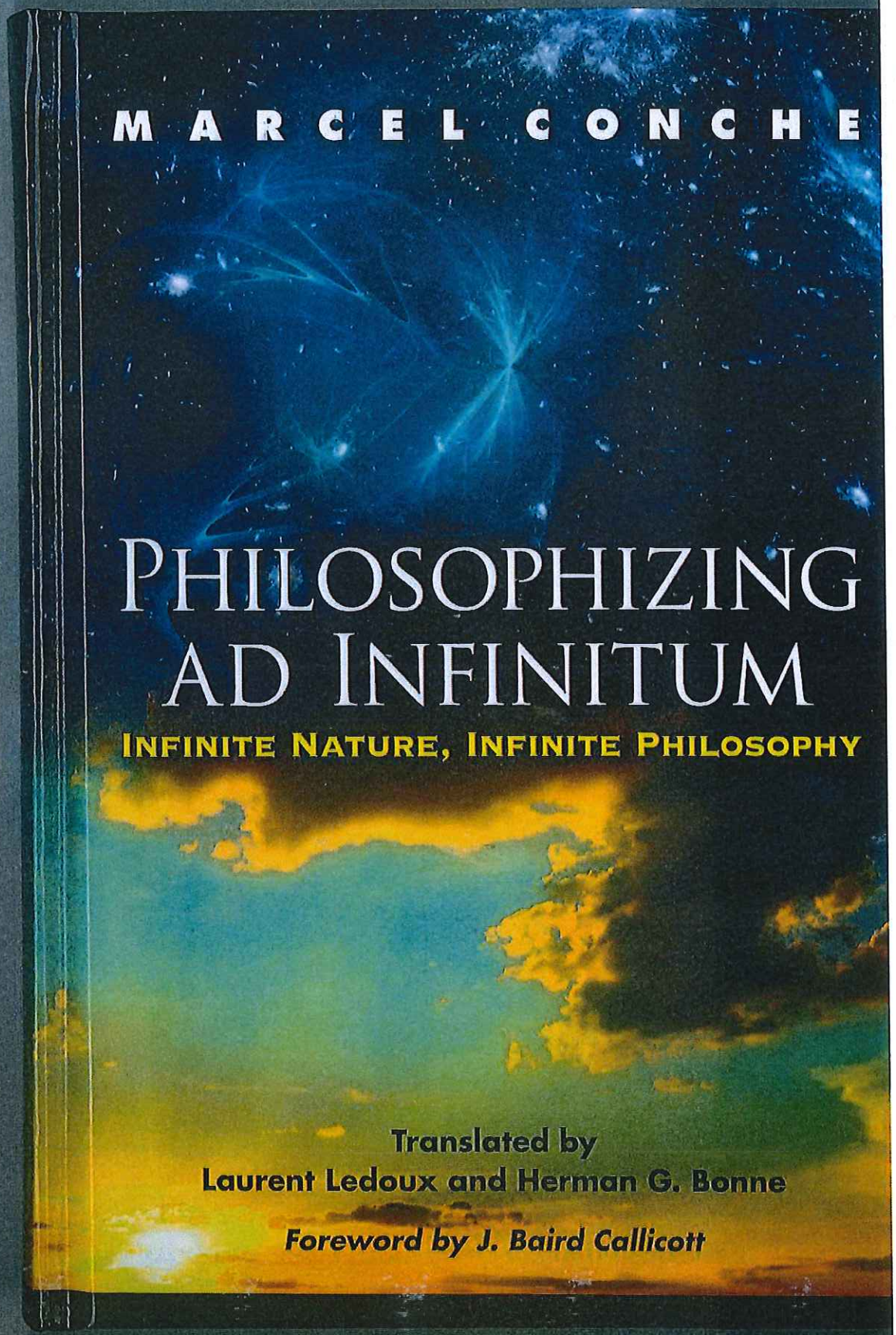
MARCEL CONCHE
PHILOSOPHIZING AD INFINITUM
INFINITE NATURE, INFINITE PHILOSOPHY
Translated by
Laurent Ledoux and Herman G. Bonne
Foreword by J. Baird Callicott

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

Herman Bonne and Laurent Ledoux

He wandered through the fields, a young boy of 16; he looked up and saw a trail of white herons flying through the sky, at a great altitude: and nothing else, nothing more than the whiteness of these white creatures rowing on a blue sky, nothing more than these two colors superposing each other, this ineffable feeling of eternity penetrated his soul at that very moment and untied what was tied, tied what was untied, so much so that he fell on the ground, as if overtaken by sudden death.

