

DIALECTIC ASPECTS OF BELIEF

Is there a specific form of dialectic reason as distinct from reason in the strict classical sense? It is very doubtful, and dialectic reason is very probably a myth.¹ I will not discuss this point here. But there is no doubt that dialectic aspects of conscience do exist; they exist not only in the conscience of the scholar, but in conscience in general which, according to Goussier, is always open, ever ready to revise itself, to doubt its provisional principles, to abandon the positions it had taken up.

Ever ready, certainly, but often lazy to do so, or too reticent. Since conscience, in all its forms, is awareness of self, it is a state that is not really a state (as when we speak of liquid state or solid state), but an unstable state that is essentially self-destructive as soon as it discovers itself, and that subsists for a moment only because of its own laziness, its slowness in understanding that it no longer exists in the state in which it was discovered since this very discovery, which is self-awareness, modifies its object. However, let us take our examples from conscience-belief.

Translated by S. J. Greenleaves.

¹ R. Ruyer, "Le mythe de la 'raison' dialectique," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 1961.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

The Pharisee's conscience is easy—too easy. The Publican's conscience should be uneasy. At least this is how the Pharisee by definition sees it, since he is so superior. But the Publican, if he can read the Gospel, could pray as follows: "My God, I render thanks unto Thee, I cannot do so like that hypocrite of a Pharisee who respects the Law, who gives alms, and whose conscience is falsely easy. I thank Thee, that I am a no-good." This reversal is far from being theoretical. It even provides a good key to understanding a large section of contemporary literature. But the Pharisee, if he too has read the Gospel and if he has been made conscious of his phariseeism, theoretically, can no longer be a real Pharisee; it is now he who has become "authentic," as compared to the Publican who is so pleased with himself. That is, at least, on condition that he has not merely revarnished his falsely easy conscience. This often happens, as we know.

THE MUNDANE FEMALE SNOB

The woman of the world who used to speak in a "sophisticated" way, begins to wish not to seem a snob. She therefore lards her conversation with vulgar expressions and phrases, and invites her acquaintances to partake of "some swell hot-dogs and a glass of beer." Then she notices that her snob friend is perplexed by this new slant, and she switches back to Bourbon, champagne, the "Imperfect Subjunctive," "just like everyone else."

THE PREDESTINED MONK AND THE DAMNED ONE AND THEIR PREMONITORY VISIONS

As we know conscious foresight often destroys its object. In Lequier's *Dialogue*, two monks have a premonitory vision, which gives them momentary participation in divine, eternal Prescience. One of them, who was at the time a model of all virtue, sees himself in the years to come turning from virtue to vice and, in the end, damned. The other, a veritable rascal at the time, sees himself, in the end, acquiring the odour of sanctity, and as from that moment one of the elect.

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A similar premonition, if held to be certainly true, would so destroy the psychological situation of the believer in predestination (in general), forever uncertain of his own destiny, that Lequier is forced to suppose that his two monks not only forget their premonitory vision, but know that they are bound to forget it.

“TO BELIEVE” SHOULD BE A DEFECTIVE VERB

According to Moore² the statement: “I believe it is going to rain,” has an analogous meaning—or rather it has an analogous usage—to: “It is going to rain.” But the meaning of: “I thought it was going to rain,” is not the same as: “At that moment, it was raining.” The first sentence mentions a (false) belief, the second a true fact. It would seem that the verb “to believe” has always the same meaning, at any given time, like the verb “to eat” or the verb “to run.” But this is not so, because of the ‘dialectic’ nature of conscience.

In the Present Tense to believe means “to believe the truth of.” In the Past it could mean to believe wrongly. On the other hand, if a verb meaning “to believe wrongly” existed, it would be defective, “it would not have a significative first person of the Present Indicative.”³ “To imagine” often has this meaning of “to believe wrongly.” But in the first person of the Indicative: “I imagine that,” changes meaning and means: “I believe, I am probably not wrong...” We often say: “I am wrong,” but in fact this always means: “I was wrong, and I shall correct my error and turn it into truth.”

The verb “to believe” should therefore be defective too, but only in the Past. It is most peculiar that the verbs “to believe,” “to be wrong,” “to be certain that...,” should have the same grammatical form as “to eat,” “to run,” etc.

