλεγχος, this ‘refutation’, which can only be obtained by *submission to an interrogative treatment*, is, at the level of the mind, ‘the principal and most important kind of cleansing’. The mind that has not gone through this test—be it that of the king of Persia—remains ἀκάθαρτον (‘uncleansed’, ‘dirty’) and ἀπαιδευτον (‘uneducated’) (230e). The mind that has not known this refutation, that has not been shaken, that has not been shown its own ignorance, has evaded the *paideic* process. Those who make speeches—like the Sophists—and hear only themselves, who refuse to enter the intersubjective space of refutation based on the *question*, will remain ‘sick,’ i.e. ‘uneducated.’

But how exactly does refutation follow from questioning? By putting together the affirmations you make as you reply to questions. It is only then that your contradictions are revealed and it becomes clear that your knowledge is an illusion. The worst thing is to try and bluff your way through, to refuse to let your contradictions be revealed. Of course, when I talk of putting someone’s affirmations together, I do not mean the affirmations that someone makes in a particular field, but *the totality of the affirmations that make up someone’s life*. It is a matter of the *fatal incoherence* of a life, of the fact that the life of each one of us is an *incoherent discourse*.

That is why Socrates believes that we need καθαίροντες, ‘purifiers’ or ‘practitioners of the purgative method’:

They cross-examine someone when he thinks he’s saying something though he’s saying nothing. Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize them. They collect his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects. (*Sophist*, 230b)

So what has the question now become? No more and no less than something that points directly to the *human condition*: in disillusioning us, it shows us that in the great, important problems we are on unsure ground. *To be between knowing and not knowing is the human condition that makes the question possible*. And the question,

in its turn, points us to the same condition. However, I repeat: not every question, but only one that goes down to the origin of the problem, that aims at a global knowledge, a question on which our entire lives depend: what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong? *This* sort of question, which assumes a super-human knowledge, inevitably leads into the zone of unknowing.

Such a question places one *in an interval*. We are 'interval beings' precisely because we ask questions of this kind. And in this case, the status of the question derives from the human condition itself, which is one of interval: between knowing and unknowing, between good and evil, between life and death.

We might think that this way of thinking is merely historical, that it is limited to the figure of Socrates, and is of no more concern to us. However the same problem faces us today. The man of science, the technician in a broad sense, lives in the same ambiguity in which Socrates' partners in dialogue lived. He is at once expert and ignorant. The knowledge that he has about a certain field goes hand in hand with his lack of knowledge about the rest, and likewise with his tendency to extrapolate from what he knows beyond what is permissible. From this point of view, we are no further on today: in the 'great problems', we are just as prone to get lost as in the time of Socrates.

Why does this happen? Why has the 'advance of knowledge' not placed us in a more favourable situation than 2500 years ago? For the simple reason that technology has never had any way of tackling the problem of good and evil; indeed it is likely to obscure it. For in knowing something, it thinks it knows everything. The purely technical way of looking at things makes impossible the framework in which the question of good and evil is raised. Science and technology give you the rules by which something works, but they do not tell you when, in the *way* it is used, evil appears in place of good. Good and evil depend on *how* exactly you use something, and science and technology are incapable of teaching you anything like that. For the price of specialization in one field is lamentable ignorance of other things.

The question that led to the essential condition of 'knowing that I do not know' set European thinking on solid ground. The essential thing is that I should have no illusions. Any *method* must have its origin here: starting from the fact that he knows that he does not know, man builds something, goes back to zero and finds his way forward. This is what Socrates originated. And where the mind refuses to be exposed and does not build on initial ignorance, there appears dogmatism.

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Ways of Self-Deception

Based on the tape recording of a presentation made by Alexandru Dragomir on 22 September 1987. I am grateful to Laura Pamfil for the work of transcribing this recording, and also those on which 'Utter Metaphysical Banalities' and 'Nations' are based. (Gabriel Liiceanu)

I shall try to speak as concretely as possible, i.e. not 'philosophically'. However, I am going to take as my motto a quotation from Hegel's *Science of Logic*, more precisely from the *Preface* to the second edition (III, 18):

The most important point for the nature of spirit is not only the relation of what it is *in itself* to what it is *actually*, but the relation of what it *knows itself* to be to what it actually is; because spirit is essentially consciousness, this self-knowing [*dieses Sichwissen*] is a fundamental determination of its *actuality*. (Hegel 1969, 37)

In fact I am abusing the quotation, for Hegel is speaking here of 'self-knowing' in the sense of the logical absolute. But this *Sichwissen* fits perfectly with what I want to say. I hope this will be understood.

Let me begin with the idea beloved of Heidegger according to which we are not what we are, but much more what we can be: *Seinkönnen*, 'potentiality-for-being'. We are something possible in relation to our own selves, we are our own projection, what comes towards us out of the future. The image we build of ourselves is largely composed of the sum of our projects and projections. We evolve, of course, on a ground made up of pre-existing determinations: we are our genes, the time and place in which we were born, the society in which we live, and so on. But beyond all that there remains a *Spielraum*, 'room to manoeuvre', a space that is not yet occupied by anything, a niche of the possible in which we can install ourselves and freely settle into one direction or another of our lives. Of course this range of possibilities is to some extent predetermined by circumstances that have nothing to do with our freedom: fashions, ideals floating in the air, readymade lifestyles, which limit our freedom while leaving us with the impression that we are choosing. However it still remains true that my own projections turn back on me and determine my way of being. I am what I really want to be, as well as being the range of possibilities that lie before me.

And yet it is not enough that I have these possibilities before me. In order to choose between them, I resort to a ‘knowing’—I have no other word—that tells me what it is better to opt for one particular possibility and not some other. Any choice of a possibility presupposes such a knowing—a ‘science’ in the broadest sense—that indicates the best possibility, that which really attracts me, and to which, concretely, I can begin to direct myself. A knowing, an understanding if you like, that gives me orientation.

However from this it follows that there is a deeper link between our existence and knowing or science in this broadest sense: knowing understood not as a totality of data gradually accumulated in the brain, but as a sort of understanding without which I cannot exist. The fact that I orient myself by choosing, and get it into my head that I can and should be this and not that, means that the knowing that precedes my access to what is possible for me is a condition of my existence. That my existence is constructed as a function of this knowing, and that this knowing is a *condition of existence*. When I choose to enrol in the Faculty of Mathematics or the Music Academy, I do so by virtue of having processed certain data of my own. And if, as in Plato’s *Alcibiades*, it is a matter of knowing what I am going to become and what it means to choose one’s life, then all the more does the choice presuppose *knowing* what a good life is. And so my confrontation with what is possible for my life presupposes a ‘knowing of what is possible’: I cannot choose unless I already have such a ‘knowing’, which in fact ultimately becomes the condition of my existence.

But once it is made, the choice implies a *Richtungslinie*, a ‘direction’ on which I must go from now on, and which, by the simple fact of its existence, eliminates all other possibilities. Having chosen from a multitude of possibilities, I am left with only one: I have *limited* myself to one, setting aside all the others that lay in front of me before I chose.

This whole game of choosing, which presupposes knowing as a condition of existence, also implies the necessity of *testing what you know*. If I can demonstrate that I have an understanding of the possibilities, then I can be sure that my choice has a sound basis, and, implicitly, have a guarantee that, through the well-founded choice that I have made, I will exist optimally and maximally.

But can I demonstrate this? Can anyone claim to have a reliable understanding of his possibilities, and thus, implicitly, a knowing by which to choose his life? Socrates replied that the only thing he knows in this connection is that he does not know. He has the knowledge of his lack of knowledge. The choice of our lives presupposes a knowing, but it is a knowing that we do not have, and nor, from a Socratic point of view, can we ever have it. We strive to choose the best life possible for ourselves, because otherwise we waste our lives and live by chance, hurled this way and that; but on the other hand, when I am asked about the fundamental reference points of my life—courage, love, friendship, beauty, piety etc.—, when I have to put to the test a science of life, the only answers I can give are evasive and insufficient. In all these branches of knowing and understanding we are dunces. This is the dramatic nature of my human situation: I do not know anything, when in fact I *have to* know, because I *have to* choose my existence, since my existence itself is choice.

What then is the solution? How can we escape from this terrible paradox of human existence? There is only one way: the solution is to ‘chew over’ the problem. That is why Socrates engages in discussion, in dialogue. Without a break. All the time. A whole life spent in dialogue. I have to keep discussing what I have to do, namely how I can manage to choose the best life, without for a moment claiming for myself the position of ‘I know’ and of the truth. When we read the Socratic dialogues, this is what strikes us at every turn. ‘Yes, we are talking about courage,’ we hear Socrates say. ‘What exactly is courage in itself?’ But why do we have to know what courage is in itself? And the answer is always the same: ‘So that we can choose, so that we can know how to choose our life.’ This was not just a problem for Socrates; it was a problem for the Greeks in general, one of the great ongoing problems that would not leave them in peace. This was a problem worth ‘chewing over’ endlessly, and one which, for Socrates, pushed dialogue to the foreground.

And yet this is not the path that philosophical thought followed after Socrates. Already with Plato, who basically stages the problem of endless dialogue, discussion is no longer the same thing; rather, as happens constantly among us, it has already become a front for searching for and finding the truth. This postulation of infinite dialogue, generated by the need for a knowledge by which to choose in the conditions of ‘I know that I do not know’, is the first fissure that Socrates brings with him in the history of European thought. (About the other fissure—the *question*—I have spoken at length on another occasion.¹) And on the basis of this fissure, our choice proves to be only a manner of speaking. We want, of course, to choose our existence, and indeed to choose the best possible (see *Gorgias*, *Meno*, *Alcibiades* etc.), but in fact we do not choose because we do not know, and because we know that we do not know.

Well then, in the context of this issue, of this relationship with one’s own self, I am going to speak about falsifications of the self, *about self-deception*. I have seen, with Heidegger, that my life is essentially possibility. Possibility both as reaction and as horizon. It is reaction inasmuch as I can react to a given situation in one way or another. This is one of the senses of the possible for me. The other sense is my projecting, that which I could be. My plan is to talk about the psychological horizon of the possibility of life, and within that, to raise the problem of self-falsification. Let us see how lack of self-knowledge appears within the context of self-image, and what the relation is between what I am and what I think I am. And all this based on a *temporal structure* of self-falsification. I am now going to propose an inventory of the ways in which we deceive ourselves, based on the temporal hypostases of the future, the present, and the past.

¹ See the chapter “[Question and Answer](#)”.

The Future

Dreams

My dream of what I am going to be is my own projection into a hero, a personal projection par excellence. Dreams begin in childhood. When I was a child, I dreamt of becoming a racing driver. Perhaps nowadays a child dreams of becoming a cosmonaut or a Formula 1 driver like Nigel Mansell. Dreams begin in childhood and continue in other forms in adolescence: in some cases they remain with us all our lives. One form of life-long dream is that of the (as yet) *unrecognized genius*, the Van Gogh model, let us say. There are people who paint or write poetry all their lives, convinced that they are unrecognized just as Van Gogh was, but that one day... Others are for ever Don Juan: Ortega y Gasset says that there is not a man alive who does not believe that he was Don Juan, at least in his younger days, that he perhaps still is, or, if he was not and is not, that he could have been but did not want to be. There are hundreds of variants on these dreams, and it is they, these dreams, that create the real failures. These, I emphasize, are *personal* dreams: i.e. they are formed by my projection of myself into a model or ideal type of person.

Fanciful Ambitions

Any fanciful ambition involves an overloaded opinion of my own capability, a wrong evaluation in an *upward* direction. If, for example, my dream is to become one of the great philosophers of the world, then my fanciful ambition might be to solve the problem of time. Why is it dangerous to nourish such ambitions? Because the precious mirage of 'I'm going to do' gets in the way of 'I do'. The fanciful ambition is thus the project that prevents you from doing. An example would be the project of reading the works of the great thinkers in the most fundamental way. This is a fanciful ambition, because there can be no definitive reading of the great philosophers. This time it is no longer a matter of personal projection: I start with myself and see myself as a great hero. This time we are dealing with a mystification at the level of action. He who nourishes fanciful ambitions is a man of action sabotaged by his own project of doing. He sets out to do in his own space something that he cannot do. He wants to catch a whale with a flimsy fishing line. It is the very grandeur of his project that puts the brakes on its achievement. This lack of adjustment to one's own possibilities is another source of failure. In my generation there was a guy called Ștefan Teodorescu who was always making up ample tables of contents. He never even got as far as writing the introduction. However the nourisher of fanciful ambitions is not an agonized failure; his life becomes a *dolce far niente*, a sort of continuous waltz among a host of projects endlessly taken up and abandoned again. There is a Chinese proverb: 'Every road starts with the first step'. The nourisher of fanciful ambitions never manages to make that first step. Or if he does, he leaves the road before he has trodden firmly on it.

Plans, Concrete Projects

These represent a third possible source of self-falsification in the context of the future. I say ‘possible’, because not every plan necessarily leads to self-falsification, only one that cannot be abandoned along the way as soon as it proves to be unrealistic or mistaken.

Any activity that I embark on presupposes a concrete plan. However as the activity advances, it may or may not confirm the initial plan. Self-falsification sets in when I lose my flexibility, when I become the slave of a project even when it no longer suits me. To avoid this sort of self-deception, I must, when I have a project or a plan, keep asking myself along the way if it is still appropriate for me to follow it, if it is really good, etc. It is not necessary that things should turn out just as you saw them at the beginning: sometimes you get a better view of them along the way.

The Present

One’s Own Set of Issues

We cannot talk of an intellectual in the absence of a personal set of issues. You will not obtain *Selbstwissen*, ‘self-knowledge’, by, for example, sitting in your armchair and asking yourself intently ‘what am I like?’ (This time I am not going to show you, as in the previous cases, how you can deceive yourself, but rather how you can avoid doing so.) So let us consider the personal set of issues. There are exceptionally quick-witted people who live in a veritable jungle of issues. They keep having all sorts of ideas about all sorts of things. Some can write an article every day or every week with some new idea, and sometimes these are only a fraction of the ideas that come to them. The case of Wittgenstein is an eloquent one. Ideas never stopped coming to him; he would write them on bits of paper and throw them into a drawer. Others came along later, took the papers from the drawer and put them in order, giving them the form of immortal ‘works’. At first sight, all these notes of ideas seem to be a jungle, but in fact this is not the case. It is for this reason that we can speak, if not of Wittgenstein’s system, then at least of his way of thinking. These scattered notes rhymed with something; they had the coherence of a way of thinking, and were, ultimately, ‘systematic’. Nietzsche did the same thing, producing feverish jottings in notebooks, scribbles on pieces of paper. A good part of the works of Nietzsche consists of notes. If you take all the volumes he wrote, you can see what a jungle was in his head. I have taken two extreme examples in order to make it clear that one’s set of issues is a matter of the present, of the ideas that come to one at a given moment. And out of these notes of ideas you yourself appear, and, reading them later, you are able to see what you could not appreciate when you wrote them: that they have a certain structure, that they are not a jungle, and certainly are not a form of trickery—that they are not means of self-deception, but an authentic *Selbstwissen*.

External Solicitations

In order not to be falsifying, external solicitations should only be accepted if they fit within one's own set of issues, and refused—as far as possible—if this is not the case. (NB: As you will see, what I have to say here only applies to intellectuals, and hardly at all to other types of people.) Even then, however, compared with the ideas that come from inside me, external solicitations are to a much lesser extent my own, and engage my commitment much less. In fact they have one major failing: as soon as they become systematic, they come to take the form of a chain; they start to represent you, and gradually build up an image of you to which you end up submitting in time. Little by little, you become this mask of yourself that you can no longer deny and that, finally, you have to accept as actually being your own face. How many intellectuals have disappeared in this way (or have never got as far as being born) behind 'regular collaborations'? The chain made up of external solicitations ends up becoming a chain that binds you. Ultimately, all you can do is shake off this fabricated image, and then explain to everyone that what you did in this or that circumstance does not 'fundamentally' represent you. Or worse, you can continue to have an outer face and an inner one, which is certainly not the best way of choosing a life.

Concrete Work

The truth is that, out of the three temporal hypostases, it is only in the present that we can see what we really are. Starting from the present, I can find out who I am. It is in fact the place of the self, and it is here, in the present, that our existence is played out. The future is possibility; the past has gone. The present, on the other hand, is continuously generating us: it is the source of a good knowledge of ourselves that is relatively immediate, and in which the role of self-falsification is reduced as far as it can be.

Hence *concrete work*. Concrete work can be either a feverish and inspired creation, or a painstaking and laborious one. We have a great deal to learn from both. They oblige us all the time to keep asking ourselves: where do I have difficulties? Where am I not succeeding? This struggle to catch your own thought and formulate it is an excellent method of reaching yourself. To succeed in knowing what you think presupposes an enormous effort, and it is only when you become attentive to the difficulty of exteriorizing your thought that you begin to know yourself. It is sufficient to look at the manuscripts of famous writers to see how different people are, and how different are the pathways by which each person reaches their own self.

Now, in this 'what I am doing now,' it is very difficult to falsify myself. Reduction to the present means potentiating the self, obtaining an identity with one's own self, which has managed to integrate and to master the past and the future too. This is the

ideal of ancient and medieval wisdom. The present, the past and the future need to be grasped and held together as a whole; in other words, the present must be answered by a cleansed past and future. In every moment of the present, I must be wholly as I am. I must reach the point where everything I do represents me. However there are few things that we consider represent us when we do them. That is why there are so many people who all their lives are completely unaware of what they are doing, while there are not a few who give moral lectures after doing things that shock everybody.

But in the ideal of wisdom that I have been speaking of, the risk is that of closure: I possess a total knowledge and control of myself, and the capacity to translate my own wisdom into action. I thus have a perfect circle, a closure of myself permanently sealed by my knowledge and my action. Well, no! To avoid this danger, *the present must be kept ever open, or rather we must always be open whatever our present may be*. The motive is quite simple: I know that ultimately I know nothing.

The image of Socrates is clear in this respect: Socrates was a wise man who lived all the time in the present, keeping the present ever open. He lived the present in the market place, like a sort of time-waster. He could begin any discussion with anyone, just in order always to remain open to the outside. To keep the present open, not to close it, means in fact avoiding the position in which the present no longer means anything. And the present no longer means anything when the truth is beyond discussion and I am in possession of it—when the truth is known beforehand and the discussion is only for the sake of demonstration.

The Past

The Mistakes of the Past, Covered Over or Forgotten by the Subconscious Will

This is the most serious source of self-falsification that comes out of the past. No-one is more of a 'trickster' than we are with our own selves. I have never met a greater deceiver than a person with their own self. Any mistake has an impact on the image that you make of yourself. However it is curious to see how it is always the image that wins and never the mistake. The latter is either concealed, blamed on someone else (women excel here), or forgotten by the subconscious will. And it is amazing to see how well this subconscious will to forget functions. People can clearly remember their moments of success, but it takes a great effort to remember the serious mistakes they have made.

Why does this happen? Because a mistake is in fact never finished. It has to be closed somehow, and the simplest way of closing it is to forget it. It is hard to finish a mistake. It is very easy to finish a success: you climb on top of it and look down with pride. But what can you do with a mistake? Do you acknowledge it? Do you recognize that you made it? I would kindly ask you to learn what to do with your

mistakes! You have to look them in the face, seeing them as the most fertile well-springs of the self. There is no better source of self-knowledge than dialogue with your own mistakes: acknowledging them, seeking to avoid repeating them, transforming them, healing their source.

One's Own Defects

We speak casually of our own defects and accept their repetition with ease. We do not get rid of them precisely because we consider that we can cure them at any time. I know that I am indiscreet, that I am greedy, but—or so I keep telling myself—I can stop being so at any time. I only have to want it. The solution is in my hands. Some time I am going to stop and start taking myself seriously... But I do not take myself seriously.

Beautification of One's Own Past: Making Myths and Legends

Here we have to deal with the opposite side of the tendency to forget our mistakes. You keep alive in your memory and endlessly go over those events in your life that show you in a good light. By constant retelling, they become veritable myths. We have all had a grandfather who, when we were children (children love repetition!), used to tell us over and over again about some great deed in his youth (something he did in the war, how he caught a thief, or something like that). The danger here lies in the fact that you start to hang onto these things. It is not just because of a sort of self-love that you mythologize the episodes that show you at your best, but rather because of the unacknowledged doubts about yourself that you gather over time. Some rely all their lives on the fact of having once been pupils of Heidegger. We all do this, one way or another: we hang on to something that is favourable to us, and make a myth of it in order to counterbalance our smallness, the inner doubt that we have about ourselves.

That's all!

Reference

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Utter Metaphysical Banalities

Based on the tape recording of a lecture given by Alexandru Dragomir on 6 October 1987. (Gabriel Liiceanu)

This title may give rise to misunderstanding.

What I want to speak about is banalities that have a metaphysical value, in the sense that they are the banalities that we all experience. And the supreme banalities that we all experience relate to the fact that we are always in a spatial and a temporal environment, that we are caught in these two environments as in a woven fabric. This is the theme of the conversation that I propose, and we shall follow an utterly banal schema: (1) The spatial environment; (2) The temporal environment.

The Spatial Environment

The spatial environment is both closed and open. Biologically speaking, any environment is closed, limited. Everyone has heard of Konrad Lorenz and the way in which he describes the delimitation of the environment of ducks and other small animals; a delimitation that extends to the smallest detail (the end of a branch, a bush, a certain stone, etc.). And so we shall begin our discussion of the spatial environment from this point.

1. *Limit*. This is no more than my ‘range’, the ‘point’ up to which I can extend myself. By my nature, I am not enclosed merely within corporeal limits; I am not walled within my body. I can move here and there, see up to a certain distance, hear various things. As long as I am awake, I am open to the outside, but I am open in a limited manner. No matter how ‘mobile’ the things I do, they remain limited because it is *as limited* that I myself in all my being—corporeal, dynamic and intellectual—am. In fact we are limited *a priori*, in the sense that each of our gestures and actions has a certain predetermined measure. I can take a step of one metre, and if I push myself I can manage a little more, but I am not capable, with my human legs, of taking steps of five metres. I am limited *da capo*, and so I am from every point of view.

This is so evident that it no longer even enters our consciousness. Many unlimited things appear in our minds, while the consciousness that I am *as limited*, as something limited, is not clear precisely because it is so very evident. I do not realize that I am the way I am with the clarity with which it would be observed by someone looking down on us from somewhere high above, as we look down on ants, for example, immediately grasping the limits within which they can move. Moreover, we can do so many things nowadays that my consciousness of limit as my first and supreme determination is far from clear. It is not at all obvious to me all the time that I cannot do anything unlimited.

2. For all that that is how things are, for all that I am limited in all directions, *the environment is a plus*; it is something more than the sum of my limitations. Going beyond the totality of my limits, it is somehow the consciousness of that totality. I live in this totality *qua* totality, not as the sum of my margins, and this is what I mean by 'my range'. It means that the *nature* of the environment is not concretely physical, although the environment is concretely physical. The environment as my 'range' presupposes a modifiable and approximate nature. For people, the environment is mobile; its limits are not fixed as with Lorenz's animals. They can be changed; my whole environment can be changed; even my language can be changed. Thus it follows that, though there is a totality of the things that make up my environment, a totality that can be inventoried (the totality of things in the room), the environment is something 'in the mind', a totality of a spiritual nature.

3. As the totality of my limits, the *environment* is at the same time *inscribed in something wider*: in my 'horizons'. For, being limited, the environment is limited in relation to something. If the environment is my 'range', if it is as far as I can extend myself, that means there is also a beyond in relation to how far things go for me. In this beyond there are things which, being unable to encompass them, I do not know very well or even at all. There may even be an abyss there. But what I know very well is that my environment is inscribed within a much wider circle about which I do not have to be clear at all costs. What matters is to be clear about the things in my immediate environment, not also about those that lie at the other end of the world, of the universe etc. All that matters is to know—and nothing more—that my environment is situated within a larger sphere.

And how exactly is it inscribed? It is always inscribed as my *own* environment. The environment always belongs to someone, is someone's *own*. It is true that in any environment there are concrete things that interpenetrate, but they are the concrete things of *my* environment. This fact too is one of those evident matters that are passed over precisely because they are too evident.

This character of 'one's own' of the environment operates in a strange way on the objects that the environment contains: *in appropriating them, it causes them to fade*. Any environment does this inasmuch as it is *my own* environment: it frees me from the things that it contains, relegating them to the taken-for-grantedness of their existence, and helps me to save my lucidity for new and important things. If I am able to concentrate on something, if I am able to work in my room, it is because the things I know are laid to one side and allowed to wither into too-well-knownness. When I sit at my desk, I am not in dialogue with the lamp on the table, with the

paper on which I write, or with the computer on which I work. The fact that I completely appropriate what I know, all that is part of the familiarity of my environment, does not take away its existence, only its foreignness.

4. That which is known of a thing means its withering, and this means that *one's own environment implies, as its opposite term, foreignness*. This is the opposition: what is one's own and what is foreign. What is foreign is all that is not in my environment, all that is not known, the beyond. From this point of view, anything can be foreign: an animal, a plant, a thing (a Coca-Cola bottle for a tribe in the tropical forest), all that is *unheimlich*, unfamiliar, while the classic concrete expression of the familiar environment par excellence is the house, the home, *das Heim*. I make a house in order to have my own environment, to be at home there. But 'being at home' comes before the home itself, from the need to have a secure environment. It is not the house that creates an environment, but the need for an environment that creates a house. The shelter-house, the hotel for example, is not my environment and precisely for that reason I am not 'at home' there. Now just as 'at home' is a feeling, *ein Gefühl*, so that which is foreign, foreignness, is a feeling. And if we are attentive and still have some freshness, then the foreign and foreignness appear in any meeting with an unknown person. There is something *unheimlich*, uncomfortable and thus strange and unpleasant, in any first meeting with a person. This is the case in which we still feel foreignness: that is to say, what is foreign about the other. For in fact few of us still feel the foreignness of a dog—how foreign it is to you –, and even fewer the foreignness of a flower or a tree.

For intellectuals, there is something foreign (and strange) in any new book that you take in your hand. It may conceal who knows what; it is foreign in the sense that it is inhabited by a foreign spirit, which is completely other than yourself. However I repeat: this foreignness is a *Gefühl*, a sentiment, and does not arise from the fact that I am afraid of a dog or that a flower is unusually beautiful. Moreover, the foreignness of a thing may be felt also in front of something that I have seen hundreds of times, but which only now, suddenly and unexpectedly, *jumps out* at me. What is the difference between any pair of worn boots and Van Gogh's boots? The latter put on stage, so to speak, the foreignness that in the case of the other boots I have never perceived. It takes Van Gogh's painting to show me to what extent a pair of boots can be foreign to us, and, as such, strange.

What I want to emphasize is that any foreignness is determined in relation to something that is one's own—let us continue to call it an 'environment' –, and that conversely any environment creates the possibility of something foreign. That is to say, in relation to the environment, in relation to this 'place' where the known is (the known that withers), the unknown shows itself. In withering, this known does not make a thing cease to exist; however it makes it no longer perceptible. Because we have seen each other so many times and because we know each other quite well, we no longer perceive each other as vigorously as we would perceive an unknown person who suddenly entered the room. In this environment of ours which is this room, they would be foreignness itself. But I was saying more than this when I mentioned Van Gogh's boots: that there is a potential for foreignness in anything. If you can take from your eyes the veil of the too-well-known, then anything can appear in its

fundamental foreignness, ultimately even you yourself if you look at yourself in the mirror as if you were seeing yourself for the first time. And it is this power to penetrate the space of the known that makes it possible for us to rediscover a thing, a person, a piece of music, a book.

However it remains essential that the foreign is determined in relation to the own—what I have called the ‘environment’—and, conversely, that the environment creates the possibility of the foreign. And these two terms are in a perfect equilibrium, which we grasp when we realize that we have an equal need for an environment and for the foreign, and that the predominance of either one of them leads to a sort of despondency. When the known predominates, the result is boredom; when the foreign predominates, the result is alienation. All of us have experienced this boredom with our own home, with all the things we know, our books, our clothes etc.: that is to say, all the things through which the environment overpowers you with the withering of everything that has lost its bloom for you. And of course we have all experienced alienation when we have gone abroad, to a place where everything, absolutely everything, is foreign, to Nigeria let us say. And then you miss the very things that until then had come to bore you. You miss your town, your home, your bathroom, the armchair in front of the desk where you work. Kierkegaard talks about this balance in one of his books, the *Treatise of Despair*: despair in the finite and despair in the infinite. And Heidegger deals with boredom in a splendid lecture, in which boredom, *Langeweile*, appears as a crevice, an abyss.

5. *The spatial environment is not chaotic, but ordered, or, more precisely, oriented.* I know very well the state of things in my environment, literally and figuratively speaking. Any thing has a place in space, and in the combination of things I can at any time find or create an order. The chaotic and order are not, in this sense, objective. The chaotic often arises from the foreignness of a setting, just as order is often the result of being used to it. No environment is chaotic for the person who lives in it. There is a perfect order on this desk for the person who works at it, although it is overloaded with books, sheets of paper, notes etc., while for the woman who does the cleaning it is completely disordered. Any apparent disorder can be tamed. Supposing that there was disorder in this room, if I spent more time in it and started to get used to the things, I would begin to distinguish in the disorder which struck me at first the order that the person who lives here has imprinted on them. Little by little I myself would penetrate this environment and transform it into my own. On the other hand, where I am and remain foreign, it seems to me that everything is chaotic. A perfectly ordered room can remain totally foreign for me, because for whatever reason I cannot appropriate it spiritually.

6. *Orientation is based on the schema of centre and surround*, that is to say me and my environment. In fact in our case it would be correct to say that ‘me and my environment’ is the basis of the ‘centre and surround’ (or ‘ordered surround’) schema. I am always in an environment, because I am always ‘outside’: I see, I hear, I take a step... The ‘me–environment’ schema is fundamental, and it ultimately reproduces the simple schema of the cosmos. As understood by the Greeks, the cosmos is that which has a centre, and, precisely for this reason, has a well ordered surround. It is a *world*. The same schema works with all the breadth and depth of its

treatment in Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), especially in the form of *Worum-willen* ('for-the-sake-of-which'). In saying this, I only want to show that these philosophical ideas of great breadth start out from an extremely simple immediate reality. It is sufficient to think a little about the immediate in order to fall upon the great philosophical solutions.

The Temporal Environment

Common sense tells us that our temporal environment is the age in which we live—which, let's face it, is vague. If the 'age' is the century, for example, then the interval is too large and too chrono-arithmetical. And if it is smaller, then how small can it get? Our language describes this short respiration of time in the expression 'from today till tomorrow'. And in fact it is impossible not to live from today till tomorrow. Each of us knows what we have in mind to do today and what we propose to do tomorrow. I always have a programme, even if the programme is to take it easy. In other words, I am always busy.

But that is what I do with my time. When we discuss the temporal environment, we need to consider what time makes of us.

1. The first thing that must be said is that man lives in a *contemporaneity* and cannot do otherwise without forcing reality. Contemporaneity is the social environment from a temporal point of view, but it is not the same thing as synchronicity. I cannot live without having a contemporaneity, but it is quite possible for me *not* to live in contemporaneity understood as synchronicity. Children, for example, are not yet contemporary with contemporaneity, and the elderly have ceased to be so.

Let us pause a little over the case of the elderly. They take into themselves, and carry with them a certain contemporaneity, that of their youth and maturity. And they keep this contemporaneity deep in their heart until they die: the artists who were famous in their time, the music, the food and all that belongs to 'Ah, back in my day!'. Whence it results that contemporaneity, too, is a sentiment, a *Gefühl*. Over and above pure synchronism, an unknown web binds you to the time in which you lived to the full, a web impregnated by all that characterizes that time in relation to the time that immediately followed it. The Greeks did not approach someone's biography with reference to the years of his birth and of his death, but rather in terms of his *ἀκμή*, meaning his 'peak point', the time of maturity, when the person attains the fullness of his being, the best period of his life. We do not know very well how these affective bonds are woven between us and the peak period of our lives, which we then feel to be contemporaneity.

Of course, someone may say to me, regardless of this *Gefühl* and this remaining behind that is presupposed by old age, we still all live in contemporaneity: we turn on the radio and hear the news, we watch television, we listen to what this or that person says, we see the same films, read the books that come out, talk together... But to what extent do these things become everybody's 'web'? To what extent are they all still grafted onto my being and metabolized? For an elderly person, all these

things are pale reflections of the similar things that they experienced in their maturity and that inscribed themselves in them with full vivacity. They see a famous dancer of today, but in fact they remain convinced that there is no longer a dancer like Fred Astaire and never will be. They see Richard Gere and exclaim: 'What a handsome man Gary Cooper was!' They look at a fashion parade and think nostalgically of the clothes 'of their day'. Of course they are contemporary with the rest of us, but only in appearance. In reality, they are all the time there, 'in their day'.