—Hugo von Hofmannsthal

Why We Translated Marcel Conche's "Philosopher à l'infini"

"Enough talk *about* Marcel Conche. Why don't you pay him a visit to talk *with* him?" said Bob Starc to Laurent in June 2006 during one of their walks in the forest. For several years, Laurent had shared with Bob his pleasure and interest in reading Conche's books. Without a degree in philosophy but an interest in it since childhood, Laurent had previously followed the good advice of another friend, Jean Jadin, to study philosophy by choosing one single given philosopher. His friend suggested Conche. After reading his works, Laurent had some apprehensions about contacting Conche. What would a nonspecialist have to say to the great wise man, who had become a well-known writer in France? Nevertheless, Laurent decided to contact him and request to meet whenever possible. To his great surprise, he received a prompt but positive reply: "Come whenever you want!" This proved to be typical of Conche's openness and eagerness to spark earnest dialogues.

Marcel and Laurent spent a wonderful weekend together, discussing philosophy and the Infiniteness of Nature, while walking, eating, or sitting on a bench in front of a magnificent landscape. During that weekend, Laurent decided to translate one of Conche's books into English, in order to make his ideas known to a wider audience. When he asked Marcel which book he should translate, the answer was quick and without hesitation: "*Philosopher à l'infini.*"

Laurent began translating the book during the summer of 2006 and despite his demanding position as manager of a commercial department at a large international bank, Laurent worked diligently each evening as well as weekends. In 2009, Herman Bonne, another enthusiastic reader of Marcel Conche's work and the owner and manager of a medium-sized company, was prompted by Conche to contact Laurent to help him finalize the translation. It took them another three years to do so, with the assistance of three native English speakers: Dan Tudor, manager of a company in the United States, Ian Swan, an Irish communications consultant living in Paris, and James Donahue, an American College teacher. Finally, J. Baird Callicott, a well-known environmental ethicist from the United States and a friend of Laurent's, introduced them to Andrew Kenyon of the State University of New York Press.

Why did two business managers, untrained in philosophy, decide to embark on such a long journey to translate a philosophical book by a French academic? The answer is simple: we both firmly believe that the notion of infinity is at the core of the crisis humanity is facing today. Every day, scientific advances offer us more insights about the infinitely small or the infinitely great. For the last two hundred years our economies have been running full speed, fueled by the implicit belief that natural resources are infinite. Today however, we finally understand that they are not and that we need to radically rethink the foundations of our economic system. Paradoxically, we believe that a solid philosophical reflection on the Whole of reality, on Nature as "the infinite" can help us properly address this unprecedented environmental crisis; Nature is indeed a perpetual challenge for the mind. Reflecting upon its infinity also helps to put man in his place, to evaluate our surroundings and ourselves according to their true proportion.

We hereby do not claim that metaphysics should be instrumentalized to help society resolve its problems. We want to acknowledge how reading Marcel Conche's works on infinite Nature has not only helped us grow and mature as human beings but also has helped us to take initiatives in our respective organizations and to change our managerial practices, leading to more harmonious, respectful, and sustainable long-term development where

the progress and personal development of all team members is considered critical for the ultimate sustainable success and growth of the enterprise. It is in this spirit that Laurent leads the association Philosophy & Management (www.philoma.org) which organizes philosophy seminars for managers.