ADAM’S FIRST SIN

Adam’s sin consisted, in spite of being forbidden to do so, in wanting “to know good and evil.” But how could he sin, (that

² Quoted by L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Enquiries*, II, x.

³ L. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

is behave evilly by choosing evil), before he knew good and evil? To leave the state of innocence can only be an act of innocence, since an innocent man acts without malice. Therefore to leave the state of innocence is impossible. A man cannot steer towards a value—or a non-value—before he, as the helmsman, knows of its existence. An innocent being cannot cease to be so by his own action. The meaning of good and evil must be imparted to him, he cannot grasp it on his own. This seems to be a case in which the dialectic of conscience plays no part. Its path is blocked at the very start. In reality, dialectic does not automatically play a part. An innocent man is always perverted by some external action. (Hence the myth of the Serpent and the Devil).

If one disregards the myth and all external intervention, diabolical or otherwise, to leave the state of innocence, if this is possible, is an ascent as well as a fall. It is an “emergence” and not a dialectic effect. It is after all in this sense that men have understood it. Thus Adam’s sin, representing man’s first real appearance, beyond unconscious animality, has been regarded with great indulgence by his unhappy descendants.

HE WHO HAS FAITH SHOULD NOT KNOW WHAT FAITH IS

The consciousness of believing implies a certain detachment from the object of belief. He who believes should not know he believes. He should have the impression that he can see, or that he knows. And yet how can he who has no faith know what it is?

FAITH CANNOT BE A VIRTUE

Let us assume the thesis: “Faith is a virtue, lack of faith is a sin.” If I have no faith, I do not think the lack of faith is a sin. André Gide is merely joking when he writes: “I do not believe in the Devil. But this is what the Devil hopes, that I should not believe in him.”

And yet, even in this case, conscience exists as an unstable state. Indeed, as is shown by experience, a believer who is los-

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ing his faith may feel deep despair, or be terrified like Herodotus, who begged the Gods and the Heroes to forgive him after he had criticized their legends.

Once belief has been clearly recognized as false, it is difficult to understand how one can continue to suffer (except from a sensation of residual emptiness, like after a tooth has been extracted).

Of Renan (of whom he had not read one word) Samuel Butler writes: "There is an article on him in the *Times*... of the worst *Times* kind, and that is saying much. It appears he whines about his lost faith, and professes to wish that he could believe as he believed when young. No sincere man will regret having attained a true opinion concerning anything he has ever believed." And he adds: "My contempt knows no limits. (Has he an accent to his name? I despise him too much to find out.)"

FALSE DIALECTICS OF THE WILL

The notion of a dialectic "reason" in the Hegelian sense is based, I think, on a confusion. An imperfect experience of the mind, leading to a series of attempts that turn out to be errors, which must then be corrected, and which, unlike scientific theories, never achieves a definitive success, in conformity with the non-temporal requirements of reality, is mistaken for an experience of the mind of a higher order that carries with it the Key to an historical development. When a carefully thought-out project reveals, with use, internal contradictions, and has to be modified, then one must turn once again to non-temporal reason in order to work out a second project, more carefully, that aims at the same ends as the first, with other means, or in other circuitous ways.

In the order of belief, as in the order of the will, properly so-called, (will to an end and not will to a means), as in the order of love, that which lends a dialectic aspect to conscience is, in this case, that there is no possible detour. Any attempt at making a detour is self-condemned as insincere. The will to believe that belief is pragmatistic, with the ulterior motive of the usefulness for others and for oneself of believing, is mere scepticism. As

* S. Butler, *The Notebooks* (Johnathan Cape, 1926), vol. xx, p. 344.

it is in the will to love. The history of a conversion, or of successive conversions, with different aims, should not be considered as if it were a series of attempts and errors, a technical adjustment. It is a "movement," involuntary by definition, and therefore from this point of view—and only this point of view—it resembles Hegelian and Marxist "movement," in which phase *a* cannot aim at phase *c* through *b* but is carried towards it in spite of itself. In fact it is rather the progressive discovery of a superior order of values, at first unperceived or aimed at in a wrong way.