For this reason, contemporaries are not just people who have lived at the same time, but those who have shared a certain temporal environment: a history, habits, technical means, fashion, cultural prejudices. And all these things have inscribed themselves in their hearts, have been co-experienced. And when they change—and *hélas*, all things change!—they no longer feel at home. Everything that has changed has changed, for them, for the worse, and they have remained foreign in relation to the evolution of the temporal environment. The Germans have a good verb: *mitmachen*, to make something together, to participate in its birth. Well, the elderly no longer *mitmachen*, no longer give things a starting push. '*Er macht das nicht mehr mit.*' 'I've lost him along the way.' He is no longer, practically and affectively, alongside me. (I am speaking, of course, in general terms, of simple and usual cases. I do not mean to say that there do not exist elderly people who are every bit as contemporary as could be. Dinu Noica, for example, is contemporary, and not just in a mimicking way, but authentically.) This *nicht mehr mitmachen* sometimes takes insurrectional forms, becoming a protest, a refusal, a deliberate form of non-participation in what is happening. Things being as they are, elderly people are foreign to the world in which they only live *de facto*, while in their hearts it is foreign to them.

It sometimes happens that we leaf through illustrated magazines of 60 years ago. What strikes us is not just the fact that the world there is different from ours, but that to a large extent it is comical. There is always something comical about the immediate past. This mixture of the tragic and the comic is particularly striking when we happen to meet unknown elderly people in the street. They are left in the world of today like so many *revenants*, like so many ghosts. Contemporaneity thus gives a certain superiority to the person who knows 'what...': what is worn, what is said, what is known, what is done and is not done, what is chic and what is not. It is the superiority of the up-to-date. And this superiority of the one who keeps up with things is much more visible in our times, precisely because the changes are much more rapid. The idea of progress nowadays brings with it an obsession with contemporaneity. This is no longer a point that separates the past from the future, but a 'now' that has become absolute in relation to the past. What is past is *ipso facto* dated, out-of-date; whatever is contemporary becomes the place of the 'last' judgement. For being contemporary gives you the right to judge the past. What I mean is that the past comes to be at the beck and call of the present simply by virtue of its temporal position. Such judgements usually start with 'Nowadays we no longer...', and they express all the arrogance of the fact of being contemporary. What is now decisive is not logic, but temporal position. We have reached, in our day, a sort of domination on the line of time, in which what is new or seems to be new is superior

precisely because it is new. This 'new' is raised to the rank of a symbol of the future, and thus raised in its temporal grade. In a symmetrical manner, all that is past becomes antiquated. Of course there is a logical naivety about this way of appreciating things. If nowadays what was superior yesterday is antiquated, then tomorrow what is superior today will be antiquated, and so on. And then there is no point in anything. How can we escape from this provincialism of contemporaneity? The safest solution is to know the thinkers of the past. Why? Because only if we are conscious of them can we reposition contemporaneity in its proper place: that of a chance limit-point in an *evolution* with which we have to be contemporary. You are contemporary if you have the culture of today not through what is today, but together with the whole unfolding in which 'today' is a chance happening that concerns us. The hardest thing is to grasp progress where it is not merely quantitative.

Let us take the example of the computer. The calculating machines that made up the first generation of computers were huge and slow. They are antiquated. There is no doubt that they are out-of-date in relation to the computers of today, which can sit on a single table, can do many more operations, and can be operated easily. All that I have listed so far are quantitative aspects. In the case of the computer, it is absolutely clear that progress is quantitative. As far as I am aware, however, no-one has yet demonstrated that in matters in which quantitative appreciations cannot be made, this force of temporality (the superiority of the new) should operate without any other criterion. However I would like you all to be aware of the power of this temporality, or to be more precise, the superiority that is felt by the person who lives in contemporaneity. Here, in contemporaneity, seems to be the end of the world, or even its culmination. Being a feeling, this is not objective but subjective. All those who live contemporaneity to the full have a tendency to confiscate time. They all have the feeling that they are at the culmination of something. Hegel was not immune to this (*der absolute Geist*), and nor was Auguste Comte or Nietzsche. For each of us, the completely legitimate feeling that we are at the furthest extreme of the world, that we are the last in time, can transform into the less legitimate, or even utterly illegitimate feeling that the world is coming to fulfilment in us, or at least entering a decisive phase. This (illegitimate) feeling is based on the following reasoning: if we, knowing all that our predecessors have done and thought, do something else, then this 'something else' is *ipso facto* superior to what was done before, since no-one would consciously do something worse. Thus a *confusion*, in the sense of an unjustified identification, is created between 'new' on the one hand, and 'superior' or 'advanced' on the other. Modern temporality—and we shall see how it came into being—brings about an enhancement of the new as a purely temporal value, an intrinsic value. The new is constituted as new, proclaims itself as such, and, conscious of its temporal value, affirms itself as a negation of the past. The term 'modern' is more than a 1000 years old, as is the 'ancient–modern' opposition, only that it did not previously have its accent on temporality.

2. Since the word 'modern' has become too vague, the 'ancient–modern' opposition has been replaced today by the *conflict between generations*. The opposition on which the psychology of generations is based can be summed up in the expression 'different from'. Thus the beatniks were 'different' from well-brought-up young

people. Everything they did was in opposition to what they had been told when they were little. 'Go and wash your hands! Go and take a shower!'—they didn't wash anymore. 'Get a haircut! Can't you see how long your hair is?'—they didn't cut their hair anymore. 'Tell the maid to iron your trousers!'—they didn't wear ironed trousers anymore, and so on. Research has shown that all these beatniks, including those who rioted on university campuses, turned into decent people, with jobs in respectable companies, committed family men who cut their hair, wore ironed trousers etc.

The generation conflict seems to elude engagement in the temporal environment, and it is tempting to see the opposition as one between group solidarities created around certain ideals, beliefs, points of view, or behaviours, implying problems of 'taste' rather than of period. But it is not at all so. The generation is always fixed in a certain time and *given a date*. It cannot escape from time. Previously there was *la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*; there were the ancients, who continued to uphold traditionalism, and there were the moderns. Then the generations began to impose themselves: we had the 'forty-eighters' (so called from the year 1848), and in France in our own century there was the 'sixty-eight' generation, the generation who threw lumps of tarmac at the police in the spring of 1968. Here in Romania, in literature, as far as I understand from the periodicals I read, each decade now has its own generation.

3. In the same way as with the spatial environment that belongs to us, so in the temporal environment in which we live, life unfolds in a predictable way. We live, in other words, with a certain temporal security. But here too, in the temporal environment as in the spatial, the foreign element may intrude: the happening, the event. 'An hour can bring what a year does not,' goes a well-known saying. The event quite simply explodes against the background of the temporal environment. But the proportion of happening, of event, is dictated by the degree of solidity of the temporal environment. In a traditional, archaic temporal environment, any violence is an event. A common assault there is the subject of discussion for weeks on end, while in New York it passes unnoticed.

Thus if the temporal environment is well 'sealed' and things only repeat themselves, happenings are unlikely to occur: this is the place where nothing has happened (as in Sadoveanu's novel¹). In such a reiterative world, whatever happens as a deviation from repetition happens abruptly; it seems like an explosion and takes on huge proportions. In our world, on the other hand, men have to go to the moon for it to be an event on the scale of a knife attack among neighbours in some small village. It all depends on the solidity of the temporal environment. In New York, it is changing all the time. All sorts of new things keep appearing; nothing is predictable as it is in a small community, as it is, for example, in the provinces. Think what a solid temporal environment the citizens of Königsberg lived in when they saw Kant walking every day at the same time.

¹The book referred to is *Locul unde nu s-a întâmplat nimic* (The place where nothing happened), 1933, by Mihail Sadoveanu (1880–1961), a well-known Romanian novelist. [Trans.]

Intervening as it does, the happening is a sort of *opening of time*, or rather of the temporal environment. This time that, in the temporal environment, flows regularly, repetitively, and in a familiar manner, is interrupted when the happening breaks its way in. Time that is thus opened acquires another dimension—a vertical dimension in place of the horizontal one—and the present is turned into something overpowering. Not only in the sense of an intensification of the present moment, but also in the sense that time is forced open towards what may be dreadful in the temporal. This is when the feeling arises that *anything* can happen. The happening has the same degree of *unheimlich*, of ‘strange-terrible’ as the foreign has in the spatial environment. The temporal structure in which I generally live, one that is familiar to me, in which things are predictable, in which I can make plans and programmes and in which everything happens in order, accustoms me to a mild and gentle face of time. All of us who have lived in the provinces are familiar with this face of time. When the happening intervenes, the face of time is changed. It takes on a quite different dimension, one you have not suspected up till now. It appears in your life in a quite different form, one that is completely unfamiliar: in the form of the extra-ordinary, the totally unusual.

And this is the end of my talk on ‘utter metaphysical banalities.’ I wanted to show that we are caught in a spatio-temporal environment exactly as in a *trap*. This means that our actions are not only limited: they also limit us. The environment is perhaps precisely this turning of our fundamental limitation back on ourselves, a turning back that results in the enclosure of our lives within limits that are no longer physical-natural, but spiritual. I wanted it to be understood somehow that philosophy is not something that deals with the problem of the infinite in the paralogisms of Kant’s pure reason. Oh no! Its place is right here in the immediate. In other words Mr Liiceanu’s ‘limit’ is not a matter of peratology.² It needs to be thought *hic et nunc*. It is for this reason that you cannot live without doing philosophy. In a way, we can live without thinking about the infinite, but we cannot live without thinking about our trap. For the simple reason that we live in it. Philosophy is thinking about the trap in which we live. I agree, of course, that there are many ways out of this trap; the principal escape routes are religion, philosophy, science, and art. In the case of philosophy, I escape from the trap exactly to the extent that I want to be clear in my mind about it. You can, of course, live in this trap content that ‘they’ give you warmth and food, I mean without feeling any need for philosophy. But for me that is not a life that I can choose. No! I want to be clear about *my* world. And this is called doing philosophy.

²See Gabriel Liiceanu’s chapter ‘The Notebooks from Underground’ in the present volume. [Trans.]

Nations

Based on the tape-recording of a lecture given by Alexandru Dragomir on 1 May 1993. His choice of theme was not random at a time when, against the background of inflamed nationalism that emerged with the fall of the Soviet Union and the conflicts in Yugoslavia, the problems of the nation and nationalism had become (and would remain) a pressing topic of discussion. Faced with the avalanche of studies, books, and speeches on the subject, Dragomir perhaps wanted show us what phenomenology could do when it touched on such a theme. What resulted was evidently a quite different approach from the usual. (Gabriel Liiceanu)

The literature of the past offers an abundance of nationalist discourses: Cicero in the *Catiline Orations*, Fichte in *Reden an die deutsche Nation* ('Addresses to the German nation'), Eminescu in 'Letter III'.¹ What do they have in common? It is quite clear that *none of them is expository*, i.e. assertive. They are either *hortatory*, urging, encouraging, as with Fichte and Eminescu—and I would add the speech of Avram Iancu²—, or *imprecatory*, chastising, as with Cicero.

Where does this tone come from? How is it justified? All these discourses refer to situations of extreme threat, limit situations for a community. Cicero, for example, calls Catiline from the very beginning *pestis*, in the sense of calamity, disaster, extreme danger, catastrophe, something that threatens to *overturn* the natural order of things (καταστροφή in Greek means just that: things being turned upside down). In Eminescu's 'Letter III', Mircea the Old is engaged in a fight for survival, and the poet emphasizes the disproportion of forces that could lead to disaster.

Avram Iancu's speech is particularly interesting; it is perhaps the most concise hortatory speech every uttered. Do you know Avram Iancu's speech? Iancu came

¹Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889) is commonly regarded as the national poet of Romania. His 'Letter III' evokes the resistance of the medieval Wallachians to Turkish invasion, under the leadership of their ruler Mircea the Old, and contrasts the heroism of the past with the debased state of the country in the present. [Trans.]

²Avram Iancu (1824–1872), leader of a Romanian peasant army in Transylvanian during the revolution of 1848. [Trans.]

out into the porch when all the dead had been collected, shook his cloak a little on his shoulders, and said: 'Well, on we go!'³ That is Avram Iancu's speech. His reticence did not come from bashfulness, but from the pointlessness of emphasizing things when there was already a common ground of awareness of the danger. 'Well, on we go!' was, in this case, sufficient. They all knew what they were doing and why they were doing it.

Now, of course there are different threats. If we try to make a strictly formal schema, there are *external threats*—for example a community is threatened, as in the case of Mircea the Old and the Turks, with destruction by invasion, subjugation etc.—and there are *internal threats* (in the *Catiline Orations*, Catiline is a threat to the security of the state, the *res-publica*). And there are also *internal-external threats*, for example the danger of xenocracy, as Eminescu sees it: 'thick-necked Bulgar, thin-nosed Greek...' According to this vision, the nation is threatened from inside by the control exercised by 'allogenuous' elements, 'foreign to the nation' and so external in relation to its interests.

In the face of all these threats of destruction, the nation seeks to be sustained, supported, rescued from the situation of trouble. That is why, depending on the threat—external or internal—, patriotic discourses are either hortatory or imprecatory. They are *appeals* to the nation, and as such refer to a different structure of judgments (see Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, II) than that of logical judgments. Like prayers, like questions, they are not expository and assertive.

However in the case of the nation, the appeal has a *revealing function*. The appeal, which seeks the awakening of the nation, causes the nation that is thus awakened in the face of danger to *appear*. The nation appears, is brought to light and becomes conscious of itself in the moment in which its being is threatened. This coming to consciousness of the nation reveals the nation as a base, in the double sense that we are all based in a nation, and that together we are the basis of a nation. As a base, the nation establishes this double belonging: we belong to a nation, and the nation belongs to us.

To make things clearer, let me take the following example. I have a book; it is *my* book. When I say that it is my book, I am referring to a legal relationship. It belongs to me because I bought it, I was given it, etc. Since it is mine, I can do what I like with it: I can underline the words in different colours (each of which will have a certain significance for me), I can draw lines in the margin, I can mark it with signs (an exclamation mark, a question mark, three question marks, etc.), or express my opinions about what the author says ('rubbish', 'completely off the mark', 'excellent', or 'worth thinking about'), or I can mark the logical structure of the text in the margin ('argument 1', 'argument 2', etc.). And then what does this book become? It remains itself as a physical and spiritual object, but it also incorporates many things that are me. A good number of my books come from the second-hand bookshop. When I open them I enjoy trying to reconstruct from the annotations the personalities of those who have read them, because they have introduced into the books, as

³In the original Romanian, as quoted here by Dragomir, Iancu's speech is even more concise, consisting merely of two monosyllabic interjections: 'No, hai!' [Trans.].

they read them, a multitude of things that represent themselves. On the one hand, they have taken from their books parts that belong to the books, and on the other, something of what they are belongs now to the books. The primary relationship presupposes a printed book, which is what it is, and someone who is about to read it, who has their own personality. Compared with this primary relationship, a new entity appears after the reading, in which the double belonging of which I was speaking becomes concrete. By virtue of it, the reader may re-read the book any time, finding their way much more easily, because of what they have already put of their own being into it, and what they have taken from it.

In this double sense, then, the nation is a base. But what sort of base? A base in the sense of a foundation? That would imply a spatial relation: the foundation is the base of a house, and the house itself is something else. From the point of view of the nation, the base does not presuppose this sort of existence—a spatial foundation—, but rather a temporal one. In his *Physics* III, 6, 206a, Aristotle distinguishes between these two sorts of existence, since, he tells us, εἶναι λέγεται πολλαχῶς, ‘being is spoken of in many ways’: either as substance, οὐσία (a house, a tree, etc.), or temporal (day, a contest, the Olympic games). What is it that characterizes temporal being compared with substantial being? The answer is change. But let us look at Aristotle’s text: ‘[...] “being” is spoken of in many ways, and we say that the infinite *is* in the sense in which we say it is day or it is the games, because one thing after another is always coming into existence’ (206a20 *sqq.*). And: ‘we must not regard the infinite (τὸ ἄπειρον) [and here he includes also time, which is one of the infinities for Aristotle] as a ‘this’ (τόδε τι), such as a man or a horse, but must suppose it to exist in the sense in which we speak of the day or the games as existing—things whose being has not come to them like that of a substance (ἡ οὐσία τις), but consists in a process of coming to be or passing away, finite, yet always different’ (206a30 *sqq.*). In short, the temporal character creates a mode of being that is different from that of things. To what extent is it different? To the extent that it is made in and from time, as a ‘building material’. All things are made in time, but only some, like the day or the games in Aristotle’s examples, are made from time. There are existences that are composed only of time.

The nation is one of the ‘things’ in the world that are created and have existence in this way. The base that is the nation, and that ‘lies’ in us, is not an οὐσία, a substantial existence, but an existence of the temporal kind. *What is the field of this base?* What is it made up of? I would say that it is *a field of significance*. How is this to be understood? There are *constituents* of the nation: geographical territory, actions in history, language. The first, territory, marks the extent of the nation; the actions in history make up our past; the language is the element through which our ‘togetherness’ takes shape, that togetherness of communication in which we speak to each other and to ourselves. How do these physical elements become temporal realities, and thus fields of significance? What does significance actually consist of?

Significance is what is involved in the working of signs. Any sign points to something, refers to something. An arrow which becomes an indicator, for example, is no longer the arrow that you shoot from a bow. It is a sign, i.e. something that points to something other than itself. So what do the elements that constitute the nation point

to? What is it that, being different from them, makes them *signify*? Obviously they point *to us*. A territory, from a physical point of view, is no more than a territory, a geographical space that can be measured and mapped, but *for us* it is our country, our homeland. History is a sequence of events that can be studied chronologically, causally, etc., but *for us* it is our past. The language in itself is no more than a linguistic phenomenon that we can study in all its structures and characteristics, but *for us* it is the mother tongue. The significance of all these objective constituents lies in their reference to us, to the members of the community they give a base to. All three elements are, in themselves, *ob-iectum*; they can be seen from outside, with detachment, as something ‘thrown’ before you that you can consider and contemplate as such. However when they enter into a field of significance, they become *sub-iectum*, which means that we find ourselves ‘beneath’ the things that happen to us, and that what happens to us has a quite different significance than if it happened to someone else. I see in one way the fact that someone has cancer (even if I may be sentimentally involved in their troubles), and in a different way if I am the ‘subject’ of the cancer, if I ‘lie’ beneath it and bear it with all my being. I cross the territory of Hungary or Austria in one way as I drive to the West, and I cross Romania in quite a different way, for every step brings me joy or sorrow. For me, it is ‘my country’, and it has this significance precisely *in its relation to me*. And this relation to me cannot be translated or transmitted; it cannot be expressed in rational terms, but remains, in all its subjectivity and untranslatability, irrational.

But how does significance manage to become the temporal reality that forms the basis of the nation? The answer is, through the fact that *we have invested* in the constituents of the nation. It is our investment that makes these things a base. In Latin (the term appears especially in medieval Latin) *investire* means ‘to clothe’, ‘to surround’, ‘to encircle’, For example, a town may be ‘invested’, making it into a fortress, raising walls around it. I can invest in a certain physical-spatial reality, by, for example, the fact that I build there, make a garden, plant trees, etc., by the fact that I *live in it*, and do all this over a period of time, which makes my investment become a base. It is the same with the past of a community: the experiences of our ancestors make up our past like a sort of investment. The history of events is *clothed* by us with a significance that transforms it into *our* past. And then the country becomes all that we have invested materially and spiritually over the years in a certain geographical, historical and linguistic territory; but also the way in which this threefold territory has invested us, forming us, willy-nilly as Romanians. (Our folk poetry shows us better than anything what the nature of this territory has invested in us.) Ultimately the nation is this construct.

What follows from this? That the nation represents a great force, and at the same time is very fragile. The nation represents a great force because the potential of energy that a nation accumulates by the investment made systematically by its members over the centuries is huge. The base that forms the nation represents an enormous reserve of energy. That is why, when danger threatens, appeals are made to this force of the nation either by *adhortatio* or by *imprecatio*. But at the same time, precisely because the material that makes up a nation is temporal, it is fragile. Due to its *temporal* way of being—which means change—it is threatened and can

always be threatened. This constant threat is part of what being a nation is all about. And these two things—the strength of the nation and its fragility—are inseparable.

Let us now note that the three constituents, territory, history, and language, do not always appear together. For the Jewish people, for example, territory, at least in appearance, has been missing, but that has not prevented them from being a people, and indeed a powerful one. But let us not forget the role of the Promised Land; a good part of the essence of Judaism is provided by this mirage of the Promised Land. Moses leads the Jews towards the Promised Land, and on the way God gives them the Ten Commandments. Territory, although it appears to be absent, in fact exists in the form of the promise. For there is indeed the promise of a land. So even for the Jewish people, who everyone says had no homeland, it was essential to have one, even if only at the level of the ideal, as a promise.

Let us note next that the constituent elements of the nation (territory, history, and language) exist in a sort of perpetual blending. It is only possible to inhabit a territory, a country—which means building, cultivating, establishing lines of communication—, in time, which means having a certain past, a history. Once again, when you go through various countries, you are struck by history in a spatialized form. You see fortresses, castles, places about which you are told: ‘This is where so-and-so stood up to so-and-so, this is where such-and-such an event took place, this is the site of such-and-such a battle...’ Any territory is thus soaked in the past of a people. And nor can the language be reduced just to how people speak among themselves in a country, or what they write in their books. A nation expresses itself in many ways: in textiles, in works of art, in ways of building, etc. And the language does not just express what it *says*. The specific character of languages cannot be reduced to the words through which information is transmitted. The most difficult thing for polyglots is not so much learning the grammar and vocabulary of a language, as the way that the speakers of a language speak: when they speak, how much, the rhythm and intonation of the sentence, and, above all, what is not said in what is said.

But it is not only the constituents of the nation that are inseparable: so too are the threats it faces. Let us consider Eminescu’s ‘Letter III’, which I fear we Romanians have not thought through well enough. I will give you an example. Mircea the Old says: ‘I defend my poverty, my need, and my people.’ The sequence is not in order of importance, but is dictated by the criteria of rhyme and euphony. But even so, how can you *defend your poverty*? What would make you want to defend your ‘poverty and need’? I can understand why one might defend one’s wealth, one’s resources, one’s well-being—and defending one’s people is only natural—, but why ‘poverty and need’? The opposition in the poem is not only between peoples—Romanian and Turkish—, but between the modesty of the one and the arrogance of the other. ‘You exalt yourself,’ says Mircea to the Turk a few lines previously. The Turkish nation is visualized in the super-abundance of signs of power, expressed quantitatively and qualitatively in Eminescu’s long depiction. Mircea defends his people as it is depicted in contrast, projected against the background of the enormous wealth and force of the Turks, i.e. as ‘poverty and need’. Of course I have to defend my people. But the identity of this people that I am to defend is revealed, by opposition to the vastly-resourced identity of the other, as ‘poor’.

And how exactly does Mircea think he can overturn the existing imbalance of forces between the Romanians and the Turks? By means of what I have previously identified as the intransmissible and untranslatable character of the base. The only advantage available to Mircea is that the Romanians are facing the Turks 'at home', on their own *base*, which at that moment of history was functional, alive, mobilizing in the face of danger. Mircea says: 'All that moves in this country, every river, every bough, is a friend only to me, but to you it is an enemy. You will be opposed by everything, more than you even realize.' The Romanian prince is relying here simply on the strength of the nation, on its 'subjectivity', its field of significance, the ineffable way in which each element (the river, the bough) relates to us and *only* to us. Bayazid is going to confront something that he has no access to. He cannot realize, cannot find out, cannot get information, for all these elements (the river, the bough, etc.) are fundamental, sub-jective, 'lying beneath'; they are only bases, and as such cannot be grasped from outside. Eminescu has a perfect intuition here of the 'irrational' in which the aspects of the base, with their unformulable and intransmissible character, remain veiled. Mircea stands against the formidable visible power, the huge army of Bayazid, with the invisible power of the base. As an invader, Bayazid is entering a 'foreign' territory, and so falls into the net of the irrational that is associated with the base. Exactly the same thing happens to Napoleon in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In both cases, those who penetrate, enter, invade come up against 'all that moves in this country' and that for them remains imperceptible, for the simple reason that the 'river' and the 'bough' are part of the double belonging of the base of the nation: we belong to the nation, and the nation belongs to us.⁴ Among all the places that a people inhabits for hundreds or thousands of years, there arise, so to speak, hidden bonds that do not come to the surface and that no one is conscious of except in such moments of danger. And a foreigner, especially an invader, can never understand these bonds. The relationship created between a territory and its inhabitants is untranslatable.

It follows from this that nations *divide*, but in a special, and not etymological sense. They do not share out a whole, but, each based on its own manner of relating, they suppress it as a physical whole. Take the map of Europe. It represents a unitary geographical territory. Is there a unitary European community corresponding to this territory? Far from it. The nations suppress the geographical whole that is Europe, transforming more than twenty pieces of its territory into so many countries. Europe, seen as a geographical and cartographic whole, is 'rational', while the pieces of territory within which things have been invested with specific significance, i.e. the *nations* of Europe, are irrational, in the sense that they are untranslatable. It is not the physical borders in the first place, but the constitutive elements of the nation that cut up geography and transform the pieces into countries. The creation of a European

⁴ It is interesting how the potential of energy that was commanded by the base of the French nation dried up after the First World War, while that of the Germans, who felt humiliated after the Treaty of Versailles, grew. Hitler was able to enter a spiritually wearied France without difficulty. He was able to mobilize a Germany that felt itself caught in a vice, while he did not have to face the irrational force of the 'rivers and boughs' of France. [A.D.]

Union will always raise the problem of how to accommodate in a whole something which, at the level of untranslatable significances, is condemned to remain idiomatic and separate. Different and irreducible as they are, and thus untranslatable, the nations lie permanently under threat: beyond a certain point dialogue between them is impossible; the territory of *logos*, of reason, is closed to them. In order to reach dialogue and *logos*, they must meet in that neutral space where irreducible significances have disappeared or been reduced (but how, if they are irreducible?), one way or another, to the global. Thus at first sight, the nation appears *irreducible*.

However its *horizon* (in the sense of future prospect) seems to be different. We may observe that in our period, history is tending towards *formalization*. What does this mean? It means that all that involves conflict between nations will be reducible to a standard problem that allows a *formal* approach, treatment, and resolution. This means that regardless of the specific character of individual conflicts, the general classes to which they belong will generate uniform solutions. These strategic and univocal solutions do not abolish nations, but they neutralize them as a potential for conflict. The best way to understand this is to consider the essence of the United Nations. The United Nations level implies a worldwide generalization, and, for this very reason, a degree of formalization of historical conflicts through their transformation into standard problems. In the light of this, a history of events, based on specific conflicts that apparently cannot be formalized, becomes outdated, and gives way to another type of history, in which any event can be put into a category, making reactions to it predictable and its outcome a foregone conclusion. 200 years ago, let us say, the Gulf War would have been regarded as an invasion of the usual sort, presupposing an active attitude on the part of those involved in the conflict, and a passive one from everyone else. Things would have been allowed to take their 'natural' course, following the logic of 'what's to be will be; we'll see what happens'. Nowadays, however, as history tends towards formality, with the identification of *types* of problem on a world scale, together with *typical* solutions for them, the Gulf War is classified as a 'problem between nations', and solved as if it were a mathematical problem, with the prescribed solution being 'outside intervention', presented as the mobilization of a worldwide will. It looks as if the war between nations in Yugoslavia is going to be solved in the same way, i.e. *at a different level from that of those involved in the conflict*. The irreducibility of those caught up in the conflict is transcended by passing to another level, that of a *logos* in which, in principle, all nations participate. They are intervening in Yugoslavia just now not because there is a danger of a worldwide conflict, as with Sarajevo in 1914, but because nowadays we have come to believe that any local conflict (ethnic or religious) can be reduced to a standard problem and solution. So the problem is not whether the nations will die or not—being temporal existences, they are mortal anyway—, but whether it will be possible systematically to neutralize their potential for aggressivity. Which means that humanity will be able to incorporate them in a sort of *inter-national translatability*, through which inevitably something will be gained and something will be lost. We are in the first phase of this process; we are feeling our way, and mistakes are being made, but what is certain is that we are going in this direction because it is considered to represent great progress. I shall suspend judgement for

the time being as to whether it is progress or not, as that would mean embarking on another discussion.

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What Is Happening to Us?

Based on my notes of a lecture given by Alexandru Dragomir on 3 December 1995, together with Dragomir's own preparatory notes, made on separate sheets of paper and preserved in his archive. (Gabriel Liceanu)

I want to talk about what happens to the human species when it loses its sense of measure. In fact I want to talk about the extreme fluidization of time (but that can wait until the end), and also, to some extent, about unquenchable appetite. I shall take as a motto for our meeting La Rochefoucauld's saying: *Qui trop embrasse mal étreint*, the spirit of which I would translate as: 'He who wants too much doesn't get what he desires.'

A multi-millennial tradition says that man, particularly through his 'soul', his intellectual part, is a crowning of nature, and thus a participant in divinity—if not actually himself divine—inasmuch as divinity made the world *with him in view*. For thousands of years this idea has lain at the foundation of the religious beliefs, philosophies, and moralities of the West (and not only the West), from the Orphics and Pythagoreans, through Plato, Aristotle, and the medievals, to Bacon and Descartes, while itself being underlain by a trichotomic conceptual schema: 'divine—soul—body'. We know very well that for Plato, participation in the divine is an *open* ascension, and that by virtue of his existing resemblance, his status of *copy* (εἰκὼν), man tends towards an identification with divinity, which is ultimately unachievable. For Aristotle, with some corrections (in *De Anima*), things are much the same.

Christianity claims that man is even more than a crowning of Creation, a summit of nature: he is *master* over all earthly things. Genesis 1, 26 tells us: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.' And again at 1, 28: 'And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' The theme of *man as master of the earth* returns with Saint Anselm and the School of Chartres in the form of the claim that man was always foreseen in the Creator's plan, and that the world was actually made for him. (It is true that there are Christian authors who have maintained the opposite: it is also from a Christian tradition that Saint Gregory takes up the idea that man is an accident of Creation, an *Ersatz*, a

bouche-trou, created *ad hoc* by God in order to replace the fallen rebel angels.) Jean Calvin, in his *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, says that the earth was given to us by God for our use, that it represents an entrusted good, and that as such we shall one day have to give account for it. Finally, the theme of ‘man as master’ appears in Francis Bacon, in the *Novum Organum* I, 1, where man is named administrator and interpreter of nature (*naturae minister et interpretet*).

From all I have said up till now, we can see that, for as long as he has existed, man has related to three entities: (1) to God, as His *subject*; (2) to nature, as its *master*; and (3) to his fellows, as their *equal*. In this model, man appears to be intermediary, but in fact he behaves as if he were central. For one thing, this framework is made by him; it is ‘his own reading’. In addition, not only does he, man, master nature, but ultimately he comes to claim that it is also he who creates divinity, and indeed kills it.

The Relationship with Nature

Let us begin, bearing in mind this model, with *the relationship of man with nature*; we can distinguish in human history *three layers of culture*.

1. What was spoken of in Genesis was achieved: man cultivated, domesticated, mastered. His mastery at first took the form of satisfying his needs by means of pragmatically acquired knowledge: I know when the animal will come so that I can hunt it, I know when the Nile will flood, etc. It is through this type of knowledge that I first manage to coordinate and master.

But this type of mastery is permanently associated with toil. It is inevitable that someone will have to bear the element of toil that is necessary for this sort of mastery. For one to be truly master, there has to be a slave. It is the slave who deals with the toil and allows the master to achieve *otium*, leisure, time that can be used freely, detached from any form of toil.

2. Now, thanks to *otium*, the second layer of culture appears. Man becomes free, or, to put it more correctly, he is freed through the existence of slaves. In this way, the culture of freedom appears, and with it poetry, music, philosophy, etc. Culture as we understand it appears at this level of freedom. Of course existence is dependent on the first layer; however it appears in the light of day as independent. And through this independence the primary layer of culture is concealed and treated as inferior. The life and culture of the first layer are despised as the superiority of the second layer is affirmed. However this does not really change much. The culture of the free man that belongs to this layer of culture is still directly dependent on another form of mastery, a mastery that frees from toil, and that is different from mastery through pragmatically assured knowledge: the mastery of slaves, i.e. the mastery of other people, of people deprived of any legal right, ‘instrument people’, as we find them considered if we go back to Aristotle. The elevating culture of Athens was made possible, politically and economically speaking, by the existence of slaves, who did not enter into spiritual ‘culture’, but who solved for those who did the problem of ‘independence’ with dependence at its base. Athenian democracy was essentially one of slave-owners.