Since we have both significantly benefited from his insights, our goal is to render Marcel Conche's writings widely accessible. We have tried therefore to make this English version of "*Philosopher à l'infini*" as readable as possible:

- Each chapter is preceded by a short summary entitled "Milestones" (as a reference to the milestones along the path Marcel invites us to take with the philosophers who influenced him). We have also added key word titles between some paragraphs of the various chapters in order to highlight the main ideas covered. Although the prose of Marcel Conche is straightforward, he sometimes jumps from one idea to another, making it less easy for nonacademics to follow. Hopefully, these summaries and additional titles will make it easier for the reader to follow his logic;
- Book references of quotes and Greek or Latin versions of specific words have been converted into endnotes in order to lighten the text;
- A glossary briefly introducing all thinkers, philosophers or "–isms" mentioned in the text has been added.

A Brief Introduction to Marcel Conche's Life and Work

Marcel Conche occupies an important place in today's French philosophical landscape. He is recognized by academics for his groundbreaking and authoritative works on Greek thinkers such as Pyrrho, Epicurus, Parmenides, and Heraclitus, as well as on Montaigne. He is also appreciated by the wider public for his more personal works.

Born in 1922 and emeritus professor at the Sorbonne, Marcel Conche has been made laureate of the French Academy and a corresponding member of the Academy of Athens for his life work. André Comte-Sponville, a best-selling French philosopher, considers Conche's philosophy as "one of the rare philosophies of our time" and has dedicated a book from an

interview with him. To date Marcel Conche has written more than thirty-five books, most of them published by the *Presses Universitaires de France (PUF)*. Many of his books have been reedited several times. While he has long been known in academic circles, over the last decade his books have drawn a growing interest from the wider public. For instance, "Confessions of a Philosopher" has met with great success in French bookshops. A specialist in Greek philosophy and probably one of the world's best academics on Montaigne, his work combines erudite references to the history of philosophy with a highly personal and substantial search for "truth," all expressed in crystal-clear prose. This is illustrated by one of Conche's early works, "*Pyrrhon ou l'apparence*" (Pyrrho or Appearance), an audacious and successful essay that clearly distinguishes Pyrrho's philosophy from Sextus Empiricus's traditional skepticism.

Today, at ninety-two years of age and living in a small village in southern France, Conche remains as active and original as ever. Among his latest projects, he has recently translated as well as provided personal commentary on the *Tao Te Ching* despite his not speaking a word of Mandarin. He translated word by word, using dictionaries. In this book he draws an interesting parallel between the near contemporaries Lao Tzu and Heraclitus: the river of the Greeks is compared to the Dao of the Chinese.

With and Without Marcel Conche— A Short Introduction to the Book

For Marcel Conche, Nature is infinite, both in time and space, and constitutes the Whole of reality. In this book, he introduces us to his view of infinite Nature, confronting it with that of other thinkers. Conche notes that, while the idea of infinity is present in many philosophical systems, time is often disregarded. Platonic thinking is focalized on an ideal and unchanging totality which does not allow for a temporal essence. Equally, for Aristotle, time is ruled from within by fixed forms which in a way annihilate its importance. Conche, therefore, finds his inspiration rather in Montaigne for whom "everything changes"; in Nietzsche, obsessed by time even when he writes about the "eternal return"; and in Bergson, who considers duration as the "background of reality."

For Conche, idealism—which has dominated philosophy since Plato—has corrupted our thinking on infinity. Infinity has been thought essentially to have a spiritual nature, perfect and achieved. It has been conceived as a well-ordered totality, meaningful and closed upon itself. Christianity has transformed reality into a "world" already completed and finite since God,

who created it, can encompass it. Conche takes a radically opposite view: what comes first is nature as the Greeks have conceived it through the notion of "Physis" (or Phusis). Phusis is an infinite reality, that is, a reality that has always been there and always will be, unending, constantly creating and exploring new paths "like a poet," that is to say, without following a well-designed plan. Mankind is part of the Phusis and cannot extract itself from it. Mankind is, therefore, destined to death but also contributes to the creative process, to Phusis through its actions. Nature or Phusis, as "All of reality," must be distinguished from the worlds or universes that it encompasses. Science helps mankind to better understand these worlds but will never be able to do more than to scratch the surface of Phusis. For Conche, infinity is not only outside mankind. It is also inside mankind. Conche finds his inspiration here in Pascal. Mankind can indefinitely make an inventory of reality though science, though this action is a futile endeavor to understand or experience infinite nature. Mankind can, however, experience infinity through love. To love is by definition to love infinitely and to reveal the other's infinity. Here, Conche's naturalism (only Nature "is" and all transcendence is imaginary) does not lead to radical nihilism: the infinite character of Nature does not serve to undermine mankind, accentuating its irreducible finite character. Rather, mankind actively participates in the creation of this infinity through its own experiences, through its own life. This may help give some meaning to the human adventure. It may also let us think that mankind is free after all for it cannot be made prisoner of a religious, metaphysical or cultural definition of itself. Mankind's relation with Nature is precisely what makes mankind its own creator.