Thus Jung, says Fromm, with his therapeutic use of religious belief is more of an unbeliever than Freud, who assumes a position against "the religious illusion"—and who is not such a firm believer in Reason—which could eventually bring him back into a faith of a higher order. But Freud himself falls into a involuntary contradiction when he "explains psychologically" scientific curiosity and belief in reason itself. Once he had been made conscious of this contradiction, Freud could have drawn on it either for a new (more irremediable) scepticism or else a new faith—in a Logos—God.

THE ROBOT SAINT

Faith based on proofs is not faith, but belief-knowledge. In the same way love that is strictly proportional to the actual qualities of the loved one cannot be love. In *The Quest of Saint Aquin*⁵ the saint is revealed as being no more than a robot. This Robot has embraced the Catholic faith because he is perfectly logical. One cannot, for a very good reason, give the psychological—and dialectic—history of his "conversion."

CALCULATED REPENTENCE

Whenever belief, or faith, is conceived as a kind of cold and calculated adherence to a ready-made system, one arrives at such puerile results as "calculated repentance": "I may sin, because I can then go and confess, and shall eventually repent."

⁵ By Antony Boucher.

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HYPOTHETICAL BELIEF AND CONDITIONED LOVE

Coming as it does as a decision taken after the bet, Pascalian faith is, if not a psychological impossibility (because of psychical multiplicity and the subconscious mind it is possible to forget the considerations already mentioned, and therefore to arrive at approximative sincerity), it is at least a caricature of belief, since by virtue of the principle of non-circumambulation of the will one cannot form a hypothesis of one's own belief unless it is either dead or non-existent. Pascal's bet, or lottery, demands the following hypotheses.

Suppose I believe in God (and that God either exists or not),
Suppose I don't believe in God (and that God either exists or not).

In the hypothetical state a similar belief, detached from the "I" as an object, is no more than a pseudo-belief. Once the same belief is "subjugated," this acquired belief will have no more value than the "sincere-fabricated-love" in R. Sheckley's utopia. He imagines⁶ an establishment for super-prostitution, whose Manager uses psychological techniques for conditioning, to make his girls sincerely, though only momentarily, in love with their client. This he announces in his advertizing prospectus, and this in fact he provides. The woman conditioned in this way is no less a prostitute, in spite of her momentary sincerity.

BELIEF WITH A PILL

To judge the value of Pascalian faith it is enough to imagine that progress in Chemistry and Pharmacy were to permit the manufacture of "pills of belief"—just as in the Best of all Worlds there are "substitutes for violent passions." Once the libertine, pencil in hand, after a calculation of probabilities, has deduced that it is to his advantage to take the lottery ticket for belief proposed by Pascal, he swallows the pill.

⁶ R. Sheckley, *Pilgrimage to Earth*.

THE TRUE DIALECTIC OF BELIEF

Pascal himself is more inspired when he makes God say to the unbeliever: "You would not search for Me unless you had already found Me." When Voltaire cynically exclaims: "If God did not exist, we would have to invent Him," one can reply: "If God did not exist, man could not invent Him." "If God did not exist..." that is to say if values were not inherent both in man and in all beings and could yet be discovered in a kind of recurrent dialectic, after the manner of Gonseth, who touches up the principles, avoiding a vicious circle, or who sees them more clearly. The matter could be examined thus: "I am looking for a real belief, therefore my search is already a belief; it postulates that the real belief I am looking for is worth the search." We have there neither detour nor vicious circle. On the contrary it would be contradictory to say: "I am looking for truth, authentic truth, and I don't believe in anything."

Is real dialectic truly dialectic in character? It is open to doubt. This basic belief expresses quite simply the anticipatory dynamism inherent in any conscience. A conscience is never a pure state. It is always a tension towards something good or towards something better. Its very life is to believe. In this sense it always anticipates (unlike the Robot Saint or a calculating love that draws up a budget). To go on living is to believe, even if one makes a show of scepticism, which is purely verbal.

Tu crois aux contes de fées,
Aux jours néfastes, aux songes,
Moi, je ne crois qu'en tes mensonges.
Et si profonde est ma foi...
Que je ne vis plus que pour toi.⁷

ABSOLUTE REVELATION AND REVELATION IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE

There is a vicious circle of constituted Reason, which proposes itself as its own guarantee, or the Revelation of the theologians, based on the supposedly divine nature of the Revealer. This vicious circle is shattered in logic, art, morality, spontaneous reli-

⁷ Verlaine, *Chansons pour elle*. Paraphrase: "You believe in fairy tales, in days of ill-luck, in dreams, I only believe in your lies. And my faith is so strong... that I live only for you."