It is with this layer of culture that we first encounter the problem of the intellectual as creator and *parasite*. Of course in this discussion of layers of culture, our point of view is a ‘historical’ one. However we might ask, in logical, metaphysical or para-historical terms, whether the intellectual is not by his very nature parasitic. Does mere intentionality not in fact imply parasitism? Does thinking ‘about’ not also mean thinking ‘on’? Is parasitism not implied by any removal from the pragmatic circuit? And does *otium*, the detached leisure necessary for the philosopher, not mark him as a parasite? Etymologically speaking, the parasite (παρά-σιτος) was (in Greek, of course) the one who took his food (σίτος) beside (παρά) another. Παρασιτέω means ‘to eat beside someone or something.’ The term was especially used for the common meals in the Prytaneum; then ‘parasite’ took the specialized sense of a sort of priest who participated in the meal. Its modern use comes through French. In the early sixteenth century, a *parasite* was ‘celui qui fait métier de divertir un riche’. If we return now to our problem we still have to ask ourselves: is man, by his intellect, a *jewel* of nature or a parasite? In other words, what did God want us for? Did he want man to be a crowning of nature or a parasite?

However we might very well spare man this (undignified) epithet, saying that as long as the intellect (and the intellectual) does no harm to that on which it is parasitic (the intellect does no harm to the object ‘on’ which it thinks, or intentionality to the object it has in view), it is not really a parasite. The question is then, however, whether at any time in its history the intellect has somehow proved harmful to its object and so become a parasite. Has this happened? And if so, when? The answer is: when culture (the intellect) becomes science, and science becomes technology, the intellect (and the intellectual as scientist) becomes a parasite. And in this role, it not only harms but becomes devastating. And so we come to the third layer of culture.

3. The third layer of culture is the modern one. It becomes possible thanks to technology, which transforms the first layer into ‘consumer culture’ and enlarges the second layer to enormous dimensions. The difference is that now mastery over nature becomes *total*. We exploit *everything*, and do so in such a way that nature ceases in a sense to exist anymore, becoming entirely transformed. If I look around at what man is doing, I have every reason to throw up my hands in despair. He is not just an innocent parasite on nature: he drains all its resources for himself, modifies the landscape and destroys its beauty, pollutes, and wipes out living species. What more can I say? He does all that technology makes it possible for him to do. And in so doing, he takes no notice of anything, not even of himself, because he does not even ask himself what is happening to him, to man, in all this. He is content to be ‘progressing’. Seen in this light, man is a parasite. But he has in fact been a parasite for millennia, being basically a beast of prey. And he is not the only one, you will say. All heterotrophic beings are essentially parasites. So what then? Do we rebel against heterotrophy? Against the very order of this world? Heterotrophy is a given. And it creates a *dependency*. Animals and people alike are dependent for their food on plants and other animals. However man has transformed this dependency by mastery (a relatively assured dependency; see the first layer), i.e. by culture. Culture in its etymological sense (*colo, cultum*) means the cultivation of plants (agriculture) and the domestication of animals (zooculture). However once it was achieved, it concealed the underlying dependency (based on mastery and assured) and transformed itself into culture in its other sense, that of a manifestation of man’s spiritual

freedom. This in its turn concealed its dependence on culture in the sense of agriculture and zooculture, and just as the first culture manifested itself as a superiority towards primitive heterotrophy, so this second culture was manifested and understood itself as a superiority towards the culture of cultivation. And when this culture, which is no longer to be identified with the cultivation of the fields, takes the form of science and, implicitly, of technology, heterotrophy reaches dimensions that all the heterotrophic species in history together cannot equal. It becomes devastating.

I do not mean by this to moralize or to preach impossible returns. I do not want to eulogize barbarism or the ‘noble savage’, nor do I condemn the intellect and science. But neither can I stop myself from wondering what is the matter with us, from trying to understand what God wanted to make of us (the crowning of nature, or its destroyers?), just as I cannot stop myself simply describing a movement of the heterotrophic animal endowed with intellect that is man, which has led, in terms of our relationship with nature, to where we find ourselves now. With the third layer of culture there appears the antagonism between the *open* and *infinite* horizon of science (progress) and nature as a *limited* given.

The Relationship with Our Fellows

For two or 3000 years a distinction has been made between body and soul, and within the soul, the intellect is designated as the superior part. Socrates engaged in *dialogue*, spoke from person to person, and each time with *one* person. What did Socrates want from this dialogue? He wanted to find a *place* that could include the two of them, and in which they could be in agreement. This place in which the two met and which both transcended and included them is *logos*. To the extent that people were capable of dialogue, each was able to reach *logos*. This *logos* was repeatable; it appeared again with each effort of two partners in dialogue to enter into harmony, to find their common point of view, one which initially had belonged to neither of them.

We jump over 2000 years and arrive at Descartes: good sense is the best distributed thing in the world *among people*. The idea now becomes explicit that *logos* is a *generally human* place. This *generally human* is the essential given of reason, and it is starting from reason, and only from there, that we can speak of a generally human. It is because reason is generally human that anyone will agree that $2 \times 2 = 4$. There is no doubt that $2 \times 2 = 4$. *Logos* thus becomes, for moderns, the natural brotherhood of all people everywhere. From this it is only a short step to saying that since reason is equally distributed (i.e. functions the same way for everybody), people are all equal.

The Relationship with the Divine

This relationship concerns myths, primitive religions, and evolved religions alike. Religion is a problem of belief. But when we make this statement, we are adopting the standpoint of Christianity, which accepts that up to a point it is possible not to

believe. In a tribe it is not so: there everyone believes spontaneously. When you put the emphasis on belief, on the other hand, you separate: there are those who believe and those who do not believe. Christianity is perhaps the only great religion in which the problematization of belief appears, the only one that is prepared to bear the attack of non-belief, the only one in which atheism as a contestation of belief can even appear from within it. There is nothing like this in any other religion. In no other religion does the aggressivity of non-belief appear as it does here in the form of de-Christianization. For in what other religion is it possible to say 'we do not need the hypothesis of God' or 'God is dead'?

When it appears, this non-belief leaves a great void in the masses. And this void has a specific form and a name: *pessimism*. The word *pessimisme* first appeared in 1759, in Voltaire's *Candide*, while *pessimiste* only entered the French language in 1789.

And now I want us to return to how man relates to nature. The manner in which man relates to nature as its master, considering nature as *Bestand*, as something that is available to be exploited, gives birth, by reaction, to *ecology*. The trouble with ecology is that it is always attacking the effect, and not the cause. Ecology is born out of a conflict, in which every time technology is at issue. The principal conflict is in fact that between technology and nature, experienced either as a conflict between form and matter (technology trans-forms nature), or as one between action and 'passion' (in the sense of bearing): nature is the *status quo* that permanently bears the action of technology. Or nature is identity, the identical term, equal to itself, while technology is progress, change.

Being equal with itself, nature obliges progress to be exhaustible, to comply ultimately with the limits of nature. If nature were infinite, ecology would not exist. So ecology really bases its arguments on the exhaustibility of nature.

So the exhaustibility of nature is set against the inexhaustibility of progress. And this inexhaustibility can be seen in the fact that progress is irreversible; it has its own momentum and cannot be made to stand still. It can be destroyed by a cataclysm, but essentially it is irreversible and unstoppable. The trouble is that this irreversible character of progress goes hand in hand with the irreversibility of the transformation of nature: a landscape once destroyed is destroyed for ever, for nature is closed in itself, is *given*. Man cannot *recreate* nature.

But irreversibility implies *time*. Modern man lives in time because he thinks of himself as being in progress, as progressing. Everything that happens along this way is 'placed', *gesetzt*; it is *positioned* in the place where it happened and I can look back at it, as something that has been placed as such (*das Gesetzte*) and that I can analyse and criticize. It becomes datable and dated, which means that it is relativized temporally. Because progress operates by this permanent 'placing' (*Setzung*, θέσις) that leaves behind the 'placed thing' (*das Gesetzte*), culture becomes critical within progress. In relation to all that happens, I am already *beyond*, and able to look at the happening in a critical manner. In dating, I find myself continually overtaking. For that is what 'dated' means: that I am 'beyond', And being 'beyond' means that I am overtaking *ever more frequently and more rapidly*. This 'ever more' is the essence of progress, and the essence of overtaking and of 'ever more' is temporal: ever more than before. Overtaking is the place from which we perceive the new (as something that has overtaken what was old). Because overtaking is continually setting the new

against what is old, the new cannot but be *anti-* (Marx, Nietzsche). This ‘ever more’ is not so much a matter of speed, as of a compacting of time itself, a compressing: ‘more and more...,’ more and more hurried. We wait impatiently for the ‘even more...’ Someone has run 100 m in 9.8 s: now we are already expecting 9.7 s.

In these conditions, there appears an anxiety of haste, an anxiety that has no remedy and that is different from Pascal’s *inquiétude*, simple unease. Our haste is a race against the chronometer, not an entertainment. Time in itself becomes history, but something different from traditional history. Time that moves, this time in which we gasp for breath, in which we live against the chronometer, this *time of haste* that is our time is *modern history*. In other words, the reality in which we live ‘lies’ on a temporal base, not a stable one. And it is precisely this temporal base on which we stand that has made us—since around the time of Descartes, and certainly since Hegel—look at reality as history. Reality that has become temporal in its essence lacks any stability. If the divine has not completely disappeared from this reality, its presence has certainly diminished, giving way to an adventure on the human scale based on temporality. In these conditions, where all that is stable disappears and overtaking becomes the rule, truth loses its foundation: if everything that others have said has been overtaken, then anything I say can be overtaken in its turn. In the anxiety of haste nothing remains standing. Truth, in its traditional sense, is no longer efficient, because it can no longer offer solutions. The great philosophers did not all tell the truth, but nevertheless they offered solutions. Their problem was: ‘What is the world? What is man? What is existence?’ They imagined that the answer they gave was ‘truth’, and whether it was or not, it was always a *solution*; and as such it offered to give meaning to the world and to human life. That was why they were important, and that is why even today philosophy is asked to provide solutions and *meaning*. In a historical world, however, such as ours is, in which the means of investigation are scientific and not metaphysical, what is obtained is not solutions but scientific certainties. In our world, the problem has changed; in place of the solution, there has appeared a sum of knowledge rigorously obtained by ‘people on the move’, in progress; the solution remains to be awaited sometime in the future as the ‘universal formula’ that will result from the totality of all our knowledge. The solution will come when progress can go no further, when it reaches its final end. But does progress have a final end? This solution is left in the hands of the scientists, and all we can do is delay it. We live in suspension, in the postponement of the solution. Although they may solve greater or lesser problems, neither technology nor science (which is subordinated to technology) are solutions in themselves. We live in a world without a solution, one that is tending towards doing away with the need for a solution. Such a solution-less world cannot offer any meaning. And meaninglessness, *Sinnlosigkeit*, is the source of pessimism. This pessimism does not arise from our belief that the world is going badly, but from the feeling or realization that it has no meaning, or more precisely that in a world without a solution, ‘meaning’ is no longer meaningful. That ‘meaning’ and the search for meaning have become nonsense. This is where we are.

Four Short Lectures

A series of mini-lectures which Alexandru Dragomir gave after 1995. He presented them to us in the course of our meetings as 'short communications' of 15–20 min. In fact they were meditations inspired particularly by the realities that we all faced after December 1989. All the themes treated here are in this sense current. Do we behave like essentially free people, or have we just liberated ourselves? What are the limits and paradoxes of feminism? Do the talk-shows that we follow daily on television tell us that dialogue is possible, or, on the contrary, that it is an illusion? The text is based on notes taken at the time, and, in the case of the lecture on forgetting, on the transcription of a tape recording made by Sorin Vieru. (Gabriel Liiceanu)

About Freedom and Subjection

The first thing that we come up against when we want to talk about freedom is that in fact we do not know what it is. Is it a given? Are we 'free by nature'? And if so, what exactly does this mean? Or, factually speaking, does being free mean not having a programme, not having an 'agenda'?

We know very well, however, the meaning of subjection, since we are, so to speak, born into it and live in it. From earliest childhood we live in a perpetual *totalitarian regime*: we are told what to do about everything important. The first 7 years, from the playpen to the beginning of school, are the years of primary subjection. We submit strictly to the programme made for us by parents at home, teachers at kindergarten, etc. From 7 years of age until we finish university, we sit at desks while teachers talk to us from *above*, in terms of both physical and symbolic space. God talks to Moses, who listens 'piously' and submits. And pupils 'sit at their desks'. Finally, after finishing university, there is the choice of a job, which is a sort of 'choice of whom to be subject to'. It follows, from this outline, that we are subject until we retire: we are unfree.

Three conclusions may be drawn from this:

1. All our lives we are subject and this seems so natural that we no longer realize how much submission there is in us.
2. Things being as they are, we do not think of freedom in itself, but in relation to subjection, which means, in fact, that we do not think of freedom, but of liberation. All our efforts are for liberation, not freedom.
3. Freedom is not a fundamental metaphysical given, but rather a *sentiment*, the ‘sentiment of freedom’, one which you obtain after liberation, and which is based on the confusion between freedom and liberation.

However it would be a mistake to understand from the phases of subjection that they are something negative, and that in better or ideal world they would no longer exist. These phases are a normal part of human life, and in the economy of life on earth there is no other way to proceed. It is good, all the same, to be aware of this, and to know that subjection is completely justified both on the individual and on the social level. It is also good to be aware that alongside this unwilled subjection, there is also subjection that is willed, assumed: joining a political party, becoming a freemason, conversion to a religious faith, recognizing the laws, listening to an master. But in all these cases, it is not so much a matter of subjection as of a spiritual submission, a submission that comes from within and that we have freely chosen.

From what I have said so far, one thing is clear: there is a *confusion between freedom and liberation*. We believe that once we have liberated ourselves we are, *ipso facto*, also free. However in fact we remain in the negative of liberation, in the obtaining of a state which has appeared by the negation of subjection, without knowing, positively, what it means to be free. Is freedom a miraculously innate property, on which the constraints of subjection later settle like bricks on a foundation? What is certain is that we bear within ourselves the *sentiment* of freedom, firmly tied to liberation, and that in thinking all the time within the subjection in which we live, we associate liberation with the sentiment of freedom.

How then can we make freedom something other than a sentiment associated with liberation? How can we make it a state in which we can install ourselves and from which *something permanent will emerge*? For the majority of people, freedom is liberation, followed generally by idleness and ‘I do as I please’. Can freedom become a *good*, as long as, living in a world, people live in subjection and aspire, at the most, to liberation?

Why Pure Dialogue Is Not Possible

Wherever people talk—even to themselves, even in command or in prayer—is the place of dialogue: in the street, on the phone, in Parliament, at the confessional, between lovers.

Here, however, I am not considering agonic, Sophistic, or interdisciplinary dialogue, but heuristic and peirastic (πειραστικός) dialogue as it is defined by Thrasyllos and Aristophanes of Byzantium.

I propose a simple *working definition* of dialogue: dialogue is the debating in common, by means of logical arguments, of a theme or problem, with the aim of resolving it. Even out of this working definition we can see that *ideal dialogue is not possible*.

Almost any dialogue is stalked from the beginning by two vices: the *vice of the object*—the theme is badly set or too vast—and the *vice of the interlocutors*: either (1) they are in bad faith, or (2) they are basically lacking in openness to dialogue (polemicists, clerics, know-alls, those who think they are superior, those with a chip on their shoulder¹).

What happens in the course of dialogue? What obstructions can arise, making dialogue impossible?

1. lack of discipline: interruptions, prolixity, contradiction, passion, rudeness;
2. arguments *ad hominem*;
3. unacknowledged affectivities (spite, envy)
4. mistaken logic in the arguments;
5. failure to understand the other's arguments, or impatience;
6. wandering from the theme, whether deliberate or not.

Dialogue is impeded and weakened by certain historical elements. Firstly, speech was doubled (if not replaced) at a certain point by writing. What was the consequence for dialogue of the appearance of writing we can find out from Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* (see from 274). Secondly, especially in our time, speech has become over-abundant, and has degenerated into talkativeness. Finally, speaking is now giving way to image and 'action'. Basically, from television and the press we get action—action movies, sport, events, and in politics decisions, measures taken, terrorism, in fact anything but speaking. (The talk-show is a feeble response to all this.) Hence the *lack of efficiency*, nowadays, of dialogue.

Let us return a little to the condition of dialogue. Dialogue is based on logical, *rational* arguments. It is eminently bound to *reason*, i.e. to the claim that reason is equally distributed among people. For all that, the criterion of truth is not consensus or the number of interlocutors that participate in a dialogue, but evidence, certainty, $2+2=4$. Certainty seems to be a criterion guaranteed by the subject (*cogito ergo sum*) and ontologically grounded. The difference between ontological certainty (as with Descartes) and logical certainty (as with Aristotle) lies in the fact that logical certainty is a priori (see René Thom). The logical certainty of arguments is pure *in writing* (in a formalized manner), but not at all in speech, which means that ideal dialogue is impossible to achieve. There is thus an analogy to be drawn between impeded dialogue and natural language, and pure dialogue and pure language. But just as pure language is unobtainable in speech, pure dialogue is not possible.

¹ Compare Dragomir's notebook entitled *Seeds*, notation of 1 July 1997: 'Incapable of dialogue (inventory): clergy of any religion, and certainly the Orthodox; communists and those of the extreme right; possessors of the truth; fanatics of all kinds; fools that think they are clever; liars.' [G.L.]

About Man and Woman

The first thing we can say when we talk about the body—in European tradition, not Islamic tradition for example—is that it has parts that are shameful and parts that are not shameful. In women, the face and, let's say, the shoulders are not shameful, while the rest is shameful. The face is the public part of the body par excellence, the part that can be exposed in the agora and that belongs, so to speak, to 'everyone' as a bodily means of identification. The face is the non-intimate part of the body, its public, unconcealed part, the part that when it is exposed makes a person recognizable by everyone.

The rest of the body is withheld from the public space and is revealed rather in the opposite of the public space, in the intimate space, which etymologically means 'the most interior'. There is a spatial pathway of intimacy, which accompanies to some extent the stages of bodily intimacy. It's route goes from house, to living room, to bedroom, to bed. It is clear to anyone that a house is something different from the agora (you feel 'at home' there, and can go about dressed any way you like—or undressed), while the bedroom and the bed are different, from the point of view of intimacy, from the living room. (When you have guests, you show them your house, but not necessarily your bedroom.)

So we have an *exterior* space, open, public, revealed, an *interior* space (with its gradations), and an *intimate* space. It is interesting how the Latin language renders these distinctions. The adjective *interus* means 'interior', but precisely in the sense of 'separated from what is public'. The comparative is *interior*, and the superlative is *intimus*, the 'intimate' of which we have spoken, i.e. that which is interior par excellence, a *nec plus ultra* of interiority, the place furthest from the public, that which is not shown, that which lives in hiding. Of course intimacy is an environment and, as such, something external, but it is the 'exterior of the interior', the exterior projected inwards, which, as such, remains intimate and profoundly interior.

Intimacy as exteriority projected inwards, as interior exteriorized, is the spatiality created by man, and thus a spiritual fact, not a physical reality. It is the circle in the centre of which I find myself and which I myself have created, like a caterpillar's cocoon. It is *das Meinige*, 'that which is mine', but not in the sense of property, rather as radiation: the environment that bears my stamp. This also means that intimacy, being your interior par excellence, engages you. (A tree does not, strictly speaking, have an interior; hence it has no intimacy.) Engaging your inner being, intimacy is connected not only to bashfulness (to what is shameful), but also to what is secret. The sharing of intimacy is the sharing of the secret of each of us, the secret of our being.

'Secret' (*secretus*)—separate, withdrawn, isolated, hidden—comes from *secerno*, to separate, to choose. We have therefore, with the sexes, a separation, a difference that separates. When we talk about the difference between man and woman, we are considering precisely this 'secret' difference, which separates par excellence. In the order of life, the difference between the sexes is *la différence même*. Of course not

all life is sexed (in protozoa, reproduction is asexual, by cell division), but the more evolved forms of life are. Sex appears at a certain level of biological development, and the stage of evolution reached by humanity is marked precisely as *difference* in a vast sense.

It is interesting that the first division of labour is by sexes: the man goes out hunting, while the woman remains 'at home' in the cave. The man is from the beginning public, the woman—intimate. The woman marks fixity, assuring the continuity of the hearth, the axiality of the home (Hestia, the Vestal—keeping the fire), while the man comes and goes. These two 'spatializations' of sex have generated analogies that refer on the one hand to the characteristics of the two sexes, and on the other, to the differentiated characterization of sexual behaviour. Thus inasmuch as it is the woman who is sheltered, protected, hidden, femininity acquires the connotation of 'weak', while inasmuch as it is the man who goes out into the wide world with all its dangers, and faces them, masculinity acquires that of 'strong'. Again, woman is the 'weaker sex', the vagina that opens, while man is the 'stronger sex', the penis that, by the strength of its musculature, imposes itself as something powerful, as a force. On the other hand, the image of the woman who marks stability and of the man who comes and goes has an evident analogy with the sexual act. From this point of view, sexual intercourse is a victory of feminine stability over masculine mobility, precisely because it breaks him away from the world. Circe diverts Odysseus from his trajectory, fixing him, withdrawing him from his adventures and wanderings, by coupling.

There is bashfulness and shame connected with the sexual organs and the sexual act. We saw at the beginning that the body has shameful and non-shameful parts. Why are the sexual organs shameful? Is it because the sexual act separates you from the world? But so does any time that you spend on your own, in 'private', albeit in this case in a purely solitary manner. Here, I must confess, I am in the dark. Why, since it is something natural, is the sexual act shameful? Why is it the intimate and secret thing par excellence, the thing that is hidden from the sight of all? Why does the *Symposium* take place with conviviality at a table in a dining room? Why is no-one ashamed to eat? When Eros is such a powerful god, a worker of magic, why does he only operate between two people, in supreme intimacy? On the other hand, intimacy is not only sexual; for an intellectual, reading and writing are intimate too. Of course what is astonishing in the case of the sexual act is the fact that intimacy is preserved at the same time as it is completely abolished, since it is no longer just *yours*, once you share it with someone else. It is astonishing that you agree to share with someone else your supreme interiority, your 'secret', that which separates you par excellence from the world and constitutes you in at an intimate level as 'you'. This means that there is something involved in the sexual act that is more powerful than the need to preserve your intimacy and that ultimately overcomes bashfulness and shame. That 'something' is sexual attraction.

So let us talk now about *sexual attraction*. Of course men are attracted by women and women by men. There is a general *sexual* attraction, a simple attraction like that between two complementary principles (like *yin* and *yang* for the Chinese). Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium* deals with exactly this complementarity:

the attraction of woman to manliness and of man to femininity is a matter of self-contradiction, self-negation, the need for complementarity. But attraction takes place in connection with the given features of each sex. What attracts me in a woman is her breasts, her hips, her thighs; I feel aroused when I see them. But why am I irresistibly attracted to a woman's breasts? Why does it excite us to see them, and especially when they are revealed to us? And why does it excite us even more to see the pelvic zone? Why does it seem self-evident? And equally, why is a woman excited by the sight of an erect penis? And why are all these surrounded by so much concealment, shame, secret, magic, and myth? Why are we attracted by the body of the opposite sex? I must confess that I have no answer to all these questions.

But sexual attraction is not only general; it is also *special*, selective. When love intervenes on the vast territory of sexual attraction, attraction changes from being generalized to being selective. Love tells me that attraction is something general that must be individualized each time. The tragedy of Don Juan is that he cannot escape from general attraction, that he experiences attraction *only* as generalized and never as selective. It is true that in a male-dominated culture, Don Juan passes for a hero (the hero of generalized sexual attraction), while his female counterpart, Messalina, let us say, remains *une putain*.

In the case of love, which operates selectively within sexual attraction, a new element appears that is commonly summed up by saying that the two 'match'. But this 'matching' goes beyond a matching of conceptions, of tastes, of character, etc. It is a 'matching' that operates through a selective *physical* attraction, through what is commonly known as *coup de foudre*, love at first sight. Indeed sometimes this 'matching' is achieved by a matching of differences, of features that do not match, with the attraction being one of opposites: the thin are attracted by the fat, the short by the tall, the choleric by the reserved, the calm by the agitated, etc.

I have asked all the questions I have asked—and above all the question 'Why has something as natural as erotic attraction become secret, shameful?—not with the intention of giving an answer, but to put these 'self evident' things in the light of θαυμάζειν, of wonder. But there is something more. If it is clear that we have no answers to these questions, if it is clear that we *do not know*, only then can we realize what a terrible abuse it is to try to suppress sexual difference. By this abuse of reason, which confuses *difference* with *discrimination*, we lose all the series of meetings between the sexes that only difference makes possible. We lose bashfulness, the secret, the intimate. When you set out to suppress sexual difference, the problem is not whether you can—because up to a point you can—, but whether it is a good thing, whether it is natural to do so, or whether, on the contrary, it is irresponsible. Is it possible to reduce this discussion to a debate between 'conservative and progressive'? In the case of feminism, what is serious is that the problem of *essence* is replaced by one of history and action. Inasmuch as the differences are considered to be discrimination, and as such 'unjust', there is an urgent demand for human *intervention*. We pass from *phenomenology* to *ethics*, and then *politics*: let's put right an injustice! Feminism—and this is its error—starts not from difference, but from its degraded stage, which is discrimination. It needs to be reminded of the essential: the mystery of the god Eros.

About the Ocean of Forgetting

I have no wish to promote some particular thesis here; my only ambition is to share with you the intuition that I have regarding forgetting.

Everything that happens to us is *kept*. Husserl used the term ‘retention’ for the way in which we keep all that happens to us. Whatever happens to me is given to me in a retained way, which means, for example, that when I remember that someone told me a particular thing—that I had made some stupid statement, let’s say—I also remember when and in what particular circumstances I was told it. Of course it is possible for me to retain wrongly something that I have experienced: it was not that person who told me what I said was stupid, but someone else; he didn’t say it exactly in that way, but differently; and the moment when he said it can likewise be retained wrongly. However the constitution of our memory still has the following two characteristics: we retain what happens to us and we always retain the circumstances of the event and a certain date connected to it. This ‘retention’, as Husserl calls it, gradually builds up our capital of memories, regardless of the fact that these memories may deteriorate with the passage of time, as regards both their content and their dating.

In fact, if I stop to think well about what happens to the things retained by our memory, I can distinguish three situations. Firstly they can be retained correctly for a long time, so that I remember them after a few days, after a year, or after many years. Or, in the second case, I can retain them but, as I was saying, with errors of content or dating. Or, finally, I can simply forget both what happened and in what circumstances and when it happened.

But if that is how things are, then we may ask—even if the question may be badly expressed—how much objectivity our memory has. How many of the things that have happened to us are retained at all, and how many of those retained are retained correctly in every aspect? Those who have a good memory keep their memories with their content and their dating. When, on the other hand, we alter something that has happened, this means that a deformation of the faculty of memory appears. It does not in any way have to be a matter of mental illness. There are a great many things that can cause a person to deform memory as such, whether they can be brought to consciousness or remain unconscious.

So what does forgetting mean? The answer is within anyone’s reach: to forget means to lose something of what I know or of what I once knew. It is evident that I cannot forget what I never knew. However at this point I feel the need to raise a question that we are not usually in the habit of asking, and that is not easy to answer: how much is forgotten, and why, and how much is retained, and why, out of what I once knew? An undoubtedly correct answer, but only for the immediate present, would be: we retain and remember *when* and *to the extent that* we are interested in the remembered object. Objects that are no longer of any interest to us have the greatest chance of being forgotten and lost. And likewise, when do we not forget what has happened to us and what we knew? When the memory of these things remains alive in us for reasons concerning our inner life.

However in giving this answer we are remaining, with Husserl, on a subjective level. What would interest me, on the other hand, would be to find out *objectively* how much is retained and how much is forgotten out of all that happens and all that we know. And here, the answer, though obvious and simple, is astounding: we lose *much more* than we remember. A veritable ocean of things enters the realm of forgetting in comparison with the small number of those we remember and know about. And since there is a veritable chasm between what really happens and what is retained, the work of retaining what has happened becomes suddenly significant. And here again it is important to note that some things happen and their memory is cultivated, while others are *given to forgetting*, as the Romanian idiom puts it. One of the responsibilities of the ministries of culture of this world consists precisely in this maintenance of the memory of those who are unanimously considered worthy of being remembered, and who thus must not be left to fall prey to forgetting. Everything, from gravestones, churches, monuments, etc. to speeches comes in here. There are always two distinct levels: the event as such and the work of maintaining the memory of this event. And if we are speaking about forgetting, it is precisely because we are preoccupied with the work of maintaining memory. And when I speak of ‘the work of maintaining memory’, I am thinking of one of the most important human activities, an activity that has its own techniques, that requires an institutionalization and that resorts to specific means of acting in the realm of people’s hearts and minds.

For all that this activity exists, for all that human endeavour can achieve a great deal, the fact remains that the greater part of reality falls into the realm of forgetting. As I have already said, we have an entire ocean of forgetting in comparison with the tiny lake of memory. But even so, the immense effort of preserving must be considered separately. It is impressive that today—after 2800 years!—we can still read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Broadly speaking, our entire culture in fact consists of all that could be saved from the shipwreck of forgetting.

Now, however, a new problem appears: in saving all that it saves, is the human mind really applying a fair measure? We will be quick to answer: if we know Homer today, it is because 2800 years ago he created true masterpieces. We say the same thing about Shakespeare, and about a number of others *de eiusdem farinae*. We are inclined, then, to believe that in the case of the creations of our own times, what is preserved will be what is most valuable and only because it is most valuable. I have grave doubts about this. Why? Because the measure that is applied to these creations, in other words our judgment, belongs to a certain *Zeitgeist*. Let me give the first example that comes to mind. When I was a student we used to ask ourselves who the greatest poet of our age was. Like others, I believed and earnestly maintained that in matters of poetry, Rilke, the author of the *Sonnets* and the *Elegies*, was unsurpassable. That he was a *nec plus ultra* for all time. Especially after I had made the effort required to master the German of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, it all seemed to me to be of a peerless beauty. After the great age of Goethe and Schiller had passed, the other poets seemed like pygmies in comparison with Rainer Maria Rilke. He climbed onto the podium of world Poetry, and received the bronze medal, if not the silver. So I started out thinking that Rilke was the unsurpassable peak of poetry and

that nothing could come after him. Today I am far from believing that the selection operated has an absolute significance. You will ask me then who I would put in his place, and what a fair selection would look like. And I would answer first of all that a number of other names could be cited, and that moreover in general we no longer make an issue of choosing the greatest of all poets, authors, or literary currents. And secondly, I would answer that in the meantime I have learnt that cultures and civilizations die too.

What is worth retaining out of all that I have said up till now? In the first place, that *forgetting is normal*, and that, although it represents a negative phenomenon and does not seem to be necessary, it is part of our nature and has a decisive effect on the nature of reality. Hence there results something else, namely that the event cannot be preserved without an effort of maintenance, that our past is made up of what is preserved, that our history and any part of our history is all that could be saved from a shipwreck. I do not think people in the field of culture are any more conscious of this than the general population. They work with material that they tend to confuse with the reality of the past rather than seeing it as the little that has survived from that past. In other words, they are not necessarily conscious that it is a *remnant* salvaged from the shipwreck of forgetting. Finally, the most vulnerable aspect of this whole story is that maintenance presupposes a selection, and we do not have arguments and evidence that this selection has been made objectively. All the rest that is not selected—the heap of facts, events, and channels along which information and even documents circulate—is condemned, by forgetting, to non-being. From this point of view, the labour of culture seems derisory in comparison to all that remains doomed to forgetting. What I have sought to communicate to you is that we are all the time surrounded by an ocean of forgetting.

Part II

Socrates: Philosophy Confronts the City

Based on (A) notes taken by Gabriel Liiceanu in the course of a series of lectures given by Alexandru Dragomir about Plato's Apology and (B) a text written by Dragomir himself.

(A) The lectures were given in April–June 1986; one of them, on 26 April 1986, was dedicated to the memory of Mircea Eliade, who had died a few days previously.

(B) The text is entitled 'Socrates', and was written in September–November 1981 in Sibiu and Bucharest. It concludes with the following passage, addressed to Constantin Noica:

Dear Dinu, I am bored. I have the greatest admiration for those who write; they are heroes. But how can you write, when you could be thinking. Only women give birth, we conceive [sic]. There is more to write about 'I know that I do not know' as a starting point, and about scepticism [as an] end of the road; about the philosopher in the agora, with the inter-personal realiter and the philosopher in a surchaufé room with the inter-personal in the abstract (you remember that for Descartes the basic argument for rejecting earlier science is that whatever is discussed—[i.e.] in dialogue—is false); about the analogies and differences between 'I know that I do not know' and cogito ergo sum, and especially [about the fact] that Socrates speaks about the known, aber er meint the ontological, while Descartes speaks about the ontological, aber er meint science. And so on and so forth.