At the end of the book, an interesting insight into Marcel Conche's view on infinite Nature is gleaned through the correspondence between him and Gilbert Kirscher, an emeritus professor of philosophy. After having detailed why Marcel Conche journeys with and without various philosophers, the book culminates with a fruitful exchange that could have been subtitled: "With and without Marcel Conche." This earnest dialogue highlights the reasons why one might part with Conche regarding his views on Nature. The openness with which Conche shares this with us is, as previously mentioned, typical of him. He relishes engaging dialogues and is always ready to have his ideas challenged and to reconsider his positions. In one of his books on Montaigne (*"Montaigne ou la conscience heureuse"*—Montaigne or the Happy Consciousness), he openly yearns for a "good verbal duel" with him. For Conche, dialogue is the foundation of morality, as he argued in an eponymous book (*"La fondement de la morale"*). This also explains why, like Montaigne, Conche has never attempted to turn his ideas into a "system." He is well aware that his ideas cannot be

put to the test and, as such, cannot be set against those who believe in a personal God, for example. The rather abrupt sentence in the appendix ("Between philosophers and believers—as such—dialogue has no meaning") should not be interpreted, therefore, as a refusal to dialogue with people who believe in God. His dialogues with Christians such as Montaigne, Pascal, or Bergson show otherwise (one with Meister Eckhart would have also been interesting, as he also seems to have made references to Nature as being infinite). Rather, Conche's sentence in the appendix highlights the need for both parties to always be ready to reconsider their beliefs in the face of new information or solid arguments, in order to philosophize and have a fruitful dialogue. Such a frame of mind seems, more than ever, critical in our global society. This is why we hope this book may spark a renewed dialogue on Nature and the infinite between men and women of different philosophies and beliefs.

Finally, let us remark that throughout his work and in this book, Conche develops inspiring ideas on the timeless and stimulating, but, in his opinion, inevitably limited dialogue between philosophy and science. Nevertheless, one may regret that in this book Conche does not present any scientific discoveries that could lend support to his thoughts, such as a mathematical treatment of infinity or contemporary cosmology. This should not be surprising, however, as for Conche no thought of Nature as the Whole of reality could be substantiated through scientific evidence. Philosophy is therefore condemned to remain an interpretation of Nature, which science can neither confirm nor invalidate. Here again we find infinity, in the unlimited number of metaphysical speculations and of philosophies about Nature. In Conche's own words: "Nature is infinite. This infinity reduces me to a point in space, a moment in time. But, I equal myself to it through thinking, not because I could have an "idea" of infinity, as Descartes said we could have an idea of God, but because my thought is like a door to infinity, which is nothing else than Nature offering herself to the consciousness and the reason of mankind."

To Julian, Miguel, and Alban, in the hope that Marcel Conche's book, whether in French or in English, will help them experience the infinity of Nature and dare to become the poets of their lives.

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I

FLASHBACK

When I was a young man I used to work in the fields, vineyards, and meadows of my father's farm. This intense agricultural labor would consume practically all my energy, leaving little or no time for reflection. Indeed, my mind was so task-oriented that there was room for nothing else. Had I been able to "let go" I would have been naturally receptive to the concept of the infinity that surrounded me; my mind would have yielded to its natural propensity to wander and wonder, as it should do when one is so young and in the midst of this pure and transforming nature. But back then I had no notion of what infinity meant, virtually no knowledge of its existence at all.

Only today do I realize how alienated my mind had been; rather than surrendering to its natural disposition and absorbing itself in meditation on the infinite, it was stubbornly and exclusively preoccupied with what is contingent and finite.