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gion, as soon as one is in the presence of the work which is valid in itself, of truth itself (and not the mere affirmation that it "is true"), of beauty itself in a successful work of art (and not in the manifesto of a School announcing future masterpieces and denouncing the works of rivals), or of the divine in nature (and not of a theological argument that "proves" the existence of God or the "divinely inspired character" of the Bible). Whosoever says: "I am God, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," guarantees nothing at all by this. But the beauty of music, be it Bach or Mozart, is self-revealing and has no need of a guarantee. In the end a Gospel cannot be considered "divine" except, like the music of Mozart, for what it is, not because of what the author of the preface says of it.

Often what seemed to one generation of mathematicians or physicists a self-evident truth, or a rigorous demonstration, to another generation seems a mere approximation. But is this dialectic movement or sharper insight? There is no dialectic movement from Bach to Mozart, or from Moses to Spinoza. And it does not occur from Newton to Fresnel to de Broglie.

THE VALUE OF VALUES AND "JUDGING A JUDGEMENT"

To judge a judgement, to enquire what is the value of a judgement of value, is perfectly possible, banale and justifiable. One frequently judges he who opines according to his opinion. "The less intelligent the European, the more the coloured man seems stupid to him." "Voltaire is not so superficial as superficial minds believe," etc.

To describe moral or aesthetic judgements as if they were facts, is to write history or ethnography. However, in spite of what extremist positivists say, normative logic, aesthetics, and morality do exist; without them their corresponding histories would not even be possible, since there would be no criteria for what is "important" or "interesting," (as "possible validities").

To enquire whether a judgement of value is valid is quite different from asking: "What is the value of value?", and is not at all a false problem.

It is because we judge he who judges that we also desire to convert him, and that there is a rhetoric for the evaluation of

values, to help virtual judges and to discourage bad judges. An auxiliary technique exists, aided by police and war myths, to incite men to judge correctly and to understand good and to search after justice, beauty, (cf. laws on urban planning), and even utility (cf. road cops, insurance, obligatory safety-belts, etc.). If on one hand thematism and valid ends are inherent in conscience, on the other hand it is curious how mankind has attributed to selected men: preachers, moralists, magistrates, etc., specialized roles as the guardians of values.

BAYLE'S PARADOX

Pleasure, or future personal utility, does not require advice, and suffering, with exceedingly rare exceptions, is spontaneously shunned. Is this true for other values? It is open to doubt. Hence the use of universal crutches in the person of a police officer God, with a Heaven and a Hell. Many naive believers think that if they stop believing in that particular God, they will instantaneously become evil-doers: "If God does not exist, then anything is permissible."

But historical experience gives ample proof that they are wrong (Bayle's famous paradox), and that they underrate themselves. Good (in the most general sense) is attractive on its own. Who would not prefer to be beautiful, lovable, gay and efficient, instead of the reverse?

Then why is there this need for bellicosity, particularly in the field of moral values? Why is it that: "No one is wilfully evil" is undoubtedly a paradox, and quite probably erroneous?

THE "GOD OF THE AIR" AND DROWNING

The Erewhons "hold it strictly forbidden for a man to go without common air in his lungs for more than a very few minutes; and if by any chance he gets into the water, the air-god is very angry, and will not suffer it; ... the air-god will kill him, unless he keeps his head high enough out of water, and thus gives the air-god his due."⁸

⁸ S. Butler, *Erewhon* (London, 1910), p. 169.

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MIDAS EFFECTS

Consciousness seems to be a sort of invisible medium which offers us objects on which we may exercise our ability to act. It is self-forgetting. The manner in which it acts on these objects, like the manner in which it perceives them, escapes its notice. It will only consider the object, which it knows and on which it acts. A child will forget to count himself when he is counting the playmates of his band. It is easier for him to recognize his brother as his brother, than himself as a brother to his brother. Furthermore, when consciousness recognizes its own existence, it gives itself the status of a mere object. It refers to itself as to a being with permanent properties, independent of its action. In other words it forgets that its role is functional, syntactical. It takes seriously a species of pure vocabulary, which may be dissociated from its own attitudes and actions, and may be applied as a whole set of labels to itself, as to its objects. King Midas, when he turned everything he touched into gold, must have believed that the objects were made of gold, quite independently of his action.