In preparing the text that follows, these two sources, (A) and (B), were first divided into fragments, which were then combined in an appropriate order, after which the resulting text was divided into sections. Some passages have been omitted (repetitions, digressions, quotations from various authors where the source was not indicated); others have been rewritten in a more succinct form, and many have been rephrased. A series of passages are my own, yet I believe they have been written in the spirit of Dragomir's interpretation. The passages about Descartes in § 3 have no correspondent in (A) or (B); however the ideas expressed in them are those of Alexandru Dragomir, who shared them with me in the course of several discussions in the years 1996–1997. The passage containing the quotation from Dostoevsky in § 6 comes from the lectures that formed the basis of 'About the World We Live in'. Similarly, sub-section § 2, a) is a reconstruction of a talk about Socrates that

Dragomir gave at the beginning of the lecture on which ‘Ways of Self-Deception’ is based. (Catalin Partenie)

For it is generally believed [...] that in certain respects Socrates is superior to the majority of men. (Plato, *Apology* 34e)

On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men, you will believe me even less. (*ibid.* 38a)

Hegel called Socrates *Hauptwendepunkt des Geistes*, ‘turning point of spirit’ (Hegel 1971, 441). And Heidegger says that while Socrates’ death might seem to be a ‘singular occurrence’ and philosophy is now generally seen as ‘a perfectly safe occupation’, it is precisely ‘from the absence of any such danger [that] we may conclude only that no one any longer ventures so far, thus that there are no longer philosophers’ (Heidegger 2002, 61). So it is worth asking ourselves who Socrates was—the only one of the philosophers to stand against certain things.

For this purpose, let us look at Plato’s account of Socrates’ defence, or, as it is known, the *Apology*. In all the Platonic dialogues something is under discussion—courage, wisdom, non-being, etc. Here, in the *Apology*, nothing is under discussion in this sense. Here, and only here, Socrates talks about himself; here, and only here, we get to see what sort of person Socrates was.

The *Apology* contains the speech that Socrates delivered in his defence, when he was on trial in Athens. What is the setting? Five hundred Athenians are judging this small, lonely, ugly, and untidy man; and this man—who knows very well that he will be executed, and that the speech in which is trying to defend himself will be his last public appearance (cf *Gorgias* 521b–522a)—adopts a position that incriminates his accusers.

These accusers are two Athenian citizens, Anytos and Meletos, and the charge (according to what Socrates says in the *Apology*) goes like this:

Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing, in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse into the stronger, and he teaches these same things to others. (19b)

At 24b, the charge is formulated more precisely:

Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things.

However Socrates’ accusers are not only Anytos and Meletos. In addition, he tells us:

There have been many who have accused me to you for many years now, and none of their accusations are true. [...] Moreover these accusers are numerous, and have been at it a long time [...] What is most absurd in all this is that one cannot even know or mention their names unless one of them is a writer of comedies. (18b–c)

Socrates, then, is not only judged for what is written in the charge against him: he is judged for his whole life and for his way of living in general. And his accusers are not just Anytos and Meletos, but many faceless others, ‘shadows’ (as he calls them in 18d). Socrates is a philosopher, a suspect individual, a strange being, who makes philosophy come close to sacred things. The city does not like this, and it

defends itself; thus there is a confrontation between the citizens of Athens and Socrates, who transforms his own trial into a confrontation between philosophy and the city.

Socrates, as we know, lost the trial and was condemned to death. But was he really guilty? In his speech, Socrates says three things: firstly, that he is different from all other people; secondly, that his activity is divinely inspired; and thirdly, that it is directed at his fellow citizens. Reduced to this, everything seems simple; however the text raises a great many problems, not only by its complexity (as with all Plato's writings), but even more by the very wide horizon that it opens. Let us, then, look more closely at what Socrates says in his defence.

1. The Oracle

Socrates says that he is different from all other people inasmuch as, instead of making money and involving himself with political matters, he examines himself and others (36b–c). Why does he do this? Because it is his divine mission.

Asked who is the wisest man, the Delphic oracle gave the following response: no one is wiser than Socrates (21a). Socrates does not believe, however, that he is in possession of any special wisdom; on the contrary, all he knows is that he does not know (21d). So the oracle's response puzzles him, and indeed seems to him scandalous: he knows that he knows nothing, and yet the oracle claims that no one is wiser than he is. What, then, did the oracle mean? Or had the oracle simply got it wrong?

After puzzling over this for some time (21b), Socrates decides to check the oracle's response for himself and to show everyone either that others are wiser than he is (21c), or that the response is incontestable (22a). Socrates' activity thus starts from the oracle, and the dominant opposition is not between Socrates and his fellow citizens, but between Socrates and the oracle. In fact with Socrates everything lies under the sign of the divine: the origin of his activity is divine; his way of living is a 'service to the god' (23b, see also 30a); and he himself is, he says, a divine gift to the city (30e). Is this presumptuousness? Socrates himself denies it (34e); but in that case how are we to take his gesture of putting his whole life under the sign of the divine?

It is beyond our power to know what Socrates really believed about the divine.¹ However we know that the presence of the divine in someone's existence confers on that person a certain seriousness. Now this is precisely what Socrates wanted to emphasize: in saying that his whole life lay under the sign of the divine, he wanted to tell his fellow citizens that his activity was undertaken in a serious register and he

¹ To truly understand what Socrates says in the *Apology*, it is essential, I think, to understand the fields of relation between Socrates and the divine on the one hand, and between Socrates and his fellow citizens on the other. However, these fields of relation are now hard for us to grasp, as we no longer have the Greek understanding of the divine, or of relations in the interior of a city; and modern exegesis, instead of illuminating things, has tended rather to obscure them. [A.D.]

was therefore to be taken seriously. The presence of the divine in Socrates' life is the guarantee of the seriousness of his whole activity.

His fellow citizens, however, did not take him seriously. No matter how much he told them that all he knew was that he did not know, they did not believe him, and condemned him to death. In fact for more than 2000 years we have all been doing exactly what those who condemned him to death did: we have not taken him seriously, but have thought that he is pretending, that he is being 'ironic'. We have not had the courage, just once, to take him seriously and to immerse ourselves in what for him is the meaning of his existence.

2. The Investigation

a) Introduction: The Phenomenological Basis of the Investigation

Our life lies under the sign of the possible; for we, as people, can *be* in many ways. We are in fact, to use Heidegger's expression, a potentiality-for-being (*Seinkönnen*) (See Heidegger 1962, 182 ff). I can busy myself with philosophy, or I can dedicate myself to music, or I can waste my life. And I can—depending on the circumstances, of course—choose one or other of the possibilities that lie before me. I can also, of course, not choose; that is to say, I can let myself be carried along and be what life pushes me to be. But I cannot exclude choice completely. I choose; I am continually choosing; I choose to do one thing and not to do another. I choose to look up or to look down; I choose to turn my head. However let us return to the situation in which I can choose to be one or other of the possibilities that lie before me. This choice is based on knowledge. I choose to be a philosopher and not a pianist on the basis of the knowledge I have about myself, about music, and about philosophy. So knowledge is something that determines my existence. I know I do not have an ear for music, a good voice, or a sense of rhythm, so I do not apply to the Music Academy. I know, on the other hand, that I enjoy reading philosophy, that I am somewhat gifted with the mental power to work with philosophical arguments, and that I would like to stay in a quiet place and meditate on the great philosophical problems; so, on the basis of this knowledge about myself, I enrol in the Faculty of Philosophy. It may be that this knowledge on the basis of which I choose philosophy rather than music is well founded. But it is equally possible that it is not well founded, and that I do not actually have the right qualities for philosophy. In this case, if I choose to busy myself with philosophy, my ambitions are vain, and if I am honest, I will have to recognize at some point that I have not chosen well. And I have not chosen well, because in fact I *did not know* how to choose.

It is hard truly to know what your gifts are and what exactly you should choose to be. But how can you know what it is to have a fulfilled human life, in order to be able to choose it? I would like to live beautifully and truly, and to be fulfilled as a

person, but what exactly does it mean to live beautifully and truly and to be fulfilled as a person? I have to know what all these things mean in order to choose such a life. But how can you know all these things? How can you knowingly choose the most beautiful and the truest life? Socrates' answer is: we cannot know. Man is a choice of his life; choice is based on knowledge; and knowledge of what it means to have a beautiful, true, and fulfilled life is something we cannot have. All we can know is this very fact, i.e. that we cannot have such knowledge. 'I know that I do not know': that is all we can say in this situation. I know that I do not know what a fulfilled human life is, so neither can I choose such a life. What, then, should we do, according to Socrates?

Socrates, we know from his contemporaries, spent his whole life in discussions about what we might term the elements of a fulfilled life: courage, virtue, justice, beauty, wisdom. This is what he chose: to discuss with those around him about what exactly a fulfilled human life might be. And he chose this because there is nothing else to be done. All we can do is keep discussing, and endlessly discussing what exactly a fulfilled life might be is the only way of not losing sight of the fact that we do not really know what such a life might be. All we can do is persist in our questions about what a fulfilled life is. All we can do is philosophize. So Socrates embodies a situation: the situation in which we find ourselves as people.

While there is a question for every answer, there is not an answer for every question. There are questions without an answer, i.e. questions that continue to stand on their feet despite all the answers they have received. The place for these questions is philosophy. Of course philosophy has given a good many answers to philosophical questions, like 'What is the world?' But the answers of philosophy do not displace philosophical questions: in philosophy, the questions outlive the answers. The sphere of questions without answers is neglected nowadays. In fact it has been deliberately set aside. Nowadays questions to which there is no answer are considered to be unscientific questions. And since nowadays everything revolves around science, the sphere par excellence of philosophy cannot but be pushed to one side. But these questions without answers exist, even if we are not aware of them.

Socrates was the first European thinker to draw attention to this situation in which we find ourselves: we are the choice of our lives, but the knowledge on whose basis we might be able to choose the best life is something we cannot have, and thus all that remains to be done is to persist in asking questions about the best life, i.e. to stay, discussing with each other, in the sphere of questions without answers. This situation in which we are caught is the phenomenological basis of Socrates' examination. No one else, either before or after Socrates, has ever embodied in his own life this situation in which we are caught. No one but Socrates has ever embodied in his own life the very essence of philosophy.

b) Knowing—Not Knowing

Let us return now to the oracle. Wishing to check the oracle's response, Socrates begins to examine his fellow citizens. Who are under examination? All those who think they know something: politicians, poets, and craftsmen. The list, according to Socrates, is complete (21e); and that is how we should look at the problem too, for these three occupations, in reality three types of pseudo-knowledge, are those that, in Socrates' vision, delimit the space of 'thinking you know what you do not know'.

Let us take them in turn. First the politicians: the more knowledgeable they claim to be, the less they turn out to know. The further you go along their way, the more distant you get from the truth (21c–d).² Then the poets: other people can always talk better about their poems than they can; the poets are 'enthusiasts', they have an inborn talent, and are divinely inspired, but otherwise they are irresponsible (22b–d). They do not really understand the things they speak of, and cannot be held responsible. They are not themselves. You cannot say that someone knows something if that person is not himself. They do not know what they speak about, for someone else speaks through them, someone who visits them from above (see also *Ion*, 535e–536a). Finally the craftsmen: unlike the politicians, these actually know something—their crafts. But like the poets, they also think they know τὰ μέγιστα, the 'most important matters', i.e. those concerning good and evil (*Apology* 22d; see also *Gorgias* 472c and *Alcibiades I*, 131b). On the basis of what they actually do know, they come to think that they know how things are in any field; thus the person who knows how to do his job falls into the sin of 'I think I know'. But it is precisely because of what you know that you end up failing to understand τἄλλα, the 'other' things (*Apology* 22d).

Any branch of knowledge has as its object an ontic field: the botanical, the zoological, etc. Socrates is saying, basically, that when you start to know one of these ontic fields, you start to think that you know them all. Socrates does not contest the fact that the craftsmen have knowledge connected with their crafts; all he is saying is that a craftsman's knowledge makes him think that he also knows what is outside his craft. For the more often you know how to do something, the more you start to think that you know what you do not know; you know, let us say, mathematics, and then you start thinking that you can also make pronouncements on matters of democracy. Understanding something thus leads to a loss of measure, and this loss of measure 'overshadow[s] the wisdom they ha[ve]' (22e). Knowing something involves a risk: if you choose a particular branch of knowledge, you enter a closed space, and the road towards true knowledge, that which has as its object the 'most important pursuits', is blocked for you. Not only does the knowledge of a particular

²It is perhaps worth noting that it is the politicians above all who think they are really wise (cf. 21c). [A.D.]

field not open up your pathway towards knowledge of the whole, it actually blocks that pathway.³

In the *Apology* (and to a certain extent also in the other Socratic dialogues), everything works on three levels, each of which is determined by a duality: ‘knowing—not knowing’, ‘life—death’, and ‘good—evil’. For Socrates, we might say, the human condition is inscribed in the space of these three dualities; to be human, in his view, means staying within these three dualities: between life and death, between knowing and not knowing, and between good and evil. According to Socrates, then, man exists in this space of ‘between’.

Let me make a parenthesis. It is in the question that ‘between’, μέσον, shows itself. I ask questions when I find myself between two things; and the question comes from the μέσον character of the human being. My question does not come from my not knowing, but from my consciousness of the fact that I know that I do not know. The question thus arises from this situation of the human being in the space between ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ (see also *Symposium* 203e), and it reflects, for Socrates, our very condition as humans. In all the Socratic dialogues, the mortal sin is to think you know what you do not know. The moment you start to think you know, you transgress your human condition and start to err; for this reason, the *ultimate answer*, for Socrates, is the question.

But let us return to those three dualities. At first glance, Socrates’ examination seems to be directed only at the first of them: ‘knowing—not knowing’. However this duality is inseparable from the other two, and this is essential for our understanding of Socrates. So we must pause to consider the other two dualities too: ‘life—death’ and ‘good—evil’.

³There is an ambivalence here: specialization implies both a σοφία and an ἀμαθία, a ‘knowledge’ and a ‘lack of knowledge’, and the two are bound together (see the occurrence of ἀμφοτέρα, at 22e). In *Protagoras* 321d, a distinction is made between those specializations, τέχναι, that spring from a necessity of life, and those problems that do not spring from such a necessity, such as the problem of good and evil, the problem of virtue, etc. This distinction in fact points to the discrepancy that exists between the extraordinary potential of technology and the lack of understanding of how to use it (a discrepancy that is also to some extent pointed to by the attack on writing in *Phaedrus* 274e). Here we cannot but think of the problem of technology in our time. Technology nowadays puts good and evil in the shade. In knowing something, technology thinks it knows everything. The technical way of looking at things makes it impossible to see the whole in which good and evil appear. No matter how high it rises, technology has nothing to say to us about good and evil. Good and evil concern how you use something, and technology cannot teach us that (cf. *Phaedrus* 274e). The certainty of technology is set against the moral uncertainty of its use; and nowadays there is no longer anyone capable of judging what is harmful and what is not harmful in that use. [A.D.]

c) *Life—Death*

With Socrates, in a sense, things remain in the negative: his δαίμων only tells him what not to do; his only claim is ‘I know that I do not know’; the oracle decrees that ‘no one is wiser than Socrates’; his trial is an unjust one; by the time he makes his defence, he knows very well that he will be condemned to death; and he dies knowing that he is being sacrificed to save a city that has no chance of being saved.

The negative is generally regarded as not being good; thus it provokes an unease, a desire to escape into the positive. In the history of philosophy, the problem of the negative is omnipresent. It appears in Parmenides, in Heraclitus, in Xenophanes, in Plato and Aristotle, in Descartes and Kant, in Spinoza, in Kierkegaard, in Nietzsche, and in Heidegger. However most of the time we find a transformation of the negative into the positive. Descartes’s doubt, for example, is a negative that becomes positive in what follows—in *cogito ergo sum*. So let us consider whether there is any positive counterpart to Socrates’ negativity.

Where Socrates’ knowledge is concerned, negativity is ultimately transformed into something positive, for it is what proves him to be wise (while the positive of the ‘knowers’ is transformed into something negative when their claims to knowledge are exposed as illusion). But it is not only his not knowing that finally leads to something positive.

At the beginning of the *Apology*, Socrates asks the judges not to believe his accusers, who have said that he is ‘an accomplished speaker’ (φαίνωμαι δεινός λέγειν, 17b). Socrates’ λόγος proves to be λόγος δεινός in the literal sense of ‘dangerous speech’, for it leads to death. But death too is transformed into something positive in the end.

Seen from within life, death is a negation of life; it is thus, at first glance, something negative. However the fact that I know I will die makes me turn to consider my life, asking myself the question: what is the meaning of my own life?⁴ What does this mean? It means, in the first place, that life is inscribed on the level of ‘knowing’. Life, in other words, is the object of a sort of knowledge; and this knowledge allows me to answer the question: what is the meaning of my own life? This knowledge that helps me to determine the meaning of my life has as its object, according to Socrates, good and evil.

⁴This turning to consider one’s life is not, however, entirely positive; for the prospect of death may overturn *die Rangliste*, the list of values that one has when one is not thinking of death. But more of that later. [A.D.]

d) *Good—Evil*

There are several types of truth. Some are personal: for example, I have dislocated my foot. Others are impersonal, but can become personal: for example, I read that garlic is good for the heart and I start eating garlic. However there are also impersonal truths that remain impersonal; for example: the atomic weight of hydrogen is 1. This is a truth that may perhaps interest me, but that cannot become personal. Now this sort of thing should not strike us as normal. On the contrary, it is astonishing that it should be so, for all that does not concern my subjectivity is strange. The knowledge of things that do not concern me did not, however, emerge of its own accord. It appeared in time, and is a historical ‘achievement’.

The problem of good and evil is, to speak in Hegelian terms, *eine subjektive Objektivität*. It is both personal and impersonal. And, for Socrates, it is on this both personal and impersonal level that the problem of knowing good and evil arises.

The virtue of a thing is its essence. The virtue of a thing appears when it functions in keeping with its essence. But not with Socrates. He does not yet ontologize good. And he is the only philosopher not to do so. Ontological problems do not arise for Socrates. For him only one thing is important: to know what is good and what is evil in order to know what to do with *your life*. What is good and what is evil—that, according to Socrates, is all that should interest us. That and nothing more—not the cosmos, not the essence of things. So Socrates would have us say not: ‘That’s all I understand; beyond that I don’t know,’ but: ‘Mathematics, astronomy etc. don’t interest me; the idea of death makes me face the problem of the meaning of my life, and all that interests me is to know what is good and what is evil in order to know what to do with my life’ (even if, in this field of good and evil, our knowledge will only be a vague reflection of a divine wisdom, for we will always remain in the space of ‘between’).

However, bizarre as it might seem, the knowledge I have in this matter of good and evil is only diffuse. In fact, I only have a diffuse knowledge of all the most important things. ‘What then is time? I know well enough what it is,’ says Saint Augustine, ‘provided that nobody asks me’ (1961, 264).⁵ What is being? We all keep using the verb ‘to be’, but its meaning remains, as Heidegger would say, veiled in obscurity.⁶

We all have opinions about the most important things, about good and evil. However where these things are concerned, the starting point is not ignorance, but a pseudo-knowledge, a diffuse knowledge, which is nevertheless functional, for we understand each other when we talk about them. This diffuse knowledge of good

⁵ *Confessions*, XI, 14, 17: ‘quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio.’ Plotinus expresses himself in a similar way (cf. III, 7, 1, 1–10). [A.D.]

⁶ See *Being and Time*, § 1 (Heidegger 1962, 23); compare also: ‘We understand the word “is” (“being”), we know the meaning; but we are unable to say what we “really” mean by it. [...] We understand “is” and “being”, but in a non-conceptual way. [...] (most people never obtain a concept of being and yet they live at every moment in the understanding of being)’ (Heidegger 2002, 149–150). [A.D.]

and evil is the greatest obstacle that I face when I want to find out what is good and what is evil in order to know what to do with my life. This diffuse knowledge lies at the centre of Socrates' investigation.

3. Excursus: The Socratic Method

a) *'I Do Not Know' As the Origin of Any Method*

Logically, the sentence 'I know that I do not know' seems nonsensical. Either I know or I do not know. If what I know is that I do not know, then the object of what I know is that I do not know; but 'I do not know' cannot be an object of knowledge—it is just a negation. What can be the meaning of 'I know that I do not know'? Has anyone ever thought about this? Of course, everyone knows: Socrates did, 2380 years ago. And apparently it even cost him his life.

In the *Apology*, the opposition is not between knowing something and not knowing anything, but between those who think they know and the one who knows he does not know. (We must beware here of the modern way of thinking through 'consciousness'. It is not just that the former are not conscious that they do not know while Socrates is conscious; in fact the horizon is a much broader one.) Thus each interlocutor comes with something: those under examination come with their knowledge, and Socrates comes with 'I know that I do not know.' But what does 'I know that I do not know' mean?

α) The Object of 'I Do Not Know'

Ignorance usually has an object. I do not know Chinese philosophy, I do not know the capital of Somalia, I do not know the year Petru Cercel⁷ died. Ignorance is thus objectified. However it is not determined only by its object, but also by what I know. For what I do not know is a multitude of things in a multitude of areas; the things I do not know seem to me like those regions marked *hic sunt leones* on the old maps of Africa. Ignorance is not, then, the absence of knowledge, but just the field of not knowing that is opened and determined by any knowing. In other words, in 'I know what I do not know', 'I do not know' appears within an 'I know'; thus, the division of 'I know—I do not know' is an exhaustive division within a broader sense of 'I know', which determines its own specific 'I know' and 'I do not know'. Knowledge and ignorance thus seem to be enclosed within the horizon of a broader understanding of knowledge.

⁷Petru Cercel, Ruler of Wallachia 1583–1585. (In fact he died in 1590, assassinated in Constantinople, where he had been trying to get support for a return to his throne.) [Trans.]

Any 'I know' implies an object that is known; we always know *something*. However 'I know' also implies a horizon to be known, which, within the limits of knowability, we call the 'world'; this horizon determines the known (the object that is known) as part of a whole. Any knowledge is thus inscribed within the world conceived as knowable; in other words the object known is inscribed as a part within a knowable world. However the whole is different from the part: the knowable is not an object known, but a possibility of knowing. So the world is what I know I do not know, but can know.

What, then, does 'I do not know' refer to when Socrates says: 'I know that I do not know'? Is it something in particular? Or all the things I do not know? (Which would not be possible, since I do not even know what they are.) No. Socrates' 'I do not know' refers to the world, i.e. to all that I do not know, but can know. In the famous sentence 'I know that I do not know', the 'I know' has an object, 'I do not know', which in turn has as its object the world.

'I do not know' is not a logical conclusion to an analysis of known things, but a way of situating oneself in something all-embracing, which is the only way of opening up the possibility of such an analysis. This fundamental 'I do not know' opens up the horizon of knowledge, precisely because, in its privative character, it makes possible an authentic 'I know'. Confronted with *everything* (and that is what we are talking about here), the answer 'I know'—given by the politician, the poet and the craftsman—is inadequate. The only answer that is appropriate in the face of everything is 'I do not know', and this 'I do not know' is the basis of the horizon of the knowable.

β) 'I Do Not Know' As a Basis for 'I Know'

Those who know have acquired their knowledge in the natural course of events. They have seen, they have heard, they have thought, and now they know and speak of what they know. And that is how people have known since the world began. I know because I have seen, or because I have heard from others, or because I have thought, or a combination of all of these. So there is no hiatus between the knower as a person and the known object *qua* known. The known is constituted in a natural way, even if it differs from person to person, according to the gifts and circumstances of each.

However Socrates comes along with 'I know that I do not know'. It is not a matter of his not knowing such and such a thing, but of his fundamentally not knowing. So he comes along with an 'I do not know' that shakes the brickwork of the known and that cannot be resisted by any natural known. Against the 'natural' wisdom of the known, he sets an 'unnatural' non-knowledge that creates a hiatus between the knower and the known and thus breaks their natural connection. 'I do not know' begins to undo 'I know'. The person who thought he knew stops first at the gulf created between the knower and the known by 'I do not know'; then he feels a sort of paralysis, like the effect of the torpedo fish (to which Socrates is compared in *Meno*

80a and c). In the end, 'I do not know' completely dismantles 'I know', making the road back impossible, and at the same time preventing any return to the 'natural' process of knowing.

The knower is thus introduced into a new field of relations towards 'I know', namely that of 'I know that I do not know'. 'I do not know' is never a negative; rather it is a privative, but it belongs to an 'unnatural' zone other than that of the natural 'I know'. It is no longer possible to reach the latter zone 'naturally', i.e. simply to have access to the known. Rather a way must be found that includes within itself a turning back over the relation 'I know—I do not know' and that is capable of guaranteeing the known.

This way, which springs from the space of a fundamental 'I do not know'—the creator of a hiatus between the knower and the known—was named by the ancient Greeks μέθοδος, a word that originally meant 'road' or 'way', and that became a technical term, with the sense of 'method', only in the time of Plato.⁸ The method thus appears in the horizon of 'I know that I do not know'; it is not a way of avoiding errors, but a way of building.⁹ Every method has its origin here: knowing that he does not know, man builds something and makes a road.¹⁰

In stating that he knew that he did not know, Socrates was instituting, and knew he was instituting, something epoch-making. His strength lies in the courage with which he remained in the zone of 'I do not know', the zone that he tried to clarify, and with which he came to identify himself. His greatness cannot be measured, for no one, either before or since, has had such strength and courage. What he achieved was the most significant grounding of Western spirituality. It is for this reason that he is a foundation of the Western spirit. From Socrates onwards, throughout Western culture, any knowledge would be based on a method; even love is conceived by Saint Augustine as a method of knowing. Ever since Socrates, Western knowledge has no longer found the known, but has obtained it; for it always starts from a negative 'I know', i.e. from 'I know that I do not know'. The foundation of Western culture is this fundamental 'I do not know,' which opens the dynamic horizon of a methodical *mathesis universalis*.

⁸The word μέθοδος does not appear in the index of the Diels-Krantz edition of the Presocratic fragments, although there are plenty of words relating to roads. It appears, however, in Plato: a need was felt for it, and it appeared. [A.D.]

⁹It is the same in the case of Descartes. Why do I want to reach the hypothesis that I do not know anything? Because this is the basis on which I can build. (And yet how surprising it is that the firmest foundation is precisely this 'I know that I do not know'.) [A.D.]

¹⁰In the *Timaeus*, Plato claims that only the divine can know, not human beings (cf. 68d), and that human knowledge is anchored in divine knowledge as in a model (since human reason is no more than a copy of the reason of the universe—cf. 41d–e, 90d). Thus we might say that man's 'I know' must be based on a fundamental 'I do not know', in order to be delimited from a total—and thus divine—'I know'. [A.D.]

b) The Socratic Method

Let us now return to Socrates' investigation. Its starting point, 'I know that I do not know', opens the horizon in which the problem of method appears. But what is the pathway opened by Socrates? In other words, what does his method consist of?

Generally known as maieutics, the Socratic method has three essential determinations: (α) its form is dialogical; (β) the principal on which it is based is that of non-contradiction; and (γ) its aim is the cleansing of the soul. Let us consider each of these in turn.

a) Socratic Dialogue

The whole drama of Socrates takes place within the horizon of speech: first of all, the oracle's response, the response that made Socrates undertake the examination of his fellow citizens, is a *saying*, a *λόγος*; then, Socrates is accused of *saying* certain things, and the court that condemns him to death is also a *place of speaking*; and finally, Socrates' investigation takes place by way of questions and answers, i.e. through dialogue, and so through *λόγος*. This dialogue is not a competition ('who is cleverer?'), but a confrontation that seeks to show (cf. *ἄποφανών*, 21c) who represents human wisdom. Socrates tries to reply to this question by engaging in dialogue with his fellows. Why, then, does Socrates engage in *dialogue*? Why does he not think on his own, as Descartes would do 2000 years later?

The oracle only said that 'no one is wiser than Socrates'. This use of the comparative suggests that the meaning hidden in the oracle's response is to be sought in the zone of the inter-personal, in confrontation with others, and not in comparing 'how much each knows'. Right from the start we are sent among people, and it is there, among people, that Socrates' examination takes place.

His examination is generally about *τα τὰ μέγιστα*, about the 'most important matters', i.e. those concerning good and evil (22d). However these things are common property. In *Protagoras* 323c it is put this way: 'it is madness not to pretend to justice, since one must have some trace of it or not be human' (see also 327a: 'virtue [is] something in which no one can be a layman if there is to be a city'). The place of morality, of the most important things, is thus the community; therefore the judgement of what is good and what is evil is something that concerns all of us; and Socrates' investigation, which is aimed at determining what is good and what is evil, is set from the very beginning in the interpersonal space.¹¹

¹¹ And—if we are to believe what Socrates says in the *Alcibiades* (a dialogue that is most likely apocryphal, and probably the work of one of Plato's pupils)—even the examination of the individual soul is undertaken interpersonally. Here, in *Alcibiades* 132 *sq.*, Socrates wonders what exactly is meant by the inscription on the façade of the Delphic oracle: 'Know thyself.' Let us imagine, says Socrates, that the oracle was speaking to our eyes, not to ourselves (all Plato's philosophy is in fact a philosophy of sight). What would it mean for the eyes to know themselves. It would mean, he says, that the eye would look at something in which it could see itself. What can

But for Socrates this interpersonal space exists only inasmuch as people communicate among themselves by speaking, i.e. through dialogue.¹² So Socrates does not engage in dialogue just out of eccentricity, but in order for the investigation to take place, from the very beginning, in the interpersonal space, whose *locus* is dialogue. However this is not the only reason why he engages in dialogue.

Let us consider how many ways one can engage in dialogue. In my view, these are four in number. Dialogue can take place: (i) between two who know, (ii) between two who do not know, (iii) between one who knows and one who does not know, or (iv) between one who does not know and one who thinks he knows. This last is Socratic dialogue. Let us see now what happens in this sort of dialogue.

Let us suppose that A is an interlocutor of Socrates, and that he is discussing with Socrates one of these ‘important things’; let us call it X.¹³ When A says something about X, to Socrates all he is doing is affirming something that he, A, thinks he knows about X, without really knowing. Which means that what A says is considered by Socrates to be false from the very start. So for Socrates the starting point is a natural falsehood, represented by the opinion of the other. And yet for Socrates the presence of the other is indispensable if we are to find the truth? Why is this so?

At the beginning of his *Discours de la méthode*, Descartes says: ‘la puissance de bien juger et distinguer le vrai d’avec le faux, qui est proprement ce qu’on nomme le bon sens ou la raison, est naturellement égale en tous les hommes.’ That is to say: ‘the power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false—which is what we properly call ‘good sense’ or ‘reason’—is naturally equal in all men.’ And this ‘good sense’ or ‘reason’, Descartes says, is ‘la chose du monde la mieux partagée’, ‘the best distributed thing in the world’ (Descartes 1985, 111). For Descartes, the capacity of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false is same in all of us. Which implies that in order to distinguish the true from the false I do not need anyone else: my own reason—if it follows certain rules (see *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*)—is sufficient for me. So I have no need for dialogue with another.

Why is it not the same for Socrates? Consider what he says to Polos, in the *Gorgias*:

an eye look at in order to see itself? ‘You mean mirrors and that sort of thing,’ replies Alcibiades (132e). But this is precisely what Socrates does not want. According to him, the eye sees itself only in another eye, or to be more exact, in the best part of another eye, i.e. the pupil (133a). However the eye is merely an analogy for the soul, which means that the soul can only know itself if it ‘looks’ into another soul. But it is not enough for the soul to look into another soul; it must look into the best part of another soul, i.e. into ‘the region of knowing and understanding’, i.e. the rational part (νοῦς) of another soul, which is like the pupil of the eye. That is where you should look, into the ‘virtue’ of the soul, just as in the case of the eye you look into its ‘virtue’, i.e. its pupil. If the soul knows itself in this mutual looking, then the place where you can know yourself is the intersubjective space. [A.D.]

¹²The gaze of a soul into another soul, to speak in the terms of the *Alcibiades*, is not an affective embrace, but a dialogue. [A.D.]

¹³The Socratic dialogue can begin with anyone, for judgement about good and evil concerns us all. [A.D.]