As a schoolboy and, later, a college student, my mind would have been naturally receptive to conceive of infinity, but instead it was continuously limited by objectives of little scope, obliged to restrict itself to these narrowminded pursuits. I had to write essays and reviews, prepare this or that homework, and eventually, as an older student, submit my thesis. These scholastic efforts were presented for my headmaster's or professor's consideration, who in due time would then pronounce their final judgment. All this belonged to the contingent order of things. All that belongs to a human being that necessarily defines him or her as a philosopher was forgotten, brushed aside, or simply never stimulated or encouraged.

Human beings spend their lives accomplishing tasks, carrying out functions, performing roles that they have chosen or responsibilities that others have chosen for them. These tasks, functions, and roles might have been entirely different as a consequence of some other particular need, tradition, influence, or coincidence. How difficult it is to truly and deeply ascertain the universal human being beyond peoples' individual characteristics!

Having been spiritually educated in the Catholic faith, my teachers taught me that "God" had created the sky and the earth out of nothing; then he created light, the firmament, the planets, and the animated beings of the sea and air. I was told that he had created man in his own image; that a man called Adam had disobeyed him nevertheless; that Adam and his earliest of all sins had wrought evil, suffering, and death upon the world. But I was also told that, in his demise, man would take with him the promise of a savior who would return as Jesus Christ during the reign of Emperor Augustus.

From all this I could have concluded that God, World, and Man are all there is. Hence, I might have come up with the concept of the Whole: the Whole of reality, and therefore of the infinite, since there can be nothing else beyond the Whole of reality.

But that is not what I came up with.

God, World and Man tallied up without forming a whole; it did not cross my mind to consider them as going *together* at that time. Above all "God" meant a serious threat for "sinners" as well as a promise of eternal life in paradise for the "souls of the deceased," at least for the "just and good" souls amongst us.

Throughout my childhood and part of my youth, I attended an annual seven o'clock morning Mass, which was offered to God in order for my mother's soul to "rest in peace." I cannot at all remember having felt something resembling a love for God. Actually, I often felt a superstitious fear of this Supreme Being known to many as the "Almighty." Even back then, my mind never truly accepted what I had been told about Christ, the "God made man, second person of the Trinity, mediator, savior, dead and resurrected."

The Foundation and Spontaneity of My Rejection of the Monotheist Creed

The Judeo-Christian myth did not prepare me to reflect upon the ideas of the Whole and Infinity. God was of course "infinitely perfect," but this prerequisite did not really inspire one to think about the infinite. The Christian dogma never quite held a firm grip on my mind. So when I came to explicitly reject it, all I had done was to throw away a burden of imposed beliefs that did nothing but uselessly weigh me down. The so-called kindness of God did not appear to correlate with the utter magnitude of suffering here on Earth.

I had yet to develop the decisive argument needed to reject this religious dogma outright until the time I became aware of the sufferings of tortured children through reading Dostoyevsky and the "Diary of Mary Berg," among other texts. I considered their abject woe as having de jure no justification whatsoever. However, it was not the suffering of children that motivated my rejection of the monotheist creed: I had already rejected it. Rather, this suffering "became" the foundation for my rejection, and it was all I required to justify an anti-theist position, which had become mine spontaneously. Indeed, it had already been mine for quite some time.

Bergson, whose thoughts shall be discussed in chapter IX, writes that by taking into account only arguments, analysis, and rational motives, "we risk failing to see what is fundamentally spontaneous in a philosophical position."[1] My philosophical intuition freely induced me to reject the monotheist path. I had a premonition that my reason, my feeling of what is just, simple, and clear would be uselessly troubled by something that only made sense thanks to a dubious "Revelation." To my mind, this was as a cumbersome, hazardous, and complex construction.

"Impossible." This is what intuition "whispers in the philosopher's ear," says Bergson. And he adds: "What a strange force this intuitive power of negation! How is it that historians of philosophy have not been more greatly struck by it? Is it not obvious that the first step the philosopher takes is to reject certain things definitively, when his thought is still faltering and there is nothing definitive in his doctrine? Later he will be able to make changes in what he affirms; he will vary only slightly what he denies."[2]

As a matter of fact, I never once thought of turning back on my position on the monotheist creed. On the contrary, my negation became even more radical over time, up to the point of annihilating itself, having completely dissolved its object.