The object of consciousness is not always a visible substantive being. "What is a giraffe? What is an okapi?" One could answer, if one were at the Zoo, by pointing at the animal in its enclosure. "What is a brother? a friend? an honest man?" One is tempted to point one out, and then to say of oneself: "I am a brother, a friend, an honest man". Later this "honest man" still believes, in the very act of cheating, that he is honest, in spite of this accidental slip and merely because he is still "Mr. X"—his own name not being syntactical and functional like him. He can easily forget that Mr. X the thief is always Mr. X, but that he is not longer honest. Young Marcel in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, in his letter to Swann, Gilberte's father, protests his perfect virtue, which he says has been unjustly suspected. But he behaves very badly with Gilberte Swann when she hands him back the same letter—without being at all conscious that he can now no longer renew the protestation.

Illusion, in others, is easily detected. Not always, however, and this is the theme of such well-known jokes as: "Money helps to support poverty." "I am not superstitious as it would bring me

bad luck." "X's beauty cream gives your complexion a natural glow." "He was a good Christian, quite ruthless with heretics."

It is more difficult to detect the illusion in ourselves.

"Let us be despotic against the enemies of freedom" (Saint-Just).

"Let us not resort to authority. Let us be Cartesian."

"Let us come back to the things themselves, and follow Husserl."

"Let us say with Gide's Nathanaël: 'Nature, and only nature!'"

THE PERSECUTED AS PERSECUTOR

The paranoid says: "I am good, and if I attack my neighbour it is because he is wicked, a criminal: I can even kill him, quite innocently and virtuously." Psychiatrists see this as an unconscious psychological mechanism of "projection." But if this mechanism is real in pathological cases, it is merely a stronger form of an illusion that is normal and inherent to conscience itself.

"AB UNO DISCE OMNES"

Even the author of a treatise on logic may flounder. Marcel Boll (*L'éducation du jugement*), criticizes the induction of the particular to the general, and gives as an exemple of this mistake in logic, a saying from Virgil: "Ab uno, disce omnes" (From one learn to know them all). Then this adversary of classical learning adds, ironically: "Let us draw this undying lesson from the Ancients, they teach us not think like them." One would hope Marcel Boll is having fun.

THE ENGLISH AND THE FRENCH

An Englishman, while getting off the boat at Boulogne, notices a red-headed woman walking past, and he writes in his note book: "The Frenchwomen are redhead."

A Frenchman, reading the anecdote, exclaims: "Ah! these English! they are all so naive."

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TO BE SO TOLERANT AS TO TOLERATE INTOLERANCE

Political or religious belief is particularly susceptible to this illusion, for, often, the necessity of action leads inevitably to a recantation of principle. Is it possible to tolerate intolerance? Or to set free the enemies of freedom? Should one defend democracy democratically? Can one de-stalinize without adopting Stalin's methods? One would not use bombs as an answer in a discussion, but if one is a pacifist and a liberal, how can one defend oneself against a bellicose opponent, and only answer bombs with arguments? Once the battle has started, the soldier of peace resembles his adversary, in spite of himself, although in his own eyes he continues to be quite different.

WHICH CHARACTER PLAYED THE BEST PART IN THE OPERA?

The naive spectator: "Why the King... of course." Even if he refers to other characters, the manner, as opposed to the labelled object to which the manner is applied, easily escapes notice. If the public is not very cultured it only sees the story in a picture. In music, only the subject, the "programme." In a play, only the intrigue. If the story, the programme, or the subject are moving, then the work is admired, independently of its artistic merit. From this point of view enthusiasm for abstract painting or pure music, are a sign of progress in culture.

FREUD IS IMMORAL

There is a tendency to attach to whosoever touches an object, or to an author who deals with a certain subject, the qualities of the object. Freud is still often considered to have been immoral. To have dealt with sexuality has made him a "psychological scavenger." Mental specialists easily acquire the reputation for being half mad. The philosopher who writes on ideal values gets the reputation for having a high moral character (if not of being a great thinker). To deal with a thing in depth makes one deep; with the sublime, sublime; with affectation, affected. A contemporary philosopher almost jeopardized his reputation by writing a book on "Rubbish, and Almost nothing at all." Another excited

the enthusiasm of his pupils by delivering a lecture on the following subject: "What do you mean by to talk through one's hat?" To clean up is to touch muck and to dirty oneself.