For my part, if I don't produce you as a single witness to agree with what I'm saying, then I suppose I've achieved nothing worth mentioning concerning the things we've been discussing. And I suppose you haven't either, if I don't testify on your side, though I'm just one person, and you disregard all these other people. (472b–c; see also 453c)

And here is what he says to Callicles, also in the *Gorgias*: 'I know well that if you concur with what my soul believes, then that is the very truth' (486e). And again: 'So, our mutual agreement will really lay hold of truth in the end' (487e).

So why does Socrates need another person in order to distinguish the true from the false? Because for him something was true only if a consensus could be reached about that thing on the basis of facts recognized interpersonally as evident; i.e. only if A and B together recognize that something is true is that thing true. (And consensus can only be reached starting from things that are evident and incontestable.) So Socrates needs another person because for him the only guarantee of truth is the consensus that you can reach with another. And being in need of this consensus with another, he engages in dialogue and does not think on his own. (Of course consensus has no value if it is the consensus of lunatics; it has value only if those who reach it let themselves be guided by reason and set aside their prejudices.)

In the dialogues in which he engages, Socrates starts from subjectivity, from A and B, from two people who want to separate the true from the false in a certain problem. This intersubjective space between A and B is set against the space of the community, that space in which there is an illusion of knowledge ('I think I know'). Thus Socrates behaves 'idiomatically' (cf. *ἰδιωτεῦειν*, *Apology*, 32a), i.e. he opposes general commonality with the one thing that can be set against it and that can expose the illusion of knowledge that is present in general commonality, i.e. intersubjective commonality.

β) The Principle of Socratic Maieutics: Non-Contradiction

In the Socratic dialogue, Socrates asks, and the others reply and contradict themselves, i.e. give contrary opinions about the same thing. Maieutics is thus a method whose principle is non-contradiction: you put someone's statements together and, once put together, they can be seen to be contradictory and thus false (while statements that can be connected without contradiction seem much closer to the truth, cf. *Gorgias*, 508e).¹⁴

But why do I come to contradict myself? At the base of contradiction lies a wandering (*πλάνη*), a sort of 'sometimes I say this and sometimes that'. The opposite of this wandering is consistency, *die Folgerichtigkeit*: instead of wandering, I go in a straight line.

¹⁴In Aristotle, the logical principle of contradiction is based on an ontological principle; for Socrates, on the other hand, the situation is exactly the opposite: the non-contradictory character of life extends to knowledge, and not the other way around. [A.D.]

So contradiction is, for Socrates, a sure indication of falsehood, while non-contradiction and consensus are probably indicators of truth. To us, this position seems strange. But it ceases to be strange if we take into consideration the fact that Socrates' investigation concerns the 'most important' things, i.e. things that can only be determined through *logos*. In the *Statesman*, Plato makes explicit an idea that appears implicitly in almost all the Socratic dialogues:

Conversely for those things that are greatest [τὰ μέγιστα] and most valuable, there is no image at all which has been worked in plain view for the use of mankind, the showing of which will enable the person who wants to satisfy the mind of an inquirer to satisfy it adequately, just by fitting it to one of the senses. That is why one must practice at being able to give and receive an account of each thing; for the things that are without body [τὰ ἀσώματα], which are finest and greatest, are shown clearly only by verbal means¹⁵ [λόγος], and by nothing else [...] (285e–286a)

In the space of immaterial things, then, we have only λόγος; and here, in this space, concordance between statements and reality ceases to be a criterion of truth; here we have only two probable indicators of truth: consensus and non-contradiction.

But let us return to Socratic dialogue. When you are under an illusion, you wander and contradict yourself. Why? Because you come to think that you know when in fact you do not know. According to Socrates, this is the worst thing that can happen to someone. And the aim of maieutics is to cure it.

γ) The aim of Maieutics: Cleansing

In the *Sophist*, one of the late dialogues, the leader of the discussion is not Socrates. Plato probably felt that he could no longer put his own thoughts into the mouth of Socrates, and so he resorted to a fictitious person, known as the Visitor from Elea. Socrates is also present, it is true, but he only takes a small part in the discussion. However the *Sophist* contains one of Plato's finest eulogies of Socrates. Did he feel guilty about transforming Socrates into a quasi-passive auditor? Did he recall, in the evening of his life, how he had spent the years of his youth close to Socrates and feel the need to show his reverence? We cannot know.

The theme of the *Sophist* is the essence of the Sophist; but this theme splits repeatedly and the discussion touches on a great many things. At 226b it comes round to the art of 'discrimination,' which is divided as follows: one branch separates like from like, while another, named 'cleansing', separates what is worse from what is better (226d).¹⁶ Cleansing, in its turn, is divided between the cleansing of

¹⁵The Romanian translation used by Dragomir renders λόγος by 'rațiune' (reason) at this point. [Trans.]

¹⁶In the first case, I distinguish things that resemble each other, and that are, so to speak, on the same plane (for example, rye from wheat). In the second case, I separate what is good from what is bad, i.e. things that belong to different planes (for example, rye from weeds). This distinction is

living beings and that of those without life, and the cleansing of living beings is divided between the cleansing of the body and that of the soul (226e–227a). The ‘cleansing’ of the soul is the removal of what is bad in it (227d), and it is of two kinds (since there can be two kinds of badness in the soul): one kind cleanses the soul of wickedness (analogous to bodily sickness, which can be cured by medicine); and the other cleanses the soul of ignorance (analogous to ugliness, which can be ‘cured’ by gymnastics).

Lack of knowledge (*ἄγνοια*, 228d; 229a, c) is a deformation of the soul (*αἴσχος*, 228a, e), and within it we may distinguish ignorance (*ἄμαθία*) and (so to speak) lack of skill. We can overcome lack of skill by learning. I do not know how to do something, but I can learn; it is just a matter of finding the right way to learn. In the case of ignorance, however, things are not so simple; here it does not help to teach knowledge, as *ἄμαθία* consists of ‘not knowing, but thinking that you know’ (229c). In this case, the remedy is not simply the transmission of knowledge; the remedy here is a process involving education (*παιδεία*, 229d), and it consists in asking the person who thinks he knows questions and showing him that his answers contradict each other, thus revealing his ignorance.

They [the educators] cross-examine someone when he thinks he’s saying something though he’s saying nothing. Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize them. They collect his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects. The people who are being examined [...] lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves that way [...] (230b–c)

Plato does not name Socrates here; however it is clear that the procedure referred to, which cleanses the soul of the greatest evil, is Socratic maieutics. This is the ‘most important kind of cleansing’: we are to consider that anyone who has not been through this process, ‘even the king of Persia, if he remains unrefuted, is uncleansed in the most important respect’ (230d). He remains deformed (like the Sophists) and uneducated; whoever you are, however great you are, if you have not undergone this cleansing, you have done nothing. For if you are not first cleansed of the belief that you know what you do not know, you cannot receive additional teaching, just as ‘the body [...] can’t benefit from any food that’s offered to it until what’s interfering with it from inside is removed’ (230c–d).

The problem of non-being, of *μὴ ὄν*, was there before Socrates and returned with Plato. However we do not find it in Socrates. Why not? Because for Socrates truth is not opposed to falsehood, but to imposture. He was not seeking to catch his interlocutor out with logic, but to make him understand that to claim that you know without actually knowing is an ugliness of the soul. Thinking that you know, without actually knowing, was, for Socrates, a sin, a stain on your soul, an evil. So he was not interested in error in the sense of inexactness (for example, saying that it rained yesterday when actually it did not), but as the illusion of knowledge.

important, for Socrates’ approach (to which this passage points, as I shall show), is all about cleansing, i.e. the isolation and elimination of what is bad. [A.D.]

4. The Results of the Investigation

Let us now look at what results Socrates' examination produced. According to what he says in the *Apology*, four things emerged from his examination. Firstly, all those he investigated thought they knew something that they did not actually know; thus in the first place, it emerged that their knowledge was pseudo-knowledge (22e). Then, it emerged that true wisdom belongs only to the gods (23a), and that Socrates's wisdom was true human wisdom, which is of no value in comparison with divine wisdom (23b); and finally, that he had been taken by the oracle only as an example (*παράδειγμα*) of the human (23a). The oracle, says Socrates, probably meant:

that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and [...] when he says this man Socrates, he is using my name as an example [*παράδειγμα*], as if he said: 'This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that this wisdom is worthless.' (23a–b)

'Knowing that you do not know' thus represents true human wisdom (*ἀνθρώπινη σοφία*, 20d); its paradigm is Socrates, and it is to be distinguished from two other sorts of wisdom: from the wisdom of those who think they know what they do not know (which Socrates does not know how to name, cf. 20d–e), and from divine wisdom (23a).¹⁷ These three sorts of wisdom are matched by three sorts of *λόγος*, of discourse: the divine *λόγος* of the oracle, Socratic *λόγος*, and the *λόγος* of the 'knowers'.

The divine *λόγος* seems to say something *il-log*-ical, something aporetic. Why? Since Socrates is proclaimed to be the wisest, and he does not know anything, it follows that the one who does not know anything is the wisest. Thus the oracle would appear to be eulogizing ignorance. However Socrates says that the oracle cannot utter a lie, for that would not be legitimate (21b). What the oracle says must therefore have a hidden meaning. The oracle speaks and at the same time hides what it says in what it says.

Socrates, in his turn, speaks and at the same time hides what he is saying. His *λόγος* declares that he does not know anything, but in the end he can be seen to embody the highest human wisdom (cf. *σοφώτατος*, 23b).

The falsity of the last *λόγος*, that of the 'knower', is exposed as it unfolds itself. The oracle states something unbelievable, but which proves in the end to be true; the 'knower' states that he knows, but is proved in the end to have been mistaken. In the middle, between the oracle and the 'knower', lies the Socratic 'I do not know'—the fundamental reality of humankind, the intermediary space between appearance and the absolute, in which the roots of science as method first appear.

There is something else that results from Socrates' examination: the confrontation between Socrates and the city, or—if we take Socrates as a paradigm of wisdom—the confrontation between philosophy and the city.

¹⁷At 23a, τὸ ὄντι is not emphatic, but underlines that that is how things are 'in reality'. [A.D.]

5. The Confrontation

According to Socrates, life is to be taken as a whole (see *Protagoras* 361d, where Socrates tells Protagoras that, in taking Prometheus as an example, he is taking care of his ‘life as a whole’). According to the way Socrates sees things, the moment I decide about this whole that is my life is the moment I start truly to be. This effort to decide about my life as a whole is an *çgèn*. This is what Socrates says in the *Gorgias*:

So I disregard the things held in honor by the majority of people, and by practicing truth I really try, to the best of my ability, to be and to live as a very good man, and when I die, to die like that. And I call on all other people as well, as far as I can—and you especially I call on in response to your call—to this way of life, this *ἀγών*, that I hold to be worth all the other *ἀγώνες* in this life. (526e)

I propose to leave *ἀγών* untranslated. Originally it mean ‘public square’, the place where, among other things, contests were held. Then it came to mean ‘contest’ and ‘struggle’. All these senses are present in the *Gorgias* text: there is, in Socrates’ message, a call to the public square, and to contest, and to struggle. This is the *ἀγών* that lies before us all, and that calls us to take our life as a whole.¹⁸

For Socrates, ‘what you are’ is connected to ‘what you think’. From his point of view, none of your thoughts are irrelevant to what you are. Socrates’ work is therefore his life (not just in the biographical sense, of course), his *ἀγών*. You cannot understand how he thought unless you know how he lived; and here it is not just a matter of concordance, but of the fact that his life is his philosophy.

The life of Socrates was based on his belief in all that had been revealed to him: firstly, that death makes you face the problem of the meaning of life; secondly, that the meaning of life is a question of knowing what is good and what is evil, and that in this zone of knowing what is good and what is evil, man himself is the question; and finally, that one must take one’s life as a whole and try to find out together with others what good and evil really are, even if one does not have much chance of success.

Socrates did one thing all his life: he philosophized; i.e. he tried, as he thought fitting, to find out, together with others, what good and evil really are. In his philosophizing, Socrates came to embody the paradigm of human wisdom, of philosophy, and to reveal the greatest evil by which man can be affected—thinking that you know what you do not know. This evil of the soul is not just any evil. It is generic and natural; it is constituted en masse, and is the very foundation of public opinion, of all that concerns *öffentliche Meinung*. It represents the city itself. It is the *das*

¹⁸There is another key word besides *ἀγών*, namely *ἄσκησις*, which appears at the end of the Socratic discourse at *Gorgias* 527e: ‘Let’s use the account that has now been disclosed to us as our guide, one that indicates to us that this way of life is the best, to practice [*ἀσχοῦντας*] justice and the rest of excellence, both in life and in death.’ So in order to obtain excellence, you must, according to Socrates, engage in the ‘exercise of excellence’, *ἄσκησις*. By ‘exercise’, we mean a procedure that simply ‘gets you in shape’. But *ἄσκησις* is in fact something that causes you to be no longer the same, that changes you and makes you feel ‘more capable’. [A.D.]

Man, anyone and everyone in their impersonality, that Heidegger speaks of in *Being and Time* (see § 27).

Socratic cleansing, therefore, has as its aim the lifting of others out of the zone of public opinion. This lifting out of the zone of public opinion follows a particular path. Socrates' dialogues take place after a great event or before one; at such moments, time is suspended and tongues are loosened. In the beginning there is a wandering, *πλάνη*, and then you are carried, by questions, towards contradictory statements. First you are taken out of your everyday life; then you wander and get disoriented. The level on which Socrates works is not just that of logic, but above all that of action on his partner in discussion. Socrates is not seeking to catch you out, but to make you understand that the knowledge you claim is pseudo-knowledge, and thus to lift you out of the zone of public opinion (hence the outcome of the dialogues does not actually matter). This lifting out of the zone of public opinion is felt, however, at least at first, as something bad.

In a way, everyday life lives itself; it is *das sich selbst lebende Leben*. It is like a mechanism whose wheels turn of their own accord, without much contribution on my part. It is precisely this way in which my life flows on of its own accord that is threatened by the disorientation into which Socrates throws me. It makes me doubt all that I know about good and evil, and this is something dangerous for me. To take me out of the daily flow and to make me face the problem of the meaning of my life seems like an attack directed against me.

Socrates philosophized all his life. He is thus different from us, who in our lives are caught up in many things. It is this monomania of his, which made him refuse to be installed in a well-ordered *Weltanschauung*, that led to his death. This obsessive preoccupation with philosophy is thus directed against us, who do not want to step outside our daily lives. Socrates twists all the things that we thought we believed and knew, and extracts them from the setting in which they had their place in our daily lives. Any thought that overturns all the things that we believed and knew is philosophy, and it is dangerous, because it threatens the flow of our daily lives. The confrontation between Socrates and the city of Athens is the paradigm of the confrontation between philosophy and public opinion.¹⁹

But it is not only philosophy that threatens our daily lives. Socrates replies to his accusers that he has never said and never will say anything but the truth (17b). But then, if we believe him, this means that the truth is considered by his accusers to be dangerous. So when is the truth dangerous? When it reveals what is *inauthentic* about humanity, about the city, and about knowledge. And if we take Socrates seriously when he says that he is in the service of the divine, this means that it is not

¹⁹I would like to make an observation at this point. Socrates never left the city, and in the city he talked to everybody. He never wrote a book, because a book does not involve such an examination of each person; thus his examination is basically an examination of the city. This examination of the city is, for him, the true politics. 'I believe that I'm one of a few Athenians,' he says, 'to take up the true political craft and practice the true politics' (*Gorgias*, 521d). This 'political craft' of Socrates ultimately sought the embodiment of another type of city. The confrontation between Socrates and the city is thus the confrontation between the city in Socrates' mind and the city in reality—the confrontation, ultimately, between a utopia and history. [A.D.]

only philosophy and the truth that endanger our everyday lives, but also the divine. Socrates is in the service of the divine, and against the life of each of us; he is the only philosopher who overturned things and went the whole way.

But even though he went the whole way, he did not succeed in cleansing the city. ‘As a result of this investigation, men of Athens, I acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden,’ he says in the *Apology* (23a). By proving to his fellow citizens that they did not know what they thought they knew, Socrates aroused their hatred. He raised a question mark over the very foundations of public opinion, and public opinion defended itself and condemned him to death. When philosophy asks ‘what is good?’, it is approaching a sacred zone. And the city does not like to see sacred things put under discussion—even in order to clarify them.

So there we have the life of Socrates. Is it worth following? Was he actually right?

6. Epilogue

In a letter to Herder (written in 1772), Goethe writes: ‘I studied Socrates in Plato and Xenophon, and then I became aware for the first time of my unworthiness [*Unwürdigkeit*]’ (Goethe 1962, 132). Socrates’ conception should make us feel our unworthiness, *unsere Unwürdigkeit* (in Greek, ἀνάξιος, a term used frequently by Plato in the *Apology*, when he refers to the low value of human knowledge). This blow struck against our being is characteristic of Plato’s dialogues. Do we actually become aware of our unworthiness when we are confronted with Socrates?

Life is the most fragile of things: you can cease to be at any moment. This is one commonplace. A second is this: this life is all we have—which means that it is very precious. And a third: each of us lives in a different way; so our life has a specific content. Now, in the context of the fragility of life, what is the meaning of this content? In other words, how should we live? What life should we choose? What is so valuable that it is decisive in the question of the value of life, and in that of ‘to live or to die’? All these were Socrates’ problems. Do we face these problems ourselves? Do we consider our life as a whole?

In Dostoyevsky’s *The Devils*, there is a disturbing passage about half knowledge. Shatov, speaking to Stavrogin, says:

half-knowledge [is the] most terrible scourge of humanity, worse than pestilence, famine, or war, and quite unknown till our present century. Half-knowledge is a despot such as has never been known before. A despot that has its own priests and its slaves, a despot before whom everybody prostrates himself with love and superstitious dread, such as has been quite inconceivable till now, before whom science itself trembles and surrenders in a shameful way. (Dostoyevsky 1953, 257)²⁰

²⁰Following Dragmoir’s similar modification of the Romanian translation, I have changed ‘half-science’ in David Magarshack’s English translation to ‘half-knowledge’. [Trans.]

Half-knowledge, for Dostoyevsky, is not a sort of less rigorous, less exact knowledge, but a phenomenon existing in its own right on a very large scale, and characteristic of the world in which he lived, and in which we too live. Of course there were half-knowing people in the time of the Greeks too. But it is only in our own time that half-knowledge has manifested itself on such a large scale, becoming a mass phenomenon, and only in our world that it has become, as Dostoyevsky puts it, a despot. Half-knowledge is basically just a variation on thinking you know what you do not know. But is it for us, as it was for Dostoyevsky, the greatest evil of our world, worse than pestilence, famine, or war? Do we believe, like Socrates, that the greatest evil that can afflict the soul is to think you know what you do not know? Do we see that the greatest trap for the spirit is precisely this—that everyone thinks they know? That everyone can explain what needs to be done?

We can busy ourselves with the Socratic problems by reading or writing books or articles about Socrates' ethics. But Socrates himself did not write anything; he just talked with other people. His philosophy was an anti-cultural act, and we should perceive it as such. However it is difficult to do this, as the machinery of culture—which initially eliminates all the great creators, and then puts them in the limelight to 'adore' them—has transformed the philosophy of Socrates into a matter of culture; i.e. a matter that no longer concerns me.

Socrates wanted us to see our lives as a whole. If I do not see my life as a whole, then I wander, *πλάνω*, *ich gehe hin und her*, I drift hither and thither. But if I do see my life as a whole, then I should manage to prevent this whole from being contradictory. What does an uncontradictory life mean? It means, in the first place, a life without compromises. When do I make a compromise? When something of vital interest for me is threatened; for life is my most precious possession, and all that protects it is good. So the compromise protects my life, but takes away its coherence. And this is precisely the position that Socrates is attacking. For him, the most precious possession is not life itself, regardless of how it is lived, but the way you live it, i.e. its coherence. So who is right, Socrates or us?

If Socrates is right, then everything is irrelevant to us, apart from our lives. If he is right, we are not really living, and we are not paradigmatic, as he was. If he is right, then, as Callicles tells him in the *Gorgias*, 'this human life of ours [will] be turned upside down' (481c). If Socrates is right and what is really essential is to concern yourself with your own life, then each of us should try to find out what the matter is with ourselves, even if our chances of success are minimal—though the message of Socrates is not for everyone, in the way that the message of Jesus is.

Socrates was right then, and he is still right today. Nothing has changed where τὰ μέγιστα, the most important things, are concerned. We deal with them today just as we dealt with them in his time. So 2400 years have gone by and we have stood still as far as the most important things are concerned. What city would admit this nowadays?

You can busy yourself all your life with philately or mathematical problems. But how dangerous and difficult it is to take seriously the attempt to find out what the matter is with yourself! And this is just what the philosopher, *der liebe Niemand*, old Mr Nobody, should be doing.

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Comments on the *Philebus*

Based on the notes taken by Gabriel Liiceanu in the course of a series of lectures given by Alexandru Dragomir in June–November 1985 on Plato’s dialogue Philebus, apart from the opening section (‘The horizon of discussion’), which is taken from two pages about the Philebus in a notebook of Dragomir’s from 1985, which appear to have been written in preparation for the lectures.

The first part of the series (11 June–16 August) consisted of commentary on the first half of the dialogue (11a–39c). This corresponds to sections 1–13 in the present text.

In the second part (2 October–2 November), Dragomir set out to deal with a wider range of topics: (a) a revision of what had previously been discussed; (b) a discussion of a longer passage from the Philebus (55a–64d); (c) a setting of the problem of pleasure in Plato’s thinking as a whole; (d) a discussion of the differences between Plato’s and Aristotle’s views on the problem of pleasure; and finally, (e) a setting of the problem of pleasure in a broader context. As a result, the lectures in this second part sometimes lack the clarity and coherence of those in the first part; furthermore, topics (a), (c) and (e) were only partially covered, and (d) was not touched on at all in the end. From this second part of the series, I have kept only (b), which corresponds to sections 16–17.

Two sequences in the dialogue (39c–55a and 64b–67b) were hardly touched on at all in the lectures; they are here briefly discussed in sections 14–15 (41b–55a) and 18 (64b–67b), which, with the exception of a few sentences, are written by myself. In sections 1–13, I have followed closely the notes taken by Gabriel Liiceanu in the course of the lectures; however many passages have been reformulated and reorganized in a different order from that in which they occurred in the lectures. Some passages have been omitted (repetitions, digressions, quotations from various authors where the source was not indicated), and others have been made more succinct. The division of the text into sections is my own.

The lectures on the Philebus began as a ‘running commentary’, a commentary that set out to accompany the reading of the dialogue, explaining each section in turn. However some sections were not explained, and others were only briefly commented on.

To attempt to complete and develop what was said in the lectures, continuing along the road they open up within Plato's philosophy, seemed to me too risky, for the interpretation they propose is extremely original. In spite of all their shortcomings, Dragomir's lectures on the Philebus remain an excellent guide through the labyrinth of this dialogue. (Catalin Partenie)

1. The Horizon of Discussion

The dialogue *Philebus* was written almost 2400 years ago. The mere fact that we have the book at all is proof of its resistance to the test of time, even if nowadays its continuity is worn very thin. It is like an old piece of tweed: you wonder how it was woven, and from what thread for it to have lasted so long. In order to find the answer, you have to take it apart and analyse it. For all the avatars through which the text has passed, its preservation over 2400 years is far from being a random matter. Certainly the *Philebus* cannot be regarded as a fossil discovered by chance, and the interest shown in it—in this elderly age of ours, in which we keep everything, as elderly people do (rags, photographs, broken objects)—is not just curatorial, but arises from the fact that the problem it raises continues to face us, still unresolved.

How do we stand, nowadays, with the problem of the *Philebus*? How do we answer the question whether good lies more in pleasure or in reason? And what can we say about their mixture? Not much. Individually, we have a faculty of reason developed at school, at university, with the help of our reading and of what we have heard from other people. And at the same time, we have our pleasures, more or less refined, more or less public, or, as the case may be, hidden. But in us, the people of today, reason pulls us one way and pleasure the other, and the left hand does not know what the right is doing. We are divided between reason and pleasure just as we are divided between busy time and free time, between the social and the individual, between here and there. And we are so divided that it is perfectly legitimate to ask ourselves if in general we actually *are* any more. *Are* we really? At the stage that society has reached nowadays, we can say that we have an extremely advanced rational science which, as *objektiver Geist*, as 'objective spirit', is making ceaseless progress with astonishing results, achieved by means of reason. But this society is also a consumer society from which each benefits according to his 'heart's desire' (i.e. according to his pleasure) and depending on his purse. Science gets on with its business in books, journals, congresses, symposia, and laboratories, while pleasure gets on with its business in department stores, boutiques, cinemas, concert halls, cabarets, stadiums, tourist agencies, television studios, brothels, restaurants, and casinos.

The connection between the institutions of reason (of science) and the institutions of pleasure is almost nonexistent, and when it is there, it is most often saddening. For it is sad to see the ingenuity of generations of television inventors, for example, ending in idiotic or pornographic films, or concerts of singers giving stu-

pid expression to primitive emotions, or, worse still, to see scholars who regenerate their creative reason by taking pleasure in all this.

Well, as long as we continue to live like this—and nothing seems likely to bring about a change—, the *Philebus* will continue to interest us, because it shows us not only the horizon within which we move, but also that the split of which I have spoken cannot be a solution for our lives.

2. The Type of the Dialogue

The medieval copyists added to almost every one of Plato's dialogues a subtitle and an indication of its type. The *Philebus* is subtitled *On Pleasure*, and we are told that it belongs to the ethical type. Ethics has as its object human nature (see, for example, the ethics of the Cynics), interpersonal relations (see, for example, the ethics of Kant), and the place of humankind in the universe (see, for example, the ethics of the Stoics). So which of these do we find in the *Philebus*?

The *Philebus* is not an ethical treatise: it is a dialogue between two characters, Socrates and Protarchus, who start from the problem of pleasure, arrive at that of dialectic, and go on to talk about a metaphysical subject, namely the four supreme types of existence: limit, the unlimited, mixture, and the cause of mixture. Apparently nothing that I have mentioned as the subject matter of ethics is discussed in the *Philebus*. Why, then, is it to be considered an ethical dialogue, and not a metaphysical one? With the *Philebus*, we come up against questions from the very beginning.

3. Introduction: The Dispute Over What Exactly Is Good for Humankind (11a–c)

The *Philebus* begins with an ἀμφοσβήτησις (11a), a dispute: for some, including Philebus, good consists in pleasure; for others, among them Socrates, it consists in knowledge and reason (so we have three elements: the aim, i.e. good; the means, for example pleasure; and the beneficiary, i.e. the subject). The question is thus not: 'what is preferable for humankind?' but: 'what is good for humankind?' The first of these is a subjective question, while the second is a theoretical and, so to speak, objective one. What I am trying to say is this: I can choose either pleasure or reason, but that is a subjective problem. Here, however, the discussion starts from the question: 'what, for humankind, is good?' The object of this question is not a subjective but an objective one.

The problem of good is a moral problem. What is morality? Morality is the discipline that regulates interpersonal relations. How exactly does it regulate them? Here I do not have a single answer, for there is not a single morality. There are many.

Why? Because there is no consensus over how interpersonal relations should be regulated. The problem of a morality, of a regulation of interpersonal relations, only appears within a society in which these relations do not simply resolve themselves; only in such a context can moral problems be debated. For us, living in such a society, there is nothing surprising about a dispute over what exactly is good for humankind. In primitive societies, however, this is not at all the case.

In primitive societies, people's relations with the divine and with each other are *given*. In other words, they constitute a 'self-evident morality', and are not the object of any debate. In Homer, for example, moral values (courage, glory, etc., which are 'sentimental' rather than 'intellectual') do not come under discussion; and for the Presocratic philosophers, there is no such thing as morality. However when the Greeks discovered the 'realm of logic'—which must be all-embracing if it is not to be devastating—everything, including morality, which had hitherto been 'self-evident', became an object of debate ('morality' thus appears when morality disappears). For this reason, there would have been something strange about the *Philebus*—which starts with the question 'what, for humankind, is good?'—for Plato's contemporaries, unused as they were to debating moral problems. Furthermore, the conflict between bodily and spiritual pleasures, which seems normal to us today, does not arise for some people. For the members of a primitive tribe, for example, sexuality was not something connected only with pleasure, but belonged to a divine plane, a cosmic plane, and a social plane.

4. The Silence of Philebus (11c)

Philebus, we are told, has defended his position that pleasure is good (11a). Now, however, when Socrates proposes to open the discussion again, he prefers to stand aside and refuses to play any more part in it (11c). Almost all Plato's dialogues begin with an extraordinary situation. The *Symposium*, for example, has as its starting point the extraordinary gathering of the most brilliant intellectuals of Athens. Here, in the *Philebus*, what is extraordinary at the beginning is this refusal of Philebus to play any further part in the discussion. Why does Philebus now prefer to stand aside?

In the dialogues there is almost always a single notion under scrutiny; here, however, Socrates comes with the three interpenetrating notions ('pleasure', 'reason', 'good') and with the opposition between two theses ('good lies in reason' and 'good lies in pleasure'). Furthermore, when he speaks of reason, Socrates lists various types of reason: 'knowing, understanding, and remembering, and what belongs with them, right opinion and true calculations', and these types seem to be listed at random (11b). The discussion promises to be difficult, and Philebus' refusal to take part in it draws attention precisely to this fact.

5. The Theme of Similarities and Differences (11d–14a)

The two theses are not, however, discussed in detail. It is Socrates who leads the discussion, and he tells his fellow speakers that there is the possibility of another state of the soul (ἔξις or διάθεσις—in Latin, *habitus*, or *dispositio*), apart from those in which pleasure and knowledge feature; in other words, there is also the possibility of a third thesis, different from those stated at 11d. The invocation of the possibility of a third thesis introduces the theme of similarities and differences. If this third disposition of the soul exists, says Socrates, then we ought to ask ourselves which of the other two it would be more closely related to (μᾶλλον συγγενής, 11e). In other words, the existence of a third disposition of the soul will make us ask ourselves the following question: which of the other two does it most resemble?

6. The Theme of the One and the Multiple (12d, 15e)

The problem of the one and the multiple is an ontological given. I only have to look at a field of grass and the problem appears before my eyes: each blade of grass is different from all the other blades of grass, but they are all the same thing, namely blades of grass. That the same thing is at the same time both one and multiple is something amazing, θαυμαστόν (14c), something stimulating, which immediately set thought in motion, gets you going. However in the *Philebus*, Plato does not start from this, from the ‘physical’ plane, but from that of the λόγος (just as he does in the *Phaedo*, 99 *sqq.*).¹ The word ‘pleasure,’ says Socrates, is one (ἓν), but its reality is extremely varied (see the expressions μορφὰς παντοίας and ἀλλήλαις, 12c–d). How is it possible that such different things as the pleasure of debauchery and that of wisdom can be covered by the same word, ‘pleasure’? There is a scandal here: how is it possible that things that are not alike should be covered by the same word? And yet, every time we speak, says Socrates at 15d, the mixture of the one and the multiple becomes present:

[I]t is through *discourse* that the same thing flits around, becoming one and many in all sorts of ways, in whatever it may be that is said at any time, both long ago and now.

7. The Logical Plan of the Discussion (14b)

What is essential in our dialogue, Socrates says to Protarchus, is not the desire of each of us to impose his thesis, but the attempt to arrive together at the truth, whatever it may be (14b). In invoking the possibility of a common attempt to reach the

¹The ‘physical’ and the ‘logical’ were not, for Plato, completely separate. Thus for him, the nature (φύσις) of a thing concerns what can logically be said about that thing. [A.D.]

truth, which will only be possible through dialogue, Socrates introduces a second level of the discussion, different from the ‘personal’ level of Socrates and Protarchus. This second level is that of logic, which takes no account of whose thesis wins—the one, the other, or neither.

8. A Short Exposition of the Theory of Ideas (15b–c)

Plato’s theory of ideas, separates, as we know, what is visible from what is invisible (see, for example, *Phaedo* 99–100). There is, on the one hand, a world of unitary and unchanging things, and, on the other hand, a world of becoming.² Here, in the *Philebus*, Socrates gives a short exposition of this theory and raises the following problem: if there are such ideas (cf. *μοναδάς*, 15b), how is it logically possible to pass from the ‘one’, from the ‘idea’, to the palpable reality in which the ‘one’ is embodied?

In a first stage, everything in the theory of ideas revolves around concepts. In a second stage, however, we pass on to judgement. In the second part of the *Parmenides*, we are told that, if we remain with concepts and do not go on to judgement, we will not get out of our aporias. And in the *Sophist*, Plato states that knowing ideas means finding the connections that truly exist between them (but also determining the connections that cannot exist, that are not real, such as we find in the discourse of the Sophists).