At first, the notion of God seemed to me most worthy of examination. At that time, part of my role as a university professor was to be able to explain the great theological philosophies of the world. Out of probity, I made an effort to align myself with the spirit that underlies and drives these theologies and to reconstruct their inner logic. However, this was quite an alienating experience as I had the patent feeling that doing so meant working against my true self.

Progressively, the meaning of the word *God* lost its meaning and eventually I tired of using it. In the monotheist system, notions of "God," "World" and "Man" are correlated. Once the notion of "God" is rejected, the notion of "World" cannot remain the same; a "World" is a whole with a defined, unifying structure. Do all finite beings, including "Man,"

form a "World?" For this proposition to be true, you need to postulate the existence of "God" for structure and unity. All finite beings become then a "world," a single one, unique and ordered, but also rational, reasonable, and harmonious. This is exactly how Plato, the Stoics, and Leibniz, among others, wanted the "World" to be, as will be shown in the coming chapters.

In contrast, once the notion of "God" is rejected, finite beings no longer need be thought of as forming a unique "World," though this does not mean that the notion of "World" becomes useless. Firstly, it remains useful as a phenomenological concept expressing the experience we have of all that we can see around us. Secondly, if all the finite beings no longer need to be brought together in one unique World, then we can consider there are multiple *worlds*. We can do so because we accept pluralist cosmologies, as Anaximander first did in the sixth century BC, or because we consider each species or even each individual as inhabiting "its own world," and finally, because we consider artists as "creating worlds."

The notion of "Man" fares no better than the notion of "World" against the disappearance of the notion of "God." Indeed, in the monotheist creed, the essence of man, the definition of what Man must be, and how he should live in order to qualify for salvation are all correlated to the notion of God. With God, eternal life, or immortality, is promised to Man; without God, his is a mortal destiny. In the monotheist creed, his "finitude" on earth means he must experience death, though that death would not be his life's end. The Loving God's promise gives sense to his life for, without God, his "finitude" becomes truly finite; his life ends with earthly death, as though he were an animal or a tree.

But what of his *being* then? "For why," asks Montaigne, "do we claim title to existence, on account of that instant that is only a flash in the infinite course of an eternal night, and so brief an interruption of our perpetual and natural condition?"[3] Montaigne speaks here as if he were an atheist. It is possible he was an atheist, albeit an intermittent one, as we will see in chapter VI.

Being and Appearances

To live during such a short period of time between the infinite past (when we were not yet) and the infinite future (when we will no longer be): can we really refer to that as "being"? Neither Plato nor Aristotle thought so, even though they needed the "forms" to be eternal so that they could be

said to "be," as we will see in the next two chapters. Indeed, the lasting being is more real than the passing one. If Man only lasts one day, he is "the shadow of a shadow," states Pindar, the Greek lyric poet who lived during the fifth century BC.

Of course, in my daily life if I observe a table in front of me I might be moved to say: "The table *is*," or "This *is*." That is because I only see things in their present and current form or shape, forgetting the two infinities—the past and the future. I do not perceive what surrounds me as integrated into the infinity of time. Hence, I accept it as a firm reality.

But, if I could see all things within the infinity of time, they would appear to me as fleeting, incapable of taking the forms of firm *beings*. They would resemble "shadows and phantoms,"[4] states Philo, from the first century AD. He adds: "In a procession the first ranks get out of sight as they move further. In a torrent the waves stream faster than our capacity to perceive them. Similarly in life, things pass by, move away and although they seem firm, not one of them remains fixed for a single moment. All flee continuously."

As we limit time to a present flanked by a short-term past and future, we are thus able to say: "This *is*," "I *am*," etc. This occurs because we only succeed in living and acting in a "narrow" notion of time; the timeframe of the short lives and of the world we inhabit. However, let us now try to exempt ourselves from the need to act and consider our lives as brief moments in an infinite time. The time frame of the Whole of reality—Nature, as I call it—can be thought to be infinite in both space and time. Are we then still able to define ourselves with the words we use in the atomic time of our daily life? What are we then? Neither beings, nor nothingness: just appearances which do not refer to a being and which simply glide and flee, destined for oblivion.