"IT IS NOT THE GUILDER BUT THE WORSHIPPER
THAT MAKES THE GOD"

Such are the words of Balthazar Gracian. But the man who guilds the God is strongly tempted to consider himself the true deist. In reality it is not adoration as opposed to gilding, but the *manner* of adoring that makes the God. It is the true worshipper who makes the true God. It is the idolater, not the sculptor, who makes the idol. It is the true, sincere believer, who makes belief real and God real. For example, he who does not hesitate in rejecting the God of his social environment in the name of a truth he is searching for sincerely, will really find God, the true God. It is the adverb "really" that makes the adjective "real."

GOD AS A PROPER NAME AND GOD AS A PARTICIPABLE ENTITY

However, since every belief and every consciousness be it even adverbial, has an intention, if not an object, this intention draws one's imagination forcefully towards an object, and even towards a personification. The declared atheist continues to look towards an object, and even towards a personification. The declared atheist continues to look towards "God by another name," and the absence of God is for him a kind of object. "The Tao one can name is not the real Tao," says Lao-tzŭ; but when he calls Him the Nameless One, he is still naming him.

The deist to the theist: God cannot have a proper name.

The atheist to the deist: But God is another form of proper name.

The theist to the deist and the atheist: This discussion reminds me of the joke: "Is the planet discovered by Leverrier really Neptune?"

Yes, but when we think of God without using words, we haven't even got an unknown planet to gaze at. To think of God is

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to think religiously, and not to think of a religious object, whether or not one gives this object a name.

It is a perfectly arbitrary postulate to define a being as necessarily part of the species "real objects." Even the notion of a knowable being, "a being-as-source-of-information," is much wider. Instinct, memory, values, are real, (in the widest sense and excluding etymology) these forms of reality are knowable, they are sources of information, without being "real objects," which may be referred to substantively, located in space, and which emit photons. Their reality is always adverbial. An animal acts instinctively, it is informed by a specific instinctive participation: it never consults something called the "instinct." Man speaks his mother tongue mnemically, without having to consult his memory as if it were an inner grammar or dictionary. Man acts, thinks, and creates validly, veraciously, aesthetically, without aiming at a "substantive" value (such as Beauty, Goodness, Truth)—which would be very awkward and at the same very pedantic, and would risk making his efforts sterile. In the same way God (so-called and otherwise) exists only by participation without observation. God is obviously not observable. If one were to discover Him as a object it would mean to have lost Him, and in the same way to discover the soul at the other end of a scalpel inside the brain would mean one had found that very thing, since it is material, that could not possibly be what one was looking for. This idea does not exclude the possibility of God as a "participable" entity, even in the conscious individual who can see Him nowhere.

INTROSPECTION AS AN ANTI-DIALECTIC

Introspection is difficult because the consciousness of an object tends to obliterate the consciousness of the action which defines that object. A kind of dialectic movement is unavoidable, *a*) because the object of consciousness tends to obliterate the consciousness of the fact that it is the object of consciousness and not an absolute object; *b*) because by treating it as an absolute object one is thereby disfiguring it; *c*) because the object then seems to protest "against the error by apparently transforming itself."

However, this dialectic aspect (illusion as the sub-product of

error), is not unavoidable, and one can be directly conscious of the temptation of unconsciouness. Introspection (caused by an action or an emotion), is difficult but not absolutely impossible. To be conscious of an emotion, says André Gide, is to create it. To be conscious of an emotion, say the psycho-analysts, is to destroy it. But whence is this law, or rather are these laws, drawn if not from a certain self-knoweldge born of introspection?

Conscience is like science; it has the quality of being able to correct itself. Conscience can become conscious of its false conscience, not by “re-dialecticizing” itself, to use Marxist terminology, but by escaping directly from unconsciousness. It is dialectic, on the contrary, that implies the existence of residues of unconscience, capable of being reabsorbed. These can be reabsorbed and are transitory like lakes in a hydrographic system.