9. The Disorder That Appears in Speech (15d–e)

For Plato, in *λόγος*, in talking, a disorder arises. This is what Socrates says in the *Philebus*:

[I]t is through *discourse* that the same thing flits around, becoming one and many in all sorts of ways, in whatever it may be that is said at any time, both long ago and now. And this will never come to an end, nor has it just begun, but it seems to me that this is an immortal and ageless condition that comes to us with discourse. Whoever among the young first gets a taste of it is as pleased as if he had found a treasure of wisdom. He is quite beside himself with pleasure and revels in moving every statement, now turning it to one side and rolling it all up into one, then again unrolling it and dividing it up. (15d–e)

The disorder that arises in talking (which is the space in which Athenian democracy operates) is here exemplified by the way in which some young men speak: some of them pass too easily to the ‘general’ (a danger that stalks the Romanian intellectual), while others insist too much on differentiation (a danger that stalks the Western intellectual). This disorder that arises in talking is, for Plato, the sign of a

²The distinction is all a matter of the presence of time (the ‘world of becoming’) or its absence (the ‘world of ideas’). [A.D.]

disorder of the mind, a wandering, a *hin und her irren*. (It would be worthwhile, I think, for someone, starting from this passage in the *Philebus*, to write a short treatise on the perils of the essay.)

Let me make a parenthesis. In the *Timaeus*, Plato says that the movements of our mind are a copy of the movements of the planets (47b–c), but that, thanks to the disorders of the body, the movements of the mind are also disordered (43a *sqq.*, 44b–c, 86b–c; see also 88d–e). This is, for Plato, the ‘disorder of the human’, the remedies for which are a healthy diet (44b, 90c), education (44b), and philosophy (44b). There is also a ‘disorder of the social’, for society is full of lawlessness, *παρανομία*; this lawlessness can also affect those who busy themselves with the practice of dialectic (cf. *Republic* 537e). Who provoked this lawlessness? The Sophists and the demagogues (492a–493a): instead of paying attention to what their ‘parents’ (i.e. the ‘ordered world’) say, young people let themselves be corrupted by those who flatter them (538a–c). The remedy for this disorder is, in a first stage, education (the *Republic*), and in a second, law (the *Laws*).

10. The Dialectical Method (16b–18b)

Protarchus asks Socrates for a *μηχανή*, i.e. a method, a way, *ὁδός*, to get out of this disorder; and Socrates replies that such a way exists (16b), although it has often slipped from under his feet. So what is the way? Describing it, says Socrates, is not hard, but using it is hard (16c). There is, then, a remedy for the disorder of the mind. This remedy is the opposite of wandering, namely the straight way, *μέθοδος*, i.e. the road through the space of logic, or, in a word, *dialectic*, whose exposition begins, in the *Philebus*, at 16b. The dialectical method is what gives me a direction, what brings *Richtigkeit und Richtung* into the disorder that appears, at first glance, in talking. (However the dialectical method presupposes disorder, for it is only in relation to a given disorder that it can give a direction; just as a map, for example, is the ordering of a region that, at first glance appears disordered.) Here is the passage from the *Philebus* in which the dialectical method is described:

Since this is the structure of things, we have to assume that there is in each case always one idea for every one of them, and we must search for it, as we will indeed find it there. And once we have grasped it, we must look for two, as the case would have it, or if not, for three or some other number. And we must treat every one of those further unities in the same way, until it is not only established of the original unit that it is one, many and unlimited, but also how many kinds it is. For we must not grant the idea of the unlimited to the plurality before we know the exact number of every plurality that lies between the unlimited and the one. Only then is it permitted to release each kind of unity into the unlimited and let it go. (16d–e)

Here, in the *Philebus*—as in the *Sophist* (253d–e) and the *Phaedrus* (265d–e)—the dialectical method starts from the attempt to grasp the one idea (*μία ἰδέα*) under which all the things that are to be investigated lie, and continues with the subdivision of this idea. (We may note here that the dialectical method, being aimed at the

determination of the connections between ideas, somehow announces the theme of the ‘mixture’, the ‘intermediary’.)

However the subdivision of ideas has a limit, for at a certain point, we arrive at ideas that can no longer be subdivided. At this point we reach the level of the individuals that make up the extension of a notion that can no longer be subdivided into species. All that lies below the last separation of species is thus irrelevant. This level of the individuals is called by Plato ἄπειρον, ‘the unlimited’, i.e. ‘the infinite’, for this is the realm of the infinite individual variants that are continually coming and going (16d–e). (The unlimited that is in view here is not in fact the infinite, but the uncountable.)

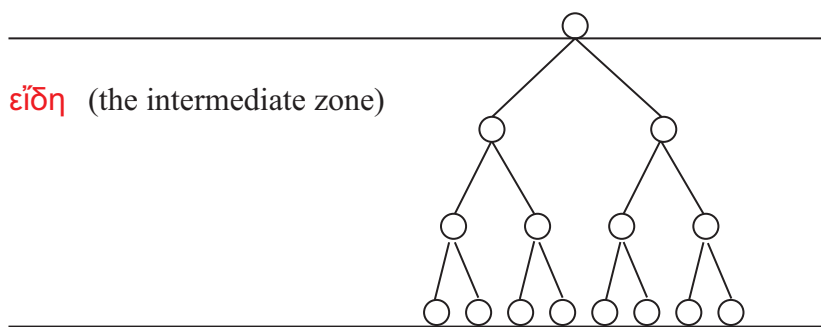
From the connections between ideas, we come to the problem of how the world of ideas is connected to the world of becoming. This is precisely the problem that is raised in the *Philebus*, at 15b–c: if the ideas are unitary, how is it possible for them to be multiply embodied in the world of becoming? How is it possible to pass from the world of ideas, finite and perfect, to the world of individuals, infinite and subject to becoming? In the *Philebus*, the answer seems to be the following: between the two worlds there is a third, an intermediate world that is ruled by number.

The ideas form a system, a real system that we must discover. And the hierarchy of ideas, of genus and species, is, in a way, determined by number; this is the space where limit, πέρασ, appears. So limit is understood here as number, and number appears both as the multitude of species and as the relation between them (and thus connects the sphere of limit with that of the unlimited). (The example Plato gives is that of music, where it is number that determines the species of the sounds—‘high’ and ‘low’, cf. 17c–e.)

The aim of the dialectical method is, then, the exhaustion of this intermediate zone (18a–b). In other words, we do not have to jump immediately to the unlimited, to the μία ἰδέα, the one (17a, 18a) (as the Sophists did, and as, alas, our own scholars often do).

We might represent things schematically as follows:

μία ἰδέα / γένος



ἄπειρον

11. The Problem of Mixture (18d–22c)

After all this description of the dialectical method, Socrates asks his interlocutors to apply it to the problem of pleasure (18d–e). Surprisingly, however, they refuse, saying that they cannot (19a–b), and, even more surprisingly, Socrates does not insist any further. But in fact Socrates is moving the discussion onto another level. He agrees not to apply the dialectical method to the idea of pleasure, but at the same time he invokes the hypothesis that good consists in something else, something different both from pleasure and from knowledge (20b). Then he makes Protarchus admit that we human beings are made in such a way that we cannot live either in pleasure alone or in knowledge alone (21a–22c). Good must thus consist in a harmonization of these two states of the soul—that of pleasure and that of knowledge.³ So good becomes a matter of finding the right proportion between pleasure and knowledge, not of opting for one or other of them. And thus the problem of mixture enters the discussion.⁴

In his later dialogues, Plato is no longer so eager to ‘discard’ the world of here and now, our world of becoming. In the *Philebus*, which is a dialogue of his old age, he becomes much more interested in this world of becoming (and when he discusses the zone of the infinite, of the multitude of things, it is no longer, as in the dialogues of his maturity, with a pejorative tone). This one idea, μία ἰδέα, that was mentioned in the description of the dialectical method has only to be found, investigated. Here in the *Philebus*, we are no longer told that dialectic is an ἄνοδος, a way that leads ‘upwards’, as we are told in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. On the contrary, here, in the dialogues of Plato’s old age, dialectic descends, from the μία ἰδέα to subordinate ideas (though it is true that this way of dialectic comes to us from ‘above’, i.e. from the gods, cf. 16c, where it is described as ‘a gift of the gods to men [...] hurled down from heaven by some Prometheus along with a most dazzling fire’).

12. The Four Supreme Genera (23c–27c)

Having reached this point (23c–e), Socrates tells his two interlocutors that the ideas that are to be considered are four in number: limit (πέρας), the unlimited (ἄπειρον), mixture (μεικτὴ καὶ γεγενημὲν οὐσία), and the cause of mixture and becoming (αἰτία τῆς μείξεως καὶ γενέσεως) (cf. 27b). What is striking here is that instead of going towards a single idea, the μία ἰδέα, Socrates starts out from ‘everything that actually exists now in the universe’ (23c), and the division of this all totality into

³From this point on it is no longer a matter of ‘that which is good’, ἀγαθος, but of ‘good’ itself, τὸ ἀγαθόν. [A.D.]

⁴The moment a problem ceases to be approached in terms of ‘either—or’ (‘good is either pleasure or knowledge’), it no longer concerns the nature (φύσις) or substance (οὐσία) of the things under discussion, but their quality. [A.D.]

two ('limit' and 'the unlimited') and then into three ('limit', 'the unlimited', and the 'mixture' of the two) (23c). The analysis of these four ideas starts at 24a.

- (a) The unlimited, or the infinite (which is connected to the world of becoming that Plato had previously so much repudiated), is determined by *mehr und weniger*, i.e. by 'more' and 'less', and its species are those that admit this 'more' (such as temperature, for example) (24a–b; see also 26d). (The infinite implies thinking of becoming in terms of 'more', and this 'more' is the last thing that we reach in a phenomenological analysis of the unlimited.) The unlimited is thus an idea, an εἶδος, which is determined by 'more' and which thus has an autonomous nature, and is not a simple derivative, by negation (ἄ-πειρον) of the limited.
- (b) About limit, Socrates does not say very much. Most importantly, it is the opposite of the unlimited (and not the other way around, as we would expect). Limit is thus determined by a certain way of understanding the unlimited (indeed from a mythical point of view, first of all there is an initial unlimited, to which limit is then applied, cf. 26b). Limit is always the limit of something; but here it is a matter not strictly speaking of limits but of relations (cf. 25d).
- (c) Mixture is limit 'applied' to the unlimited (cf. 26b). I would like here to make some observations.

(α) This line *represents* an infinite straight line:

But this line *is* a segment of an infinite straight line:

A |-----| B

- The moment I 'apply' limits A and B to the first line, I obtain a γένεσις εἰς οὐσίαν, belonging to a certain thing (cf. 26d). The first line is an ἄπειρον, which does not exist except as τόπος νοητός. I can do nothing with it. With the segment of line, on the other hand, I can do many things. From three such segments, for example, I can make a triangle (and with the triangle I can obtain the whole world, as Plato does in *Timaeus* 53c–55c). Hence the notion that limits create an essence that resides in the sort of relation imposed by the limits applied.
- (β) When I limit a straight line with A and B, I put a stop to an infinite progression. Limit thus stops something that is ἀεί, continually, moving. Limit suppresses the unlimited and 'stops' it in its becoming; and by stopping, it determines it. The unlimited is thus the possibility of applying a limit, and only exists in this sense. The world, such as it is, is a world of limits. But these limits are not to be thought of apart from the unlimited. (Everything is discussed here, in the *Philebus*, in terms of 'logical genesis', and the unlimited has logical priority over limit.)
 - (γ) When limit is applied to the unlimited, there appears a γένεσις εἰς οὐσίαν, a birth of something of a certain sort (see 26d). Within the world of becoming, there thus exists the unlimited, together with the being, οὐσία, that is obtained by the application of limit to the unlimited. In the world of ideas, on the other hand, there are only ideas, which always remain the same. The 'stopping' that is created by the application of limit to the unlimited is, so

to speak, an image of the ‘remaining the same’ of the ideas. Limit cannot be separated from the world of becoming; ideas, in contrast, have no limit, for they are not created, as palpable things are.

- (d) The order and stability that result from the application of limit to the unlimited are created, and thus they can be understood. The geometrical figure, in its stability, is a made thing, a ποιούμενον. This is the difference between beings that exist in the world of becoming and ideas: the former are created, while the latter are not. Ideas have no limit: they are not born; and limit only appears in the world of becoming. Now if beings in the world of becoming are created by the application of limit to the unlimited, we must ask ourselves who is the author of this creation.

For the Greeks, two things were truly astonishing: the fact that there is a harmony in all that surrounds us and the fact that humankind managed to grasp this harmony. They thought that, if the person who grasps harmony does so through the intellect, then the harmony itself must be the product of an intellect. For us things are very different; for us the detection of cosmic harmony does not raise the problem of its author. For Plato, however, our intellect is no more than a minute part of the divine intellect, which created the world of becoming by the application of limit to the unlimited (and it is precisely because the world is created in this way that we can know it). All that belongs to this world of becoming is an *ens creatum* and a μίξις, a created thing and a mixture, and the cause of the mixture (which both mixes and brings into being) is a *causa efficiens* (cf. 27a).

13. False Pleasures and Pains (31b–38b)

Let us now see what is said in the following section.

- (a) Firstly, the problem of pleasure is raised again in the following terms: in what exactly, and through what affection does pleasure come to be? But, says Socrates, in order to answer this question we have to consider also the problem of pain (31b, see also *Republic* 586a).
- (b) Next, we are told that pleasure and pain naturally occur in the mixed genus (ἐν τῷ κοινῷ γένει) (that to which health and harmony also belong) (31c). Pain is a destruction of harmony, and pleasure its restoration (31d). Everything comes under the sign of the ‘way’: pain is the way of disintegration, in which the union between the limited and the unlimited (through which all living things come into being) begins to be destroyed, and pleasure is the way of recomposition, in which the initial proportions between the limited and the unlimited are restored.
- (c) Pain and pleasure both exist in the body and the soul alike. The pleasure and pain that occur in the soul arise from memory (which points, in its turn, to affection) (33c).
- (d) Affections are of several kinds. Some are extinguished within the body, before reaching the soul, while others pass through both the body and the soul (33d).

Affections that do not reach the soul do not raise the problem of memory and forgetting.

- (e) Remembering is different from recollection (34b). Recollection is the rebirth of an affection (which, thus reborn, is totally independent of the body; in this case the soul feels it again on its own) (34b–c). (The soul acts through the intermediary of memory. When I am in pain, the memory of pleasure encourages me to keep going. Oppressed by a present pain, I evoke a past pleasure—this is the circumstance in which I recall a particular thing from memory.)

Limit and the unlimited have so far appeared three times in the dialogue. The first time, they appear with reference to quantity (16c–17a). Here the unlimited does not refer to the infinity of things, but to the fact that they are countable; it is thus a matter of a potential, not an actual infinity. What connects the unlimited and limit on this plane is number, for the idea of quantity is in both—in the case of the unlimited, the quantity is undefined (*quantitas*, ‘multitude’), while in that of limit it is a matter of determined relations. The second time, limit and the unlimited appear with reference to substance (in connection with *γένεσις εἰς οὐσίαν*, cf 26d). Finally, the third time, they appear with reference to temporality, in the context of the discussion of the problem of perception, of memory, and of recollection (33c–36d).

- (f) Thus we arrive at the question of whether there are false pleasures and pains (36c). There are false fears, expectations, and judgements. But what about false pleasures and pains? Protarchus will only accept that there are false judgements. And yet, says Socrates, there are circumstances when, let us say, you are dreaming or you are in a state of insanity, and you believe that you are enjoying something without actually enjoying it. Both the judgement and the pleasure are real; why then should the object of pleasure be always true, when the object of judgement could be either false or true? If pleasure is qualifiable, then it can also be false (37c–d). In this case, the pleasure would be false in relation to its object; this means that pleasure would arise on the basis of a false judgement (37e). But then, Protarchus objects, the judgement on the basis of which the pleasure arises would be false, not the pleasure as such; in this case, Socrates concludes, it follows that there is no difference between the pleasure that results from ‘right judgement and knowledge’ and that which results from error and ignorance (38a).

14. The Painter and Scribe in the Soul (38b–39c)

Here things start to get even more complicated. Any opinion, says Socrates, is accompanied by a discourse and by images:

If memory and perceptions concur with other impressions at a particular occasion, then they seem to me to inscribe words in our soul, as it were. And if what is written is true, then we form a true judgement and a true account of the matter. But if what our scribe writes is false, then the result will be the opposite of the truth. [...] Do you accept that there is another

craftsman at work in our soul at the same time? [...] When a person takes his judgments or assertions directly from sight or any other sense-perception and then views the images he has formed inside himself corresponding to those judgments and assertions [...] are not the pictures of the true judgements and assertions true, and the pictures of the false ones false? (39a–c)

Here arises the problem of representation, which is seen differently from the way we see it nowadays. What I see, says Plato, is what I judge that I see. In other words, I see according to my judgement of the objects that I am looking at, which means that *logos* is the basis for sight. It is not what I see that constitutes the outside world, but what I judge about this world. Thus I see the world with what I am. I cannot see it in an absolute sense, but according to what I am (in other words, the psychological has a greater importance in my life than the somatic).

15. False Pleasures and Pains: Conclusion. Types of False Pleasure (39c–50e)

The discourse and images can also accompany an expectation or a hope—i.e. a projection of the future.⁵ It is the same with anticipated pleasures: they are in fact discourses associated with images, and thus are no different from judgements. The fact of enjoyment is always real, says Socrates, but it can be false, i.e. it can sometimes be based on things that are not and have never been real (and often, perhaps most often, it is based on things that will never be real) (40d). Pleasures can thus be false because, like judgements, they have a content; this is the first type of false pleasure.

So pleasures and pains can be false, and in this case they are bad and useless (40e); this is the general conclusion. Socrates does not stop here, however, but continues the discussion, distinguishing another three types of false pleasure; those that are false because they are (so to speak) overestimated (41b–42c), those that are false because they are wrongly identified with the absence of pain (42c–44b), and those that are false because there is in fact also pain in them (47d–50d).

16. Pure Pleasure: Pleasure as Generation or Becoming (51a–55b)

The discussion of false pleasures has only been a preparation for the discussion of true pleasures. For a pleasure to be true, it must not be false; i.e. it must not belong to one of the four types of false pleasure (51a–52d).

Having reached this point, Plato attacks any kind of pleasure from an ontological perspective. His argument is the following:

⁵Hope is what is vital in us (cf. 40a). It is that ‘vital urge’, ὀρμή, that drives life forwards. [A.D.]

- (a) being (οὐσία) and becoming (γένεσις) are two distinct things (54a);
- (b) ‘all becoming taken together takes place for the sake of being as a whole’ (54c);
- (c) that which exists for the sake of something else is not in ‘the things good in themselves’ (54c).
- (d) pleasure is always a process of becoming (54c–d);
- (e) so: pleasure belongs ‘in a class different from that of the good’ (54d).

The occurrence of this attack, at this point in the *Philebus*, is disconcerting. What about true pleasures, we ask ourselves? Are they also situated outside the good? And if they are, why was this argument not introduced right at the beginning?

We are what we know, Plato seems to be saying here. In other words, the object of our knowledge forms us. He who is in the world of pleasures has no chance of reaching the true object of knowledge, which is being (see 58a, 59a–b), for pleasure belongs to the zone of time and movement.

(Plato starts, almost without exception, from concrete things, which he finds astonishing and which he wants to understand—like, for example, pleasure. Sooner or later, however, he arrives at the most abstract ontological matters. With Plato everything—ethics, politics, art, etc.—is ontology.)

17. The Problem of Knowledge (55b–59d)

In the *Parmenides*, Socrates admits the existence of a world of the ugly, the disgusting (130c), and in the *Philebus* he takes up this problem again when he starts talking about ‘repugnant pleasures’ (cf. 46a–b; see also 65e–66a).

So what belongs in the world of the base, of *das Niedrige*? The unimportant belongs there—for example, hair (*Parmenides* 130d), as do activities with ‘lots of specialized and ridiculous-seeming names’ (*Sophist* 227a), the indecent (*Philebus* 66a), the absurd and the dirty (*Parmenides* 130d).⁶

Do the contents of this world have a correspondent in the world of ideas? Everything we see with our eyes has being, says Socrates in the *Parmenides*, so all these ‘undignified and worthless’ (130c) things seem to have an idea (130d; see also *Sophist* 237d: every time we utter the word ‘something’, we are referring to a thing that is).⁷ But, he continues, every time I think about this I become afraid that I will get lost in ‘some pit of nonsense’ (130d). When you find yourself faced with the abyss of empty talk, to which the ‘low’ things lead you, you hurry back to ‘high’ things, and despise those you have left behind (as happens in the *Phaedo*).

⁶The world of *das Niedrige* also includes, according to post-Platonic Western tradition, the excremental (here we should think of Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Luther, Baudelaire, and Freud). [A.D.]

⁷But if the philosophy of Plato also embraces this zone of *das Niedrige*, then it is not *eine erhabene Philosophie*, a sublime philosophy, on the model established after it by Christianity in continuation of the *Phaedo*. [A.D.]

But the understanding of ‘elevated’ things, those that are beyond the zone of *das Niedrige*, has, so to speak, its ‘ugly’ parts too. In the first place, the mind of man is perishable. I can cease to be at any time. And then nothing of what my mind contained will be any more. In the second place, human thought is discontinuous. It is enough for a fly to buzz and thinking is disturbed. And in any case, even if nothing disturbs it, thinking still stops of its own accord sooner or later. Apart from the precariousness of death, there is also a precariousness of discontinuity, such that even the understanding of ‘elevated’ things is, though in a different way, affected by fragility.

For Plato, nothing can save us from this fragility except access to that which is unchanging. The way of access to that which is unchanging is dialectic, for it does not deal with that which has past, present and future (*Philebus* 58a, 59a–b).⁸ If, through dialectic, you can embrace that which has no past, present or future, you no longer need to fear disintegration and death (see *Republic* 486a); the human spirit takes refuge in that which is unchanging and thus overcomes its own fragility (490a–b).

For Plato, the spirit is meaningless if it cannot stand up to disintegration and death; the spirit takes refuge in the opposite of the passing, i.e. in the unchanging, τὸ αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ αἰεὶ (cf. *Phaedo* 78d, 100b and *Republic* 358d, 524d). The theory of ideas is thus an attempt to save knowledge from disintegration and death.

18. Happiness Is a Life in Which There Is Mixture (59d–64d)

So there are pleasures that belong to the body and pleasures that belong to the soul. In the *Phaedo*, when Socrates, shortly before drinking the hemlock, takes off his chains, he tells those gathered around him that pleasure and pain always bring each other along. They do not both come to us at the same time, says Socrates, but if you have the one, you will have the other too, for they are like two bodies connected by the same head (60b). However here, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is speaking only of pleasures connected with the body.

In the *Republic* the problem is taken up again: where the body is concerned, humankind swings between these two poles—pleasure and pain; when we reach the midpoint between them, we experience both, although this ‘average’ may seem to us to be either pleasure or pain (584a). But all this swinging between bodily pleasure and pain is only a wandering and a ‘downward’ movement (586a). True pleasure belongs to the soul, or more precisely to the divine part of the soul: reason.

In the *Philebus*, Socrates reaches the conclusion that good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) is to be sought in a mixed life (μικτὸς βίος), in which intelligence (ἐπιστήμη, 61d–e) unites with true and necessary pleasures (ἀληθεῖς ἡδοναὶ καὶ ἀναγκαῖαι). This mixture is

⁸For this return to dialectic, see *Republic* 515c–d (the ‘direction of the gaze’) and 518d (the ‘turning of the entire soul’). [A.D.]

not just aimed at an ‘average,’ which we can achieve on the level of bodily concerns, for it is a mixture made by reason, by νοῦς.

19. Measure, the Beautiful, the True. The Final Hierarchy. Epilogue (64d–67b)

Now the problem of the ‘good mixture’ is raised. A good mixture, says Socrates, is that in which the elements are combined according to the proportion (without which the elements in the mixture will perish, 64d) of the beautiful and the true (65a). The mixed life is thus a good mixture if we seek (in this order) the following:

- (a) ‘measure, the measured and the timely, and whatever else is to be considered similar’ (66a);
- (b) ‘the well-proportioned and beautiful, the perfect, the self-sufficient, and whatever else belongs in that family’ (66b);
- (c) ‘reason and intelligence’ (66b);
- (d) ‘the sciences and the arts, and what we called right opinions’ (66b);
- (e) ‘those pleasures which we set apart and defined as painless; we called them the soul’s own pure pleasures, since they are attached to the sciences, some of them even to sense-perception’ (66c).

Pleasure thus comes in fifth place, while reason is much closer to what is, humanly speaking, good (67a). Socrates’ thesis is thus closer to the truth than that of Philebus. Socrates seems to have won; but his victory is only partial. ‘There is still a little missing,’ says Protarchus, refusing to let him go (67b). What is still to be discussed? Plato does not tell us, for the dialogue ends with these words of Protarchus.

At the beginning of the *Philebus*, we saw how, when Socrates proposes opening the discussion again, Philebus prefers to stand aside (11c). Why? Because the discussion promises to be difficult: Socrates comes with three interpenetrating notions (‘pleasure’, ‘reason’, ‘good’), with the opposition between two theses (‘good lies in reason’ and ‘good lies in pleasure’), and with a disconcerting number of types of reason (11b). Now, at the end of the dialogue, the delimitation of the five elements that must be sought in a mixed life is even more disconcerting than the enumeration of the types of reason at its beginning. This disconcerting delimitation highlights the fact that there is actually more than just a little still to be discussed. With the *Philebus*, as with many other dialogues, we are left in a state of questioning.

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The World We Live In

Based on tape recordings of a series of lectures given by Alexandru Dragomir in the period September 1986–May 1988, together with extracts from two short presentations which he made in 1998. At first sight, these lectures, in the form in which they were first delivered, seem to have no logical connecting thread. And yet there is such a thread, even if in places it can only be intuited. In reconstituting the present text, my chief preoccupation has been to bring this logical thread to the surface. To this end, the initial text resulting from the transcription of the original lectures and presentations has been modified: some passages have been omitted, others have been reformulated, and others have been adjusted stylistically. A number of passages, intended to complete thoughts that had not been carried to their conclusion or were simply not explicitly formulated, are entirely my own. What has resulted, however, is not a flowing text, but rather a suite of fragments. I could have gone further, and transformed the suite of fragments into a text in which the logical thread of the lectures would have been more clearly highlighted. This I have not done, for fear of losing the enigmatic beauty of the fragments. However it should be borne in mind that the lectures from which the present text derives were no more than sketches for a work that was never carried out. I would like to thank my wife Ioana for the patience and accuracy with which she transcribed the first part of these lectures, and Sorin Vieru, who transcribed the two presentations made in 1998. My thanks also to Bogdan Mincă for the care with which he read the reconstituted text and for his comments on it. (Catalin Partenie)

The Riddle of the Intellect

A hundred years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about the world in his time:

Such a total aberration of mankind from its basic instincts [*eine solche Gesamt-Abirrung der Menschheit von ihren Grundinstinkten*], such a total decadence of value judgments [*eine solche Gesamtdécadence des Werturteils*]*—that is the question mark par excellence, the real riddle that the animal ‘man’ poses for the philosopher [ist das Fragezeichen par*

excellence, *das eigentliche Rätsel, das das Tier «Mensch» dem Philosophen aufgiebt*]. (Nietzsche 1967, 25; Nietzsche 1992, 39)

For Nietzsche, the world in his time was characterized by a *Gesamt-Abirring*, a total aberration from its basic instincts, and this was, for him, the real riddle that man poses for the philosopher to unravel. But what about us? Is the world in which we live also characterized for us by such an aberration? And if it is, is this aberration of our world, for us as for Nietzsche, the real riddle that man poses for the philosopher to unravel? Since then, since Nietzsche wrote these words, a century has passed. We are, to some extent, duty-bound to ask ourselves these questions at least once in a hundred years.

How pleasant it is to talk about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries! You are filled with peace of soul. It is as if you were talking about your grandparents. It is not the same with the nineteenth century; when you talk about it, it is as if you were talking (in the shadow of Freud) about your own parents. But when you start to talk about the present century, the twentieth, you are embarking on a very delicate enterprise indeed. Now it is as if you were talking about your own brothers and sisters. Now you might not be able to achieve a suitable distance from the things you want to talk about; indeed you might even find the ground slipping from under your feet. In what follows, accepting the inevitable risks, I propose to talk about the world of this century—that is, about the world we live in.

All those who have thought about history have ended up believing that the age in which they lived was history's culminating point. Even Hegel believed this. However we must set aside this obsessive belief that—by some amazing coincidence—the whole process of history culminates exactly in the age in which we happen to live.

The world in which we live: I don't mean that it is the culminating point of history. And yet: how different, how completely other it is compared with all the worlds that have gone before it.

The world in which we live is a world of technology, although many are not completely aware of this fact and of its full consequences. Take, for example, this meeting of ours. In order to come here I had first to come down by lift from the sixth floor of the concrete apartment block in which I live, and then get into a car. And here I am now, in a room packed with books and other manufactured items. So we are moving in a technological world. We are more and more caught up in it, and, to put it bluntly, we could not escape from it even if we wanted to. However this whole world of technology is capable of turning on us and destroying us.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus—who gave people fire, i.e. technology—is punished. Why? Because fire was *stolen* by Prometheus. Theft is something that 'shouldn't be done', that is not in the order of things, and is thus a deviation, *eine Abirring*, an aberration. Constituted into a world that today includes us all, the technology derived from the fire given to us by an act of 'aberration' has come to represent, to borrow Nietzsche's words, *eine Gesamt-Abirring der Menschheit von ihren Grundinstinkten*, a total aberration of mankind from its basic instincts—or at least from its instinct of self-preservation, since technology has reached the point at

which it can turn against us. And for us too, this aberration should be one of the real riddles that man poses for the philosopher today.

The origin of technology is science. But in that case, the world in which we live is a world of science, and the aberration of technology is an aberration of science. Science, then, is one of the real riddles that man poses today for the philosopher to unravel. However science is a product of the human intellect. Which means that the world in which we live is in fact a world of the intellect, and the aberration of science is in fact an aberration of the intellect. The intellect, then, is one of the real riddles that man poses for the philosopher today. So what is the intellect?

Ecclesiastes 1.1: 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.' The scene with Yorick's skull in *Hamlet*. Eminescu's 'Letter I': 'thoughts that have ranged the whole universe fit neatly between four planks.'¹ The theme is commonplace. But the scandal remains: how can a mind that knew so many things, that thought so much, that understood whole slices of the world, no longer be? It is scandalous that Einstein should die. It is scandalous that the intellect should no longer exist. The intellect is at once colossal and precarious. And its precariousness contradicts its grandeur.²

This contradiction has never bothered us. We live happily with it. For thousands of years we have been living happily with it. Anyone who talks about the grandeur of the intellect ignores its precariousness, and anyone who talks about its precariousness ignores its grandeur. But how absurd it is not to realize what a serious contradiction there is between the precariousness of the intellect and its grandeur, and how enigmatic it is in consequence. (How many thinkers have meditated on this contradiction? Not many: Heraclitus, Socrates, Pascal. And of these, the only one who took a step towards getting beyond it was Socrates, when he said, 'I know that I do not know.' As long as all I do is raise questions, I do not enter the race for knowledge, and so do not enter the domain of grandeur.)

Trying to see certain things: that is what this is all about. It is in fact the most important thing in a philosophical enquiry: seeing certain things. When I try to see what the intellect is, the first thing that comes to mind is the contradiction between its grandeur and its precariousness. However this contradiction appears commonplace to me, and then I am discouraged and tell myself that I had better abandon my attempt to see what the intellect is. But going beyond the commonplace towards the deeper problem that it conceals is one of the most important aims of philosophy. I do not propose to find solutions, and I set the question of originality completely aside. My motto, in this enquiry, is: *je prends mon bien où je le trouve*.

What each of us is interested in is ourselves. What am I?—this is the question that engages me most of all. For me, I am a body subordinated to my intellect. My

¹Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889) is commonly regarded as the national poet of Romania. His 'Letter I' portrays an aging scholar meditating on the past and future of the universe, leading to reflections on the apparent futility of human endeavours in the face of mortality and the disregard of posterity. [Trans.]

²How astonishing! The fundamental principle of the intellect is non-contradiction: something is, at a particular time and from a particular point of view, either this way or that way. But the intellect itself is contradictory, for it is at one and the same time both precarious and colossal. [A.D.]

body is an ὄργανον, an instrument guided by my intellect. I have eyes to see with, hands to handle with, and feet to walk with, but all these—the eyes, the hands, the feet—are driven by the intellect. This vision is a very old one. Both for Plato and for Aristotle, the intellect, the νοῦς, is a κυβερνήτης, a helmsman who pilots something, namely the body.³ (For other people, however, I am in the first place my body: how I look, how I walk, the gestures I make. Likewise, other people are also for me, in the first place, their bodily aspect, even if they don't believe it.)