Neither appearance-*of* (a being), nor appearance-*for* (for a being—a subject): such is the Pyrrhonian notion of Appearance. This concept is named after Pyrrho, the ironic philosopher considered by some as one of the fathers of Skepticism. In the monotheist creed, Man is the only being not destined to die. However, if Man has no destiny, then he merely appears for an instant until death extends its inevitable reach over all living things. All finite beings are then subsumed into the notion of Appearance. This whole of finite beings, the Whole of reality, is infinite since there is nothing else but this infinity, multiple and without unity. As will be shown in chapter V, this can hark back to the boundless universe of the Epicureans except that, in Nature, as I see it, there would be no substantial entities such as

atoms, the infinite void, and gods. As long as our thinking limits itself to what appears to or before our eyes, we consider such entities as fictions.

Duties toward Shadows

But if human beings are only shadows, and if independently of what they do they quickly vanish, what becomes of our duties? Do we have duties toward shadows? There was a time when I thought that the reality of a being was implied by the unconditional character of the moral imperative that could be applied to that being. By "real," we can understand as we have just seen, either "that has the semi-reality of shadows" or "that has the full reality of what will surely last."

Since we do have unconditional duties toward particular beings, at least in particular situations, I concluded that these beings were fully real. I now understand they might have only a semi-reality. But that does not change our duties toward them in any way. We can therefore claim to have duties toward "shadows." Indeed, ontology should not interfere with morality; they play a different game. Ontological nihilism such as the Pyrrhonian philosophy only leads to a depreciation of beings, not of the duties we have toward them, or of the values we hold.

Where Pyrrho, Heraclitus, and Parmenides Meet

Was it possible for me to stick to the Pyrrhonian philosophy of Appearance, to such ontological nihilism? In order to answer this question, I should first state that my method is neither reflexive (examining myself), nor deductive (concluding from ideas to things), nor dialectic (limiting itself to the ideas game), nor eclectic (supposing a minimal agreement between different philosophies), nor intuitive (leading to the heart of things). My method is experimental, or rather "experiential." So I continuously confront *all there is, the Whole of reality* with *all that is offered to my experience.* Here we should distinguish between two forms of experience: on one hand, the narrow forms of experience such as those of the worker, the artist, or the scientist, and on the other hand, the global philosophical experience. The latter does not omit anything but rather takes all the aspects presented to us into account.

This leaves us with the following question: Can the notion "the Whole of reality" facilitate the experience one has of that reality or are there pockets of resistance? I think that it can, and that there is not one single pocket of resistance.

It is not by chance that I have tried to pull Pyrrhonism toward Heraclitus's philosophy and thereby bring together Heraclitus and Parmenides. Indeed, to defend as I do with Pyrrho the argument that there is nothing more than vanishing appearances is equal to defending the eternity of this statement. What there is now is not what there was yesterday, but whatever there is, to claim that "*there is*" remains always true. "*There is*" is the way I translate the "esti" of Parmenides, the Ante-Socratic philosopher who holds that the reality of the world as "One Being," an unchanging, un-generated, indestructible whole.

Parmenides's slightly younger contemporary, Heraclitus, claims what could be seen as just the opposite. For Heraclitus, everything is "in flux," as exemplified in his famous aphorism "*panta rhei*" which means "everything flows, nothing stands still."

With "*there is*," Parmenides and Heraclitus join forces to give eternity its rights. Indeed, when I say "*there is*," no notion of time is involved: "*there is*" demands no specification.

To test it, let us introduce the notion of time. Let us ask ourselves if, one day, one may have said or may say in the future: "*There is nothing.*" This would be contradictory. " '*There is nothing*' cannot be said or thought"[5] says Parmenides. "*There is*," on the other hand, can be equated to "neither there was, nor will there be, *because* it is now"[6]: the idea of "now" or "*nun*,"[7] used here, excludes the succession of moments in time and refers to an "eternal present": a present in no way bordered by a past and a future.

We can therefore say that everything happens in the world within an eternal present. Heraclitus's *panta rhei*, "Everything flows," implies an eternal present, just as Parmenides's *nun*.

Getting to See the "Real Force"

What diversity there is within this infinite constant! What diversity in this "*There is!*" We have only to open our eyes: a multiplicity of beings and appearances reveals itself to us. We will call them "beings" if we look at them in narrow time and "appearances" if we choose to do so in infinite time as seen above. However, this diversity, this multiplicity cannot be

called disparate. What we see is an arrangement, a "world" (*cosmos*) in the phenomenological sense.

It would of course be pointless to ask why "*There is*" rather than "There is not": it has always been and always will be so. A more natural and rational question is to ask "Why is it 'so' rather than differently?" Aristotle observes: "For all men begin, as we said, by wondering that things are as they are."[8]

When we do wonder about it, we quickly note that no finite being can exist without an external source. Rain presupposes the cloud. The day presupposes the sun. The plant presupposes the seed. The animal has parents. All these beings cannot bring themselves alone into existence, or organize themselves in a world (a structured unity). Not even this world can justify itself. Should we then say this world conforms to an eternal model? We would thereby only shift the problem to another level.

So which creative force engendered this world? Observation and analyses of this world can give us a clue—on the condition that we are not blinded by some obsessive myth. The monotheist faith can prevent us from seeing what we have before our very eyes. We are told an Almighty being has created the world from nothing, and we must believe it, as absurd as it may seem. We are so blinded by this myth that we still would not understand it, even if we were to have real evidence reproducing all aspects of the world right before our own eyes. In order to truly see the real force, we first need to reject as imaginary the unsatisfactory "explanation": the absurd myth of "creation out of nothing."

When we finally succeed in rejecting this myth, then the real force naturally reveals itself to us. To sing the real force, to sing the renewal of nature in spring, the poet Lucretius uses the words *power, force*,[9] or even *love* (*Venus*). The Ante-Socratics called this real force "*Phusis*," which translates to Nature, always denoted with a capital N.

As the "real force," Nature can be said to animate the world. But it does this discreetly "in the background," as it were. Heraclitus says "Nature (*Phusis*) is wont to hide itself."[10] Heraclitus uses the word *phileo*,[11] meaning "to love," but also "to be in the habit of, to be wont to."[12] We can observe this over time as Nature shows or hides itself according to the seasons: it is a habit, the altering of the seasons being undefined. This power of life, Nature, hides itself and becomes invisible during the "dead" season. But after death, life; after life, death and so on. Each of these two opposites is needed. Nature keeps them together as they take turns to appear. A law of harmony governs the course of things but, as Heraclitus notes, "the hidden harmony wins over the visible harmony"[13]: the invisible governs the visible and holds its key.

Nature as Phusis, Nature as the Whole of Reality

The myth claims "God created the world," thereby implicitly acknowledging that the world is not everything. What is there beyond the world then? If we consider "God" as a cultural notion incompatible with our ingenuous experience of reality, could we then consider Nature as all that is "beyond" the world, as what encompasses the world we know and the multiplicity of other worlds and universes? If we do so, could we extend "*Phusis*," the "real force," "*Nature as what underlies the world*" to an all-encompassing Nature? Could Nature then be considered to be "*the Whole of reality*," "the only being that truly *is*" which does not flow away while all finite beings are no more than its fleeting manifestations?

We can only answer this question by plowing through with an ingenuous experience of reality and by contemplating it with renewed attention. This is precisely the purpose of this book. In the following chapters, I will attempt to define my philosophical position by differentiating it from those of the philosophers who are dearest to me. Hopefully, a certain idea of Nature will emerge from these chapters: Nature as infinite in time and space, as infinitely creative and in which Man, if he does not get bogged down with rigid concepts or blinded by contrived and deceptive myths and creeds can also be creative.

XI.

WITH THE "OLD SAGE" AND WITHOUT HIM

Milestones

This last chapter, with and without Lao Tzu, constitutes for Conche an opportunity to synthesize somewhat his key ideas on Nature. It is an open infinity because it is nothing but continuous