Sometimes the intellect no longer plays any role in our lives: when we love very intensely, for example, or when we are beside ourselves with rage. And yet it is in the intellect that our primordial identity lies. The intellect is not just what guides my body; it is what defines me. Regardless of whether we speak about its grandeur or its precariousness, it is in fact in the intellect that the very essence of humanity is made manifest. This is also a very old vision. We can see it already in Aristotle, who defines man as the being that has λόγος, reason (*Politics*, 1253a 10). We do not know how old the formulation is; most likely Aristotle himself inherited it from an older tradition.

My intellect guides my body and defines my being. However I am not only intellect. I am a whole that has a driving part—the intellect. The intellect may remain in harmony with the whole that is me. But equally it may come to be the absolute center of my life. The intellect can be an enlightened despot or it can be a tyrant. It can preserve the harmony of my being, or it can destroy it. When it destroys it, so that my whole life organizes itself around my intellect, then I become an intellectual. But what exactly is an intellectual?

What Is an Intellectual? Anaxagoras, Fragment A 29

In European culture, the first definition of the intellectual is, I believe, to be found in Anaxagoras, in fragment A 29 (Diels–Kranz):

Ἄναξαγόραν μὲν γάρ τὸν Κλαζομένοιον τὴν θεωρίαν φάναι τοῦ βίου τέλος εἶναι καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ ταύτης ἐλευθερίαν λέγουσιν.

Which may be rendered as:

It is said that Anaxagoras of Clazomenae said that the aim of life is θεωρία, and that from it [is born] freedom.

Let us consider the first part of the sentence first of all. The word θεωρία literally means 'seeing.' So what does it mean to say that 'the aim of life is seeing'?

In Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, there is the following fragment about Anaxagoras (Düring fr. B 19; Walzer and Ross fr. 11):

³ See, for example, in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*: 'Further, part of us is soul, part body; the one rules, the other is ruled; the one uses, the other is present as its instrument. Again, the use of that which is ruled, i.e. the instrument, is always arranged to fit that which rules and uses' (Düring fr. B 59; Walzer and Ross fr. 6). [A.D.]

And when somebody asked Anaxagoras for what end one would choose to come into being and to live, he is said to have answered the question by saying ‘To observe [θεάσασθαι] the heavens [οὐρανός] and the stars, moon and sun in them’—everything else being worth nothing.

So Anaxagoras would seem to be saying in fragment A 29 that the aim of life is observing (θεωρία) the heavens and what is in the heavens. But what does ‘to observe the heavens’ mean?

Another fragment of the *Protrepticus* is about Pythagoras (Düring fr. B 18; Walzer and Ross fr. 11):

Then what is it among existing things for the sake of which nature and god have brought us into being? Pythagoras, when asked about this, answered: ‘To observe the heavens [τὸ θεάσασθαι τὸν οὐρανόν],’ and used to say that he was an observer [θεωρός] of nature [φύσις] and had come into life for the sake of this.

To observe the heavens is thus, according to Pythagoras, to be an observer of what the Greeks called φύσις, a word usually translated as ‘nature’.

Nature (φύσις), says Heraclitus, ‘likes to hide’ (κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ, Diels–Kranz, B 123; Freeman 1948, 33). But in this case φύσις does not refer to what is seen, like the heavens for example, but to that which remains hidden from sight in what is seen. In this case, φύσις is not something that I can see, but something that I must find with my mind. To be an observer of nature, θεωρός τῆς φύσεως, would thus mean trying to understand what lies hidden in what you see.

So what Pythagoras seems to have meant is that it is to understand what is hidden in the heavens that the gods brought us into being, not just to stare at the sky. And according to this interpretation, Anaxagoras in fragment A 29 is saying that the aim of life is not just to look at the world, but to understand it; in which case the word θεωρία, ‘seeing’, is in fact a metaphor for ‘knowledge’.

Actually it is perfectly common in Greek philosophy for ‘seeing’ to be used as a metaphor for ‘knowing’.⁴ Our argument may, however, seem far fetched, and the invocation of Pythagoras and Heraclitus in the context of the interpretation of a fragment of Anaxagoras may be considered risky. Perhaps Anaxagoras wanted us to take his words literally, as meaning that looking, looking as such, is the aim of life. How are we to decide between these two interpretations?

Perhaps the second half of the fragment can help us. However it seems even more difficult to understand than the first; for what is meant here by ἐλευθερία, ‘freedom’? And moreover, the connection between the two remains obscure, for why should ‘freedom’ be born from θεωρία?

If we take θεωρία to be ‘looking at the world’, at the visible world, then ἐλευθερία seems to refer to external freedom: the world can be seen only if I am free to wander through it. The aim of life is to look at the world, and for that I must be a free person, not a slave, kept forcibly in one particular place. But what Anaxagoras says in his

⁴Plato, for example, speaks of “those who love the sight of truth” (οἱ τῆς ἀληθείας γιλοθεάμονες, *Republic* 475e 4); see also *Symposium* 219a. [A.D.]

fragment is exactly the opposite: freedom comes (ἀπὸ ταύτης) from θεωρία, not θεωρία from freedom.

External freedom may result from many things. From divorce, for example; or from the fact that I have fled from the city where I was a slave. If we take θεωρία as 'understanding of the world', then ἐλευθερία cannot refer to external freedom; for I do not cease to be a slave if I understand the world. It seems that ἐλευθερία here refers to something else.

Each of us has opinions. Some of them are our own; we are attached to them, and if they were proven false we would suffer. Other opinions we have borrowed from other people and have adopted as our own. In order to understand the world, however, I must not be attached to any kind of opinion. Only thus can I understand nature, φύσις.

The Greek philosophers understood the nature of the world, φύσις, in different ways: as 'water' (Thales), as 'air' (Anaximenes), or as 'fire' (Heraclitus). What does this variety of solutions mean? It means, among other things, that the Greek philosophers were free in their search. Free from their own initial opinions, and from those of other people.

There is no way you can think except by yourself, so when you think, you do not depend on others. In other words: when you think, you become free. Which means that freedom comes, in a manner of speaking, from thinking. Freedom comes from thinking because the very condition of thinking is that it has no master, it is free.

As long as there are certain patterns of thinking in my mind which I have taken over, as such, from Heidegger, say, or from Nietzsche, I am not actually thinking. As long as I am dependent on others, I am not thinking. I only begin to think when my thoughts originate in myself; and then I create freedom. If I live in a city ruled by a tyrant, I am not free in the external sense. But there is freedom within me, for I am able to think, and thinking creates freedom. Only an inner freedom, of course, but not to be made light of for all that.

In trying to understand the world, I create freedom, and it is this, this understanding of the world, that is the aim of life. That is how I believe the fragment from Anaxagoras is to be understood. And if we understand it in this way, then what Anaxagoras says in this fragment is more important than all his doctrine about νοῦς. But even understood in this way, the fragment never ceases to amaze me.

In the ancient city there were all sorts of professions: painter, soldier, merchant, and so on. At a certain point, one of the inhabitants of the city came and said that understanding the world was aim of life. When someone for whom knowledge became the aim of life appeared in the city, something colossal happened: it was then that the intellectual appeared. For that is what the intellectual is: someone who values the intellect more than anything and who considers knowledge to be the sole purpose of human life.

However the appearance of the intellectual, in the Greek world, did not mean the appearance of a new profession, that of intellectual. The person who said that understanding the world was the aim of life did not lay claim to a particular field, like the astrologer or the doctor, and did not seek a special place in the city. In not laying claim to a field and a particular place, he stands in opposition to all the others, who,

each in their own way, ‘do’ something in some field or other. In fact he stands in opposition to any kind of professionalization and, indirectly, is opposed to the city and all that is political. Just as Socrates was.

This opposition between the intellectual and the political also appears in one of the surviving fragments of Democritus, who said that he ‘(would) rather discover one cause than gain the kingdom of Persia’ (Diels–Kranz fragment B 118; Freeman 1948, 104). The Great King, the ruler of the entire Persian kingdom, represented for the Greeks the greatest political power imaginable. And Democritus sets this political power against the achievement of finding a single causal relationship. The intellect and its achievements are set above any political power and achievement. Anyone who, like Democritus, believes this is an intellectual.

So the intellect guides our body and defines our being. It directs us towards the understanding of the world, and thus creates freedom and bestows it on us. Only that in this bringer of freedom there is also a latent tyrant.

The intellect can establish itself as the absolute center of my life, and then I become an intellectual, that is to say someone who values the intellect more than anything and who considers knowledge the sole purpose of human life. Thus the intellectual is the person in whom the intellect institutes a rupture and an aberration. The human being as a whole is broken, and one of its parts, the intellect, proclaims its absolute supremacy. The intellect is contradictory not only because it is both grand and precarious, but also because it can both make us free, setting us on the path of thought, and enslave us, depriving us of all that does not directly concern it.

When did the intellect break the human being, and when did it proclaim its supremacy? When did this rupture and this aberration take place? It was already happening in Greek Antiquity, if we read in the fragment of Anaxagoras an attempt to grasp the essence of an already existing human type—the intellectual. (The supremacy of the intellect is also attested, if I may so put it, by Plato. In the *Laws*, 896a, the soul is defined as ‘motion capable of moving itself’. Here the supremacy of the intellect is founded on its autonomy, that is on the fact that it is understood as being a free-standing entity, as *ein Sichselbstbewegendes*, i.e. something that moves itself.)

I return to the problem from which I started. Constituted into a world that today includes us all and can turn against us, technology has come to represent, to borrow Nietzsche’s words, a general aberration of humanity from its instincts, or at least from its instinct of self-preservation, an aberration that is one of the real riddles that man today poses for the philosopher. Now, might it be possible to explain this aberration as the actualization of the latent aberration that exists in the intellect?

Let me explain what I mean. We could argue in the following manner. There is the latent possibility in the intellect that it may deviate from its role of guide to the whole human being, and may proclaim its own absolute supremacy. This possibility was actualized already in Greek Antiquity. Already in ancient Greece, the intellect began to break away from the entirety of the human being. In breaking away, its essence was transformed: from guide it became producer. When the intellect becomes independent, it no longer governs, but produces, and its production becomes its measure. The intellect has produced many things, of which two have

had a particular impact: science and the technology to which science leads. In the course of time, technology has acquired a certain autonomy in relation to that which produced it, i.e. the intellect, and has instituted in its turn a breaking away and an aberration, this time not in humanity but in the world. After the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (which were two centuries of contemplation, of theory), there followed the pre-eminence of technology, which marked a fundamental change in human existence. With the emergence of this pre-eminence, the world was broken into a world of technology and a world of nature. To conclude: the aberration of humanity through technology has its origin in the actualization of a latent aberration of the intellect, namely its aberration from its initial role of guide to the human being as a whole.

Of course we could argue in this way. It all seems coherent, at least at first sight. A fundamental 'existential' component (to speak in a Heideggerian manner), namely, a latent aberration of the intellect, leads, once it is actualized, to a historic event, namely the appearance of technology, which in turn leads to an aberration of humanity. Moreover, this sort of explanation satisfies our (Hegelian) need to understand a thing by situating it within its history. However this way of explaining the aberration of humanity through technology is much too general to be convincing. In order for this explanation to carry weight, we would have to show, to tell the story of how exactly the actualization of this latent aberration of the intellect through science led to the aberration of humanity through technology. I do not propose to attempt such a task, which would require two things that I do not have: access to one of the great libraries of the world and a thorough knowledge of the history of science. However I do not want to stop before sketching two essential episodes of this road that links the appearance of the intellectual with the modern pre-eminence of technology, namely: the constituting of science with Aristotle, i.e. the beginning; and the turn that it took in the thinking of Descartes, i.e. the beginning of the end.

Aristotle and the Constituting of Science

The Anaxagoras fragment casts some light on the moment when the intellectual appeared. But when did science, which is considered today to be the greatest achievement of the intellect, appear? The problem of science was first discussed by Plato, but Aristotle pushed things further than Plato and was the first to set it out as a whole. And just as Aristotle blazed the trail, so it has remained.

So what is science for Aristotle? I shall begin with the first book of the *Metaphysics*, where there is a description of the two fundamental inner dispositions that make science possible.

Leisure and Wonder

After all the arts, the τέχνηαι, had been thought up, Aristotle tells us in the *Metaphysics*, ‘the sciences [ἐπιστήμῃαι] which do not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life were discovered’ (981b 20–23). And this, he continues, happened ‘first in the places where men first began to have leisure [ἐσχόλασαν]’ (b 23–24). This is why mathematics first appeared in Egypt, for there ‘the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure [σχολάζειν]’ (b 23–24).

What is the meaning of σχολή, the source of our words ‘school’ and ‘scholar’? Σχολή is usually translated as ‘leisure’. Thus it is leisure that makes school possible. But what does ‘leisure’ mean? The arts, the τέχνηαι, are, Aristotle tells us, παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις, ‘beyond the common perceptions of man’ (981b 14). The practice of an art already removes me from the world that is flowing around me and that I can perceive with the aid of my senses. An art already situates me παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις, outside all that can normally be perceived by the senses. However the arts orient me towards the immediate, for they concern either the ‘necessities of life’ or ‘recreation’ (981b 18–19). The sciences, on the other hand, according to Aristotle, ‘do not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life’ (981b 20–23). But in order to reach the point where I can devote myself to something that is not directed either at practical usefulness or at enjoyment, I must first of all put a stop to the manner in which my everyday life unfolds. Not only do I have to situate myself παρὰ τὰς κοινὰς αἰσθήσεις, beyond common perceptions, i.e. outside the world that flows around me; I must also stop this flow, and, as it were, leave myself. This stopping of the flow of life and leaving of oneself represent an inner disposition. It is to this inner disposition that Aristotle refers when he uses the word σχολή. This means that it is this disposition that makes science possible. However it is not the only inner disposition that makes science possible.

The origin of the highest of the sciences, philosophy, is, according to Aristotle, wonder:

For it is owing to their wonder [τὸ θαυμάζειν] that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. (982b 11–17)

The idea that wonder is the origin of philosophy also appears in Plato (see *Theaetetus* 153d). The wonder with which we are concerned here is not mere curiosity. It is an inner disposition that takes me out of my everyday life, just like that leaving of oneself to which the word σχολή refers. When I wonder at something, my life no longer follows its normal flow. When I am struck with wonder, the thing at which I wonder takes its place (for a time) at the centre of my life.

Before technology dominated the world, people lived amidst animals and plants, mountains and valleys, forests and rivers. Today we live amidst the most sophisticated products of technology—all sorts of machines, constructions and apparatus. We have got used to them; some of them we know how to operate ourselves, and we are no longer conscious of their strangeness. However in the pre-technological

world, in the world dominated by nature, everything had an aura of *strangeness*. In that world, each thing appeared to be somehow mysterious, other than us. (We still feel this strangeness of things today in the most unexpected situations: you look at a stray dog in the street, for example, the dog looks back at you, and suddenly you are aware that this dog is *other* than you. Is it possible that if we start cloning animals on a large scale we will eventually stop perceiving the strangeness of animals?)

However as we leave the world of technology behind, and descend deeper into the past, this sensation of strangeness is intensified and begins to be accompanied by fear. If we could travel back in time, we would see that the further back we went the more intensely people would feel this strangeness of the world. And we would also see that beyond this feeling of strangeness there would appear a certain wonder before the world, which would likewise get more intense the further we left the present behind us. It is this intense wonder before the world, which it is not so easy to feel nowadays, that Plato and Aristotle are thinking of when they say that wonder is the origin of philosophy.

Why did the world of nature seem, to a greater extent than the world of technology, to be other than us? For me, this sensation of strangeness is based on three things: the belief that the world is made; the belief that, made as it is, it is not made by us; and the belief that, since we did not make it, we cannot understand it either. On the other hand, the world of technology does not inspire fear in me, and does not cause me truly to wonder, precisely because this world is made up of technological products that we ourselves have made; and since we have made them, we understand them; and since we understand them, they no longer seem as strange to us as the plants, the animals, and the mountains, which we did not make. Thus my wonder before them is no longer so intense.⁵

These two inner dispositions—leaving of oneself, and wonder—make possible the emergence of philosophy, i.e. of the highest science. These two inner dispositions are hard to achieve. It is not easy to stop the flow of your life and to enter a

⁵I can only understand something if that something is made. In other words, any existence must be considered as made before I can understand it. This idea appears in Plato: in the *Philebus*, for example, where we are told that what is ‘born’ and what is ‘made’ are the same thing (27a), and above all in the *Timaeus*, where the whole of reality is the creation of the Demiurge (see 27a–fine). It also appears, of course, in Christian theology, in which the whole of reality is conceived as being the creation of God. But it appears too in modern science, for the laws of nature presuppose that reality is something made—made, but of course not by me. I have not said that reality does not also contain a non-made part; all I have said is that I can speak of something only if I assume that it is something made. In the *Timaeus*, for example, the Demiurge builds the universe out of a raw material, which is not made but simply given. But about this raw material not much can be said, for it has no form (see 52d–53b). Likewise the receptacle, the *χώρα*, is not made but given, and not much can be said about it either (see 52b–d). Thus for Plato there is a link between non-made reality and nothingness, about which I can state nothing positive. About nothingness, I can state only that it is. Why can I not understand something unless that something is made? A difficult question! I am not going to try to find an answer here. However I believe that the answer, regardless of our starting point, will lead us sooner or later, to the problem of truth, for to my mind, truth, understood as a correspondence between utterance and reality, has as its foundation the idea that reality is something made. [A.D.]

state in which you leave yourself. It is not easy to stop the flow of your life and to let yourself wonder at the things that surround you. But unless you stop that daily flow, science will never emerge in your life.

The Question and the State of Questioning

Leaving of oneself and wonder do not automatically bring about science. In order for science to appear, we must ask questions. *Posterior Analytics*, 89b 23–24: ‘The things we seek are equal in number to those we understand.’ By ‘the things we seek’, we must here understand ‘the things that we want to know’, i.e. ‘the things that we are asking about’. I do not come to know by chance, but according to the direction in which I seek, and that direction depends on the questions I ask myself. When I ask, I am already going in a direction, and I come to know within the horizon opened up by the questions I ask myself. Which means that, according to Aristotle, we know as much as we ask.

To every answer there corresponds a question, but there is not an answer corresponding to every question. When I ask, I am clearly asking something, which means that my question has an object and seeks to obtain an answer. And yet the question has pre-eminence. First I ask, and then I find out the answer. But what about the origin of the question? The question seeks to obtain an answer, but that answer is not its origin. The question comes out of a state of questioning, which is also an inner disposition that stops the daily flow of my life. Why does it stop it? Because it requires me to admit that I do not know, and when I admit that I do not know, then life no longer flows as it did before. In ordinary life I am aware that I know some things and do not know others. But in daily life I am not in a state of questioning: in daily life I do not dam the torrent of life in which I am caught up, and which carries me like a river in spate; I do not recognize that I do not know and that I have to ask in order to know. The state of questioning, then, is the third inner disposition, together with leaving of oneself and wonder, that makes possible the emergence of science in our lives.

The Four Fundamental Questions

Let us return to Aristotle and his thesis that we know as much as we ask. If we put things this way, then it is only natural that we should ask ourselves how many sorts of question there are. *Posterior Analytics*, 89b 24–25: ‘We seek four things: the fact [τὸ ὄν], the reason why [τὸ διότι], if it is [εἰ ἔστι], what it is [τί ἐστίν].’ So according to Aristotle there are four things that we seek, i.e. four questions that can be asked. In other words, there are four fundamental questions, and we know within the horizon that they open up. These four fundamental questions form two pairs: the first two concern facts, and the last two concern things.

Let us consider, says Aristotle, the case of an eclipse. An eclipse is a fact, something that takes place. When I am confronted with a fact, the first thing I want to know is ‘the fact’ itself; in other words, I ask if this situation really exists as it presents itself to me. Is this actually an eclipse of the sun? This is the first question that I ask myself. Then, if I have an affirmative answer to this question, I ask ‘the reason why’; in other words, I ask myself what is the cause (αἰτία) that makes this fact, the eclipse, exist as it does.

Aristotle says that when we want to know ‘the fact’, we are thinking of ‘putting it into a number’ (εἰς ἀριθμὸν θέντες, 89b 25–26). For the Greeks, 1 was not a true number, and 0 did not exist. Number was for the Greeks in the first place the ‘relation of numerical type’ that exists between two elements. ‘Number’ here, in the expression ‘putting it into a number,’ refers to ‘relation’: when we want to know ‘the fact’, we are thinking of things put in number, that is, those things that are in relation to something else. Aristotle gives the example of the eclipse: it is a phenomenon with certain attributes, and so is something in relation to something else, and that has a cause, thus being in relation to something outside itself.

A fact, like the eclipse, is something that happens, i.e. something that takes place in time. Since it takes place in time, a fact sends me to that something that has preceded it in time and caused it. For Aristotle, however, the cause of a fact cannot be reduced to an event that has produced an effect. For him, the cause of a fact is that something which is responsible for the existence of that fact just as it is, i.e. that something in whose unfolding the fact takes its place. That something is called in Greek ἀρχή.

The cause of a fact is outside that fact. But the cause and the fact are not separated; they are linked to one another. The cause is the starting point for the fact, what makes it just as it is. Now when I find the cause of a fact, I deduce that fact from its origin (ἀρχή). The term that Aristotle uses to denote this operation is ἀπόδειξις, which is usually translated as ‘demonstration’ (see, for example, *Posterior Analytics*, 90b 3). Ἀπόδειξις is derived from the verb ἀποδείκνυμι: ‘to show,’ ‘to bring to light’ (δείκνυμι) ‘from where’ (ἀπό) something comes. The demonstration, ἀπόδειξις, of a fact thus denotes the bringing to light of the origin (ἀρχή) of that fact.

Let us now move on to the second pair of questions: ‘if it is’ and ‘what it is’, When I am confronted with a thing, I first ask ‘if it is’, i.e. I ask if this thing really exists just as it presents itself to me. This is the first question I ask. Then, if I have an affirmative response to this question, I ask ‘what it is’, i.e. I ask what its definition is.

Take this cup, for example. I first ask myself if it exists just as it presents itself to me. Then I ask myself what it is and seek its definition. The definition gives me the essence of the thing. But essence is also a relation, for a definition involves putting something (*genus proximus*) in relation to something else (*differentia specifica*).

Posterior Analytics, 90a 35: ‘That the search is for the middle term [μέσος] is made clear [...]’ In all that we seek to know, i.e. in all four of the fundamental questions, what is sought is the middle term, the one that makes the connection between two elements.

When I want to know a fact, I seek to find out its cause. Once I have found out the cause, I have to ask myself whether this too might not have a cause. Let us say that I want to know a certain phenomenon F (an eclipse, for example). In order to know this phenomenon, I do not have to look at it. What I have to do is to go to what determines it, to its cause (αἰτία), let us say to E. And then I have to go to what determines E, let us say D. In this way my knowledge goes from one middle term to another.

(Of course this cannot go on to infinity. I have to stop somewhere, for otherwise my knowledge about this fact will not be real knowledge. However the further I move towards more and more general causes, the more I approach an essence, i.e. the object of the last two questions. In other words, as I advance in the direction pointed by the first two questions, I approach that which can no longer be deduced from nothing, that towards which the last two questions point, i.e. essences. But ultimate essences are the object of philosophy; so at the end of knowledge based on demonstration lies philosophy. However I will not enter here into the fascinating discussion about the relation between definition and demonstration in chapters 4–10 of the second book of the *Posterior Analytics*.)

I am concerned with middle terms again when I want to find the definition of something. The definition brings to light the essential relations of the thing defined. The thing is a compound, the unity of a number of elements. A cup is a small drinking vessel that has a handle. First I bring to light the relation between ‘cup’ and ‘small drinking vessel’, and then I connect ‘small drinking vessel’ with ‘having a handle’. ‘Small drinking vessel’ is a middle term, which links ‘cup’ and ‘having a handle’.

Let me sum up. One: I know according to what I ask. Two: the fundamental questions are four in number. Three: they concern a fact and its cause (the first two questions), or a thing and its essence (the last two questions). Four: all four questions lead to a knowledge of ‘middle terms’; in other words, all I am able to know within the horizon opened by these questions concerns relations: between a fact and its cause, and between that cause and another (in the case of the first two questions), and between notions (in the case of the last two questions). (I will not go here into the difficult problem of Aristotelian νοῦς.)

Excursus: The Correlation Between Knowledge and Reality

In Aristotle, there is a correlation between knowledge and knowable reality. To cast light on this claim, however, we must begin with Plato.

For Plato, existence has two realms: that of the ideas and that of their perceptible embodiments. The Platonic idea (εἶδος, ἰδέα) is αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἀεὶ, i.e. always free-standing and unchanging (cf. *Phaedo*, 78c, *Symposium*, 211a–b, etc). Since ideas are eternally unchanging and identical with themselves, while their palpable embodiments are born and perish, only the ideas truly exist. The Platonic ideas exist to some extent also in their perceptible embodiments. The idea of beauty, for

example, exists in a beautiful body (for it is the idea of beauty that makes it a beautiful body). But being pure and not mixed with anything, the ideas cannot have their true *locus* here, in the world of becoming, the world of their perceptible embodiments, in which all things are born and perish.

For Aristotle, as for Plato, a perceptible thing, something I can see, is an embodiment of an idea. The idea, for Aristotle, is like a form, μορφή, which is embodied in a material, ὕλη. However for Aristotle, existence does not have two realms, as it has for Plato, but one. For in Aristotle's view, ideas only exist together with their perceptible manifestations, their embodiments. The essence of a thing is given by its idea, but ideas have no existence apart from their embodiments. In other words, for Aristotle, since ideas only exist in their embodiments, their true *locus* is here, in the realm of becoming.

The reality of things thus represents, for Aristotle, the unity of two elements: the idea, and the perceptible. The reality of things is, for Aristotle, this relation, this λόγος between μορφή and ὕλη. And the reality of facts is also a λόγος, the relation between a fact and its cause, on the one hand, and between a number of causes, on the other.

Reality is, for Aristotle, λόγος, and the knowledge of reality is 'logic'. In Aristotle there is, therefore, a correlation between reality and knowledge. (And it is not a simple correlation, since the way of being of reality is the foundation for the way of being of knowledge. In other words, knowledge, in Aristotle, has a metaphysical foundation. Knowledge is 'logic' since reality itself is λόγος.)

Abstracting and Exactness

Metaphysics, 1003a 21–22:

There is a science which investigates being as being [τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν] and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others deals generally with being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attributes [τὸ συμβεβηκός] of this part—this is what the mathematical sciences for instance do.

I will not enter here into questions concerning the science whose object is 'being as being', as the expression τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν is usually translated. This science is none other than philosophy, and its status raises many problems. What I want to do is to bring to light a pattern characteristic of the so-called special sciences. These sciences, we are told, cut off a part of reality, which they then theorize. Arithmetic, for example, cuts off number from reality, and theorizes it. It cuts off only one aspect of reality, the quantitative, expressed through number, and then theorizes it. This cutting off is an ἀφαίρεσις, an abstracting, a breaking of one thing from another, a pulling out, an abstraction. As a consequence of this abstracting, all the other aspects that define reality are ignored; arithmetic, for example, ignores all that is not subsumed in quantity. Quantity is always linked to substance: a certain thing is three feet long or has a temperature of 36 degrees. But I cannot merely abstract this

quantitative aspect and ignore the rest. This is what the geometrician does: he does not take the thing as it is, in its entirety, but abstracts from it only its quantitative aspect—its surface, its angles, etc. By this ἀφαίρεσις, the intellect abstracts from a thing only one aspect of it, which is not in fact free-standing. This aspect may be considered essential in relation to other aspects, but it is not strictly speaking free-standing.

Now, how much can a science ignore of what is real? *Metaphysics* 1078a 8–9:

And in proportion as we are dealing with things which are prior in formula and simpler, our knowledge will have more accuracy, i.e. simplicity. Thus a science which abstracts from the magnitude of things is more precise than one which takes it into account [...]

For us, any knowledge must, if it is really knowledge, be exact. For Aristotle it is not so. For him, exactness, or accuracy, can only be obtained with regard to that which is simple. Arithmetic, for example, is, according to Aristotle, more exact than geometry (982a 28). Why? Because the object of arithmetic is simpler than that of geometry. Why is it simpler? Because geometry has, in relation to arithmetic, one additional element, namely space. Arithmetic ignores more of reality than geometry, because it ignores space. Thus the more a science ignores, the more exact it becomes. But I return to the question: how much can a science ignore of what is real?

First Principles

Let us say that I want to know a certain phenomenon F. In order to know this phenomenon, I have to go to its cause, let us say E. E is the origin, the ontological base of F. But I must also go to what determines E, let us say D. Thus in order to know phenomenon F, I go ‘back’ to its causes. The further ‘back’ I go, the greater my ‘comprehension’ of F. For D is not just the cause of E, but also of F. For this reason, going ‘back’ to causes also means going towards καθόλου, towards ‘the universal’ (cf. *Metaphysics* 982a 20–25). The further ‘back’ I go, the more I encounter general and simple things, which are the basis for those ‘behind’ which they lie; which means that reality has a certain ontological hierarchy and that everything has an ultimate origin, an ultimate ontological foundation—in this case, the simplest and most general principles.

But knowledge too has its hierarchy. *Metaphysics*, 982b 2–6:

and the first principles [τὰ πρῶτα] and the causes [τὰ αἴτια] are most knowable [μάλιστα ἐπιστητὰ]; for by reason of these, and from these, all other things are known, but these are not known by means of the things subordinate to them.

Knowledge is not homogenous: the knowledge of certain things, of first principles, is more important than the knowledge of other things, for it is on the knowledge of first principles that knowledge as a whole is based. Here we have a second aspect of the correlation between reality and knowledge. The first aspect concerned the correspondence between the λόγος of reality and the ‘logical’ character of

knowledge. This second aspect concerns the correlation between the hierarchy of reality and that of knowledge: the ultimate principles on which reality is founded are also the ‘most knowable’ things, that is, those on which the whole of knowledge is founded.

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel starts with *das selbige Bewußtsein* and ends up with *der objektive Geist* and knowledge of the divine. In the first two chapters of the first book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle starts from the senses (αἴσθησις, cf. 980a 1–981a 1) to arrive at the science of first principles, which is also a knowledge of the divine.

The divine intellect knows everything, all at once, by a sort of intuition. This way of knowing is not permitted to the human intellect. The human intellect cannot know everything, all at once. It knows ‘by turns’. In other words: the human intellect’s way of knowing presupposes a certain unfolding of knowledge, a road. For Aristotle, this road leads towards the knowledge of first principles.

The closer I get to first principles, the more I ignore of the totality of what is real. And the closer I get to first principles, the more exact science becomes, so much so that, according to Aristotle, ‘the most exact of the sciences [ἀκριβέσταται τῶν ἐπιστημῶν] are those which deal most with first principles [τὰ πρῶτα]’ (982a 25–26). The road of science leads, for Aristotle, to exactness.

The Alienation of Science

Science makes for abstraction: it abstracts from the individual only certain aspects and ignores the rest. The more a science ignores of what is real, the more exact it is. The more exact it is, the simpler its object becomes. The more I know what is simplest, the closer I come to divinity. Science brings me closer to divinity. But it also alienates me from my everyday world. Of course, science brings me closer to what is essential. It leaves aside only the accidental; but by leaving aside something, even if it is something non-essential, it ends up ignoring the whole. And the more it ignores of the whole, the more alien it becomes to me.

Leaving of oneself, wonder, and the state of questioning—the three inner dispositions that make possible the emergence of science in our life—take us out of our everyday life and prepare us for another life, one in which science plays a part. But science itself involves a rupture. It involves a rupture because it abstracts from the real only one of its aspects. And because, in setting up exactness as its ultimate goal, it directs me towards the simplest principles, which means towards all that is most alien to me. Science alienates not just because it abstracts, but because it takes me out of my everyday world.

‘[A]nd of the sciences [ἐπιστήμαι], also, that which is desirable on its own account and for the sake of knowing it [εἰδέναι] is more of the nature of wisdom [σοφία] than that which is desirable on account of its results’ (982a 14–16). The sciences, Aristotle tells us, ‘do not aim [directly] at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life’ (981b 20–23). And yet, certain benefits result from certain sciences. If

I live in the country and have a cow, it helps me to know something about the gestation of cows and so the gestation of cows interests me. If I no longer have a cow, if I have sold her, then it no longer interests me. However if the gestation of cows interests me as a problem of biology, then I begin to 'pursue science for its own sake'. Put in this way, things seems simple. But if we put things in this way, we risk losing sight of the core of what Aristotle is saying.

If the gestation of cows interested me only as long as I had a cow, then all the knowledge I have accumulated about the gestation of cows will be lost as soon as I no longer have a cow. However if the gestation of cows interests me as a problem of biology, then I will try somehow to preserve in my mind my knowledge about the gestation of cows. And in this way I 'revolve' and turn round on myself. I no longer do what everyone else does; I am no longer interested in the immediate, but in what is in my mind. And so I start to change my way of looking at the world. I start to think that everything exists only in my mind. I start to pursue science for its own sake.

This brings us to the theme of the rupture between everyday life and the life in which science plays a part. As I have said, leaving of oneself, wonder, and the state of questioning—the three inner dispositions that make possible the emergence of science in our life—take us out of our everyday life and prepare us for another life, in which science plays a part. Science, however, directs me towards 'science pursued for its own sake', and if I begin to pursue science for its own sake, then the rupture between everyday life and life organized around science becomes huge. For 'science pursued for its own sake' breaks me away from my everyday life, in which everything revolves around usefulness and pleasure.

When nothing else interests me any more but science, I completely overturn my normal way of relating to the world. Now I organize the things that surround me according to their knowability, and no longer, as previously, according to their importance for my everyday life. Now I am no longer interested in the immediate, nor in the urgent, nor in the important, but in that which is 'most knowable'. I start to change my way of looking at the world, and the world starts to structure itself differently for me. Now the world starts to be organized by the intellect, life starts to be divided up according to other criteria, and I start to become alienated from myself.

The rupture is not only between everyday life and the life in which science plays a part. A person is whole if they do all the things a person does: eating, sleeping, drinking, loving, knowing, admiring, imagining, running, and so on. But if I choose only scientific knowledge, and if I absolutize it and make it the aim of my life, then I become an intellectual, a person diminished and aberrant from the fullness of personhood. Choosing and absolutizing scientific knowledge is an ἀφαίρεσις, an abstracting, a breaking of one thing from another, and, at the human level, its consequence is an alienation from oneself.

Look at an intellectual. Can you tell how he runs? Can you tell if he is capable of admiring the autumn colours? No, none of all that. It is not because he is not interested in the autumn colours, however, that he is an intellectual. He is an intellectual because he has abstracted something, namely scientific knowledge, from the entirety

of the human, and because he has absolutized this fragment broken from the rest. The more exact a piece of knowledge, the more alien it is to me. Alien to me, to my life, to all our lives. Science itself abstracts from the individual only one aspect, and whoever pursues science abstracts from his being only one way of being, namely that of the intellectual.

He who, for the first time in history, chose and absolutized scientific knowledge must have appeared to others to be a man on the way to alienation from his community and even from himself. With time, this human type became more widespread, and was accepted, justified, and standardized.

In the Middle Ages, the aberration of science from the real became greater. With almost all the great medieval thinkers, the abstraction operated by science becomes the fundamental act of reason. In the Middle Ages, concepts, i.e. universal abstractions, and not things, became the true object of science. Now everything started to be focused on concepts, which, we might say, came to form a world in which the intellect began to enclose itself more and more. This enclosure of the intellect in the world of concepts continued and was aggravated, if I may say so, in the philosophical and scientific thinking of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

I shall leave aside a series of notes which I have made concerning the dispute over universals, from texts by Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Occam, together with a series of commentaries on Galileo, Bruno, Kepler, and Newton, as they are largely based on consultation of secondary sources. However I would like to say a few things about Descartes. For, as I see it, in his thinking, the alienation of science took a truly grave turn, a turn that made possible the appearance of modern science.

The Enclosing of Science with Descartes

Descartes is easy to read. And he is, beyond doubt, one of the most often read philosophers. But he is hard to understand. You need first of all to understand what he denies, and he denies a great many things. And then you need to read him very carefully and patiently. His texts are very clear and sometimes give the impression of being a collection of banalities; but it is these very banalities that make them hard to penetrate.

In his preface to the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes himself advises us as to how we should read his writings. Three readings, he tells us, are necessary: first an overall reading in which we pass over difficulties, the aim being 'merely to ascertain in a general way which matters I have dealt with'; then a reading in which the reader should follow the reasoning, and 'mark with a pen the places where he finds the difficulties'; and finally, a third reading, in which we think on the matters discussed in the text, and find solutions to the difficulties we have previously identified. And, Descartes concludes, while some difficulties will remain unsolved, the reader 'will discover their solution on a final re-reading' (Descartes 1985 vol. I, 185). How many books can one read this way in a lifetime?

Reason Equally Distributed

The *Discourse on the Method* begins thus: ‘*le bon sens* [*bona mens* in the Latin translation] is the best distributed thing in the world’ (Descartes 1985 vol. I, 111). What are we to understand here by *le bon sens*? *Le bon sens*, or reason (*raison*), Descartes continues, is the faculty with which we distinguish the true from the false.

Reason is for Descartes the essence of the human. ‘But what then am I?’ he asks in *Meditations on First Philosophy*. His answer is: ‘A thing that thinks’ (Descartes 1985 vol. II, 19). All I am in essence is an entity that thinks. Reason is our essence, and our ultimate goal is knowledge. Descartes thus to a certain extent denies the medieval conception, according to which man was not essentially only reason. He redefines the essence of the human, and this is an epoch-making step.

Reason, then, according to Descartes’s argument, has been equally distributed among us. We all have it to the same extent. In the dedication with which he opens his *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes says that ‘almost all those who can easily understand matters which belong to mathematics are quite unable to understand those relating to metaphysics, and vice versa.’⁶ So we are not all capable of understanding mathematics and metaphysics with equal ease. But how is such a thing possible if reason has been equally distributed among us? The diversity of our opinions, Descartes tells us in *Discourse on the Method*, does not result from some having more reason than others (as we generally tend to believe). No, it is due to the fact that we guide our reason along different paths. The path, then, is everything. The difference is one of paths. Reason has a path to follow in order to arrive at the truth, and everything depends on this path (cf. Descartes 1985 vol. I, 111).

The Pathways of Reason: Doubt

What indications should I follow to arrive at the truth? What rules should I obey? We find them in Descartes’s *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*). ‘Not stealing’ is a rule. But it is not *ad directionem ingenii*; that is, it does not give reason a direction. Descartes’s rules, twenty-one in number, set out the road, the pathway that reason has to follow in order to arrive at the truth.

‘We need a method if we are to investigate the truth of things,’ says Rule IV (Descartes 1985 vol. I, p. 15). Reason has been equally distributed among us; it is

⁶Dragomir’s quotation is based on the Abbé Picot’s 1647 French translation of the *Principles*, which here differs somewhat from the Latin text: ‘et je remarque presque en tous, que ceux qui conçoivent aisément les choses qui appartiennent aux mathématiques ne sont nullement propres à entendre celles qui se rapportent à la métaphysique, et au contraire, que ceux qui à celles-ci sont aisées ne peuvent comprendre les autres [...]’ (Descartes 1989, 26). Cf. the standard English translation: ‘and it generally happens with almost everyone else that if they are accomplished in Metaphysics they hate Geometry, while if they have mastered Geometry they do not grasp what I have written on First Philosophy’ (Descartes 1985 vol I, 192). [Trans.]

our essence, but it is only the means towards fulfilling our ultimate task: finding out the ‘truth of things.’ We are not in the truth. The truth must be acquired, found out, and for this I have to follow a particular pathway. Otherwise, I will mistake falsehood for truth. This means that we are somehow in an uncertain position between two things, between truth and falsehood. We waver between truth and falsehood. However everything depends on methodical doubt, not on this existential wavering.

Our everyday life is based on trust, on the natural trust, so to speak, that I have towards all that I find around me. Doubt emerges first of all as the falling apart of this natural trust, and it puts an end to certainty. Let us take a banal example: jealousy.

Those who love each other live in a harmony based on natural mutual trust. People in love have a spontaneous trust in one another. But this trust can crumble. Something suspicious appears: a handkerchief, an indefinable manner, a certain coldness. Something is no longer right. This something changes everything and leaves me prey to doubt. Because of this something, I now doubt all our past—I no longer know if it was true love or an illusion. The environment of our lives, which our love had transformed into the surroundings of intimacy, falls apart, and I no longer feel at home in it. I begin to doubt my friends, who may be lying to me out of friendship, my neighbours, and even my own dog, who may have seen what I have not seen. Everything around is now poisoned, just as the present, the past and the future are poisoned.

But I am not absolutely sure that I have been betrayed. I waver. I have left the surroundings of love and now live in a zone that is foreign to me, although on the outside nothing has changed. In fact everything is happening within me. Jealousy and doubt are inside me. The world is just as it was before, but the link between me and the world is broken, and I am now all alone. The only thing that can save me now is the truth. The jealous person is obsessed with the truth. Sleep, what I eat, how I dress: none of these interests me any more. I no longer want anything but the truth. Doubt has created in me an unquenchable thirst for truth. And the truth I seek is something evident. Not what someone or other has said, but the absolute truth understood as something evident.

What happens to the philosopher is no different from what happens to the jealous lover. It is the same thing, except that the ‘domains’ are different. The philosopher’s doubt, too, is a state of soul; and like the jealous lover, the philosopher pushes doubt as far as it will go.

Dubito, ergo cogito. Cogito, ergo sum. Doubt is reason, and reason is what I really am. If I am a philosopher, then doubt, reason, and my existence make up a whole.

What does the philosopher doubt? According to Descartes, the philosopher is the person who doubts everything. Consider the beginning of the *Principles of Philosophy*: ‘The seeker after truth must, once in the course of his life, doubt everything, as far as possible’ (Descartes 1985 vol. I, 193). The philosopher decides to put everything in doubt. At least once in his life—which means that doubt represents a major event in his destiny. Putting a question mark over all that you know is the start

of philosophy. If you are really a philosopher, your doubt must extend to cover all your surroundings. But this doubt that is within you will make you lonely, and you will end up standing alone in front of the world, driven by an unquenchable thirst for truth.

What did Descartes doubt? First of all, he doubted all that he had learnt (see Rule III). All that I have learnt, he says, is about the past of human knowledge. And this past must be put under the sign of doubt. At the same time, Descartes opens himself to the future. The rules for the direction of the mind are a road that breaks with the past. The past becomes history, and we need a starting point for the road that opens our way into the future. Descartes rejects the past en masse, and says: I, Descartes, am a new beginning. And thus knowledge is historicized.

Doubt is methodical, and seeks that which is absolutely beyond all doubt. What is beyond all doubt is the certain, the truth as something evident. What is evident is the evident character of certain ideas about which reason cannot doubt. Truth is thus a matter that concerns reason.

The Enclosing of Science

In *Discourse on the Method*, he tells us his own story. First, he studied a number of things in school, and then, as soon as he could, he began to travel. After he had travelled, he decided to enquire into himself. He was in Germany at the time, he tells us. It was late in 1619, or perhaps early the following year. He had gone to Germany to attend the coronation of the Emperor Ferdinand. We do not know exactly where he was in Germany when he started to enquire into himself. All we know, from the *Discourse*, is that he found himself alone, in a quiet, well-heated room. After beginning to doubt all the education he had received and all the knowledge he had acquired in his travels, Descartes arrived in a ‘room,’ that is, a place isolated from the world. Doubt had made of him a solitary thinker. Doubt, which had opened up a crevasse between him and the world, then made him seek the truth within himself, which means that reflection on the intellect now becomes the foundation of science. In the setting of this modest room, human reason weighed up the world, and transformed it into *object*, while itself becoming *subject*. This image of Descartes—a man thirsting with the desire for truth, alone and isolated—seems to embody the situation in which science itself, precisely through the thinking of Descartes, then found itself. Descartes’s self-isolation is not an existential self-isolation. It is the self-isolation of science itself.

Science itself is at the end of a long road, a road that began with Aristotle and continued with the medieval thinkers. All along this road, science has been breaking with the world, dealing with more and more abstract aspects. This way has led it to the relation object-subject. The ego now becomes, if I may say so, a-cosmic; that is, it is no longer part of a world, but stands in opposition to the world. The Cartesian ego is a subject confronting a world that has become object. The world is no longer a whole in which man must find his fulfilment through philosophy (as in Plato) or

through faith and love (as in Christianity). Man and the city are no longer (as in Plato, in the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*) part of a cosmos. No, the world is now something that is placed before the intellect. With Descartes, philosophy ceases to be an attempt to situate man within the world. Before Descartes, it is man who is thrown into the world; with Descartes (and likewise with Kant and the whole of German idealism), the world becomes that which is thrown in front of me, i.e. an object. With Descartes, science breaks away from the world and seeks its basis in the intellect. Science has as its object something that belongs to the world, and so is directed towards the 'outside'. But with Descartes, science turns back on the intellect and seeks its basis there, that is to say, 'inside'.

The 'primary seeds of truth', which are indubitable truths, lie at the roots of all science (see Rule IV; Descartes 1985 vol. I, 18, cf. also p. 17). In them, reality is given to us in unmediated form, and starting from it, by intuition and deduction, we arrive at science (see Rules III and IV). The *locus* of truth thus moves to the intellect (see Rule VIII: 'there can be no truth or falsity in the strict sense except in the intellect alone,' Descartes 1985 vol. I, 30; I do not propose to discuss here the difference between reason and intellect). It is in the intellect that we are to seek the basis of true knowledge, and ultimately the basis of all reality. For Descartes, the guarantee of the indubitable truths that we are given is God. But in fact man remains for him the basis of all reality, for it is he who institutes the fundamental object–subject relationship.

'To do something for *x*' presupposes that *x* is *ein Seiendes*, something that exists. I can do something for my mother, for my father, or for my beloved, for they all exist. Now, if I say that I am pursuing science 'for its own sake', does this mean that science exists as *ein Seiendes*? Let us say that I study the gestation of cows as a problem of biology. Gestation exists, cows exist. But biology? Biology as 'science for its own sake'? Of course it also exists. But it exists in a different way from my possessions or the cattle in my cowshed. It exists, but it is an intellectual, an immaterial reality. When he claims that 'science for its own sake' is possible, Aristotle is claiming the reality of science. An immaterial reality, to be sure, but a reality nonetheless. Moreover, science pursued for its own sake is, according to Aristotle, 'the only free science, for it alone exists for itself' (*Metaphysics*, 982b 27–28). Science pursued for its own sake is thus autonomous; it is free, i.e. free to abide by its own rules. In short: it has a reality and an autonomy of its own, which allow the intellect to enclose itself in science as in a world. I now return to Descartes. In Descartes, science acquires an even greater reality and autonomy than in Aristotle, and his thinking allows the intellect an even greater degree of enclosure in the world of science.

The intellect is for Descartes an instrument of knowledge (see Rule VIII), and the rules for the direction of the intellect are like the instructions for use of a machine. *Instrumentum* comes from *instruo*, which means 'to line up', 'to arrange'. The instrument is that which, by lining up and arranging knowledge, lays the foundations of science. However in relation to the instrument that has generated it, science acquires a certain autonomy. The instrumentality of the intellect is the origin of any modern instrument, and it is what has made possible the emergence of modern

technology. And the autonomy of science has made possible the autonomy of technology. But let me stop here.

Epilogue

There exists in the intellect the latent possibility that it may deviate from its role of guide to the whole human being, and proclaim its own supremacy. This possibility has been realized since the days of ancient Greece, with the intellect transforming itself from guide into producer. What it has produced is science, whose constitution Aristotle grasped so well.

Science promotes an aberration from the real, by abstracting certain aspects from it; thus science institutes, for those who practice it, an aberration from the human, namely an alienation from the human in its entirety by abstracting from that entirety one single way of existing, the intellectual way.

Science had a destiny. It transformed itself, and from Descartes onwards, took a road in which its aberration from the real and the aberration of its practitioners from the human have increased enormously. But the aberration of science from the real has produced something with profound effects on the real: modern technology.

The intellect is contradictory not only because it is both colossal and precarious, but because it can both make us free, setting us on the road of thought, and enslave us, depriving us of all that most directly concerns us. It is contradictory also because what it institutes, namely science, is an abstraction from the real that has led ultimately, through the technology it has generated, to an enrichment of the real. How amazing it is that we do not see these contradictions and do not realize how enigmatic the intellect is in consequence.

At first we were stewards: according to *Genesis*, God left the world in our care. *A Deo in curram*, says Calvin in his *Institutio*. However we did not remain stewards, but wanted to become masters. And so we have done, only that, *nota bene*, we are masters of a *created* world. We are masters over a nature that we did not make, but which, after we had killed our Father (*Gott ist tot*), was left in our hands. We have been left to fend for ourselves, and it is our reason that makes the laws. We are like teenagers left for a weekend to do as they please. We are living *without God, alone, fending for ourselves*.

Left with nature in our arms, we have hurried, with the help of technology, to get rid of it. In fact we now only live in a universe of technology. Everything around us is technology. Nature has been relegated to paddocks: parks, reserves, garden plots on the edge of towns, etc. Nature no longer surrounds us; it is somewhere else, *ailleurs*; we have to go to it. We go on excursions into nature, precisely because nature is no longer our environment. It has become inaccessible and exotic. Which also means that nature is no longer in us. In any case, we may be sure that the world in which we live is one of technology, not of nature.

At last, without God and without nature, we are in a fully social world. In modernity, we live in towns, and towns are formed by 'free association'. We are *associates*,

but contiguous, not close. We are simply side by side, without necessarily being together. This is the landscape of the modern world in which we live. It is the result of progress, of the advance that always comes at the price of something lost. But we do not have eyes to see what we are losing.

How far the science and technology of our days are from the science and technology of Antiquity! How huge their progress has been! How far will they be able to progress in the future? To the end of the road? But what end? And for what? For the good of humanity? But what humanity? These brutes that surround us? Why, ultimately, do we want to progress? Let us take a TV set, for example: it is a colossal achievement of the intellect, but everything becomes relative when you start to watch it. Did it take so many millennia of science and technology for us to be able to watch Rai 1? But everyone will have an answer: the doctor will tell you that we progress in order to treat ourselves better and better; the politician will refer to all sorts of things, as the case may be; and so on. We all live in the paradigm of modern science. All people, regardless of what they do, conceive the world according to modern science. But can we believe in science without knowing where it will take us?

Technology has been constituted into a world that nowadays includes us all, and has come to represent, in Nietzsche's words, *eine Gesamt-Abirrung der Menschheit von ihren Grundinstinkten*, a total aberration of humankind from its basic instincts—at least from its instincts of self-preservation, now that technology has reached the point where it can turn against us. We have already begun irrevocably to lose species of animals and plants. We have begun to lose also the strangeness of the other in the great urban agglomerations. Is what we are now losing on this earth not too big a price? Is this where we wanted to end up? Is this where our unquenchable desire for truth has led us? Is this where the road that started in the thinking of the Greek philosophers leads? All these questions are not the questions of the scientist. And nor do they seem to be our questions. Modern science is the metaphysics of our times. And like any metaphysics, it is intolerant and suspicious.

How great is the danger of self-destruction? We do not know. What can we do to avert a catastrophe? Green parties? Nuclear disarmament treaties? Or must we simply recognize that we do not know what the goal of our scientific and technological progress is? But could a politician, whose role is so important nowadays, ever recognize that he does not know the goal of our progress? Could Bill Clinton or Chirac admit such a thing? What is to be done? What would our salvation be?

Who among the Roman generals would have believed that a poor Jew, a carpenter's boy, would come and change everything? Who among the great businessmen of the early nineteenth century would have believed that a man without any wealth, writing all day long at a table in the British Museum, Karl Marx by name, would change the world by his thinking? Someone, I believe in my heart, will come one day and will rethink the integration of humanity into the world. And his thinking will be our good fortune.

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Alexandru Dragomir: Fragments of a Portrait

Andrei Pleșu

I

Having previously met Constantin Noica, our meeting with Alexandru Dragomir inevitably inscribed itself, for us, in a scenario of symmetries. We judged everything by comparison, astonished to see, in flesh and blood, a figure whom our ‘model’ treated as his own equal. Constantin Noica would often subject his own thoughts and writings to the rigors of the expert, ‘Sănduc’, who would pronounce without complaisance, and sometimes with kindly sarcasm: ‘You write beautifully, Dinu! But when do you intend to get started on philosophy?’¹ Visibly irritated, Noica in his turn lost no time in ironically putting down Dragomir’s ‘sterility’: ‘Sănduc seems to think that philosophy is just a matter of giving yourself up to thought...’ But beyond this show of incompatibility, a certain comradely respect and a certain collusive affection rose immediately to the surface. Dragomir admired Noica’s intellectual ingenuity, while Noica had an equal regard for Dragomir’s ruthless professionalism. ‘Thinking beautifully’ and ‘thinking exactly’ lay in the balance before us: again and again we had the opportunity to observe how much exactness can be produced by style and what ineffable beauties may lie hidden in exactness.

II

Due to the madness of the time, it was the professional Dragomir from whom the ‘profession’ of philosophy was withheld. In a Romania ideologically confiscated by dictatorship, he reserved a secondary, private, clandestine role for his philosophical preoccupations, camouflaging them behind trivial pursuits. He was an unknown, ‘hidden’ philosopher, a philosopher who could not be recognized as such by those

¹ ‘Sănduc’ and ‘Dinu’ are diminutives forms of Alexandru and Constantin respectively. [Trans.]

with whom he interacted socially. Moreover, whether by nature or as the result of practice, he did not bear the 'marks' of philosophy, its professional 'distortions'. Noica's aristocratic halo and charming affability, seasoned with subtle reflections and with all sorts of sapient allusions, were in perfect contrast to the way Dragomir came across: alert, urbane, polite in an unaffected sportsmanlike way, he frequently seemed happy to engage in social chat. A man apparently without taboos, without airs, without the cult of statuary gesticulation. He did not display his metaphysics, did not attract attention, with a pretence of nonchalance, to his hidden depths of competence. His sharp intelligence, unrestrained by protocol, characteristically expressed itself in his physical appearance: small and wiry, mobile, rapid, Alexandru Dragomir had the unpredictable agility of the Socratic gadfly. Harassing, stringent, penetrating, a tonic combination of precision and volatility, he nonetheless never lost his contact with the ground, building his mental constructions more by observation and logic than by speculative dexterity. His stock of instruments included, on the one hand, the immediate, the 'utter banality' of life, and on the other, the classic philosophical text, read rigorously according to the method learnt in Heidegger's seminars. He did not go out in search of 'ideas' (and indeed he boasted that he did not have any); he did not appreciate displays of cultural fireworks ('anyone can be subtle'); he would not give twopence for 'originality'. He simply wanted to understand, to give an honest answer to few questions that seemed to him to be important: in the first place, the question of time. The rest was, for him, external ornament, if not imposture. It seemed to him inappropriate to write anything before he had the final answer, clearly articulated. He had succeeded in separating the exercise of thinking from its public manifestation. He was a philosophical 'loner', a virtuoso of soliloquy. In other words, his thinking was for him the supreme *intimacy* of the spirit. The invitation to convert this intimacy into a published 'body of work' thus seemed to him to be a trivial and vain indiscretion.

III

After a number of years of friendly seminars, in the course of which Dragomir astonished us with the skill with which he analytically decomposed commonplaces and their surroundings, the texts of philosophy and the platitudes of common sense, something happened towards the end which astonished me, at least, more than anything that had gone before. I heard him suddenly wondering, as if drawing up a laconic balance statement of his life's pursuits, if there was any sense in the effort of philosophizing. Do you actually find out anything at the end of a well conducted philosophical enquiry? We had previously agreed that it was in the nature of philosophy to give answers that did not suspend questioning. But that did not mean that the questioning had to start again from where it had been at the beginning. It might be true that the answers did not actually cancel out the initial question, but they enriched it, redistributed it, placed it in a new light. This time, however, Dragomir seemed dissatisfied, or in any case sceptical, about what was *really* gained by the

interrogative approach. The bottom line, he said, is that we have two possibilities: either what we find at the end of our laborious investigation is slight, insignificant, and irrelevant, or what we find meets our expectations, but then we are simply tautologically doubling the discourse of the world. In this case, all the philosopher can do is to reformulate in the language of the intellect that which is already given, without, in fact, adding anything new. To put it brutally, the philosopher delivers either too little or nothing at all. (Assuming, of course, that he does not deliver a spreading error.) This is a theme that Constantin Noica would never have come to. Noica believed so intensely in philosophy that to question its 'sense' would have seemed to him almost in bad taste. He believed in the sublimity and the *novelty* that philosophy brought along with itself. And the older he got, the stronger this belief grew. But Alexandru Dragomir, who did not allow himself to add any emotion, any illusion or 'beautification' to the 'craft', felt, at the end of his life, exposed before the possible *emptiness* of his own endeavour. It was not just the sense of philosophy that was in question, but the sense of his whole existence. The able, solid, perspicacious thinker was unexpectedly shaken by the *muteness* of philosophy, by the fear that perhaps he should have looked *elsewhere*, for *something else*; and that, in the final instance, even when practised with maximum seriousness (indeed *precisely* for that reason), philosophy 'did not hold', resolving things only in a wandering manner, while avoiding the merciless perplexities of current reflexivity. Determined, out of methodological scrupulousness, to say only *what can be said* and to think only *what can be thought* with a minimum rational foundation, philosophy inevitably runs the risk of prescribing limits to the real that are no more than its own limits. It was clear to me that Dragomir had reached this crisis *precisely* because, technically speaking, he had thought rigorously, well-armoured historically and metaphysically, without in any way anticipating the result of his journey and without any prejudices or expectations of his own. It was equally clear to me that a pathetic tension had taken hold of his later years, a tension which, in spite of his old skill in self-persiflage and his sound Transylvanian sense of measure, had a certain undertone of despair. A man who had almost forbidden himself to 'produce' texts excelled in the analysis of texts: thus he *needed* the texts of *others* in order to configure his own discourse. A man who had always thought for himself, and above all *by himself*, a man whose only interlocutors had for decades been the great dead men of philosophy, from the Pre-Socratics to Heidegger, was at last enjoying his meeting with us, four or five younger friends, better able to listen than to respond. He, the solitary, was bathing with delight in our modest colloquy, just as he who had written himself off as an author lived with euphoria among the most prolific authors in the field... And in the end, he whom an exigency of intellectual sobriety had led to expel religion politely from among his systematic preoccupations let slip the question, as if by chance, at the end of one of our meetings: 'Could you lend me a Bible?' Did he really not have one? If only from a cultural point of view, it seemed to me astounding, just as astounding as the declaration that he, the possessor of one of the most acute minds I have ever encountered, made about Father Scrima's interpretation of the prayer of Saint John the Stranger: 'I don't understand a thing!' It took,

indeed, a professional of the stature of Dragomir, to give philosophy, in a flash, the revelation of its own muteness, of its refined opacity and tattered nobility.

IV

As irony (if not some mysterious worldly or unworldly justice) would have it, it is actually from the circle of his last interlocutors that the editors of the present volume have emerged. Alexandru Dragomir thus finds himself condemned post-mortem to the status of author which he knowingly sabotaged all his life. I do not believe this turn of things would have displeased him. After all, it shows that the practice of philosophy is, in the final instance, ‘worthwhile’—if not through the ultimate validity of its answers, then at least through the collateral benefits that it may yield. Before it finally has to face its own emptiness, philosophy scatters over the earth the fine dust of intelligence, of honest seeking, of disinterested curiosity. And the philosopher is saved: his reticence about communicating is transformed into a source of communication. His silence stimulates the volubility of his editors, the asceticism with which he consistently refused to share anything in writing is matched by the reversed asceticism of those who strive to tend his legacy, inviting us to share in it. Thus everything is in good order. In the end, to delegate to others the ‘bureaucracy’ of publishing is just another way of addressing posterity...

V

There are two sorts of reading, Alexandru Dragomir once told us, sometime around February 1987: the reading of the ‘reader’, who seeks to find out whether what is written in the text is true, and that of the ‘author’, who is interested in the overall structure in which the text has its place, the suite represented by the ‘works’ in their entirety. The ‘reader’ reads books and extracts quotations. The ‘author’ reads whole bodies of work and does hermeneutics. I would add that there is also a third possibility: the reading of the ‘creator’, that is, the person who reads in order to write. This was, I think, the case of Constantin Noica. He read in order to depart (literally) from the text, to imprint his own image on the text he had read. He often used to say that he had achieved this performance with all the great authors of philosophy, from Plato to Hegel. (He admitted, with vague irritation, that his attempt with the Gospels ‘had not gone well’: he had been unable to ‘impose himself’ on them, to give them his own tonality.) Alexandru Dragomir, on the other hand, read in order to reach the autonomous meaning of the text, and through it, the thinking of the author. His approach did not seek to foreground hermeneutic technique or the brilliance of his own talent, or to impose a ‘Dragomir imprint’, but rather to find the precise meaning of the passage under discussion, its metaphysical ‘intention’. Reading, for Dragomir, was not the search for his own truth, but the *instrumentalization* of his own intellect,

self-surrender, in order to identify the truth of the *other*, the author he was reading. Thus he would read Aristotle to find out what Aristotle wanted to say, which ought to seem perfectly normal to us, if we were not surrounded by the super-intelligent manoeuvres of so many prestidigitators, who strive to find the Derrida, or the Freud, or the Rorty in Aristotle. If from Noica we learnt to treat the text with (well-tempered) freedom, from Dragomir we learnt scrupulous piety, *servitude* towards the text and its author.

VI

Dragomir's humour was part of a long-practiced strategy of undermining solemnity. In his relations with others, as in his relations with the great texts and with ideas, he refused the *philosophical pose*, the intellectual starched collar. He did not want to give fatal brilliance to reflexivity, did not seek the dumbfounding effect, the Luciferian pirouette. (He was among the few former students of Nae Ionescu who were prepared to regard the latter critically.) He thought with naturalness and suggested, by his relaxed manner, that the philosophical labour was not a highly formal manoeuvre, that it did not call for festive disguise or elaborate ceremony. To fish for an issue in the confusion of everyday life, and approach it in a matter-of-fact way: that was the hygiene of his intelligence. He was serious, but he did not make an abuse of sobriety; when the conceptual tension accumulated by his demonstrations became too great, he would be quick to introduce into the recipe the *witz* that was needed to 'cut' the scholarly mayonnaise, to help us to return to 'normal', with the aid of ideas. In other words, he did not enjoy thinking in the rarefied atmosphere of 'fundamental attitudes'. I never saw him in a bad mood, which distinguished him clearly from the classic stereotype of the philosopher. The 'guiding lights' of the history of philosophy do not seem to have been monuments of good spirits. Kant was, it seems, profoundly deficient in this respect. And nor, I believe, was Hegel the life and soul of any party, not to mention Thomas Aquinas, Descartes or Husserl, Aristotle or Heidegger. Of the great names, only Plato (on the Socratic line of inheritance) and, paradoxically, Nietzsche, seem to have had some sense of the comic. It is a theme worthy of research... In any case, Alexandru Dragomir belongs rather to the category of exceptions. He was sufficiently serious to leave, in his philosophical 'manners', a free place for play. He would rather appear frivolous than appear boring. It seemed to him ridiculous to pronounce the truth with capital letters.

VII

Noica's discourse generally provoked a reaction along the lines of: 'I would never have thought of that!' Listening to Dragomir, you felt the urge to say: 'Why did I never think of that?' With the former you discovered the unexpected, with the latter,

the evident. There are two different kinds of metaphysical joy. The unexpected is associated with exaltation, with fancy and the exotic. That which is evident unveils the 'strangeness' of the familiar, the mystery of things near at hand. Alexandru Dragomir did not cultivate the techniques of evasion, put no trust in inspired divagations, and did not rely on the intuitive surprise. His, on the other hand, was the virtue of patience, of repetitive stubbornness, of static and lucid drilling. He managed to take to its limits the capacity (and obstinacy) of philosophy to explain the immanent with no other referent than the immanent itself. He managed, likewise, to live in conformity with the makeup of his thinking: not only did he have the (organized) passion of the immediate and the desire to make it transparent for the intellect, but also the talent of cooperating harmoniously with the immediate, accepting it in a gracious and virile manner. He was civilized and relaxed, and made friendship a cult and conversation a delight. He had been *un homme à femmes* in his day, but had grown old untroubled by the inertial eroticism that afflicts some men... I have never met a more discreet, tender and pure couple than that which Alexandru Dragomir, at the end of his life, achieved with Nina Călinescu. In the success of this partnership, one could feel a dimension that went beyond the logic of the real, and that 'secreted' transcendence from the very substance of its fulfilment. About this success, Dragomir never spoke. It was just one of his many silences, which cannot be recovered in any book. At the end of his life, Constantin Noica was aware that he had said all that he had to say. Alexandru Dragomir seems not to have wanted to say more than what was strictly necessary...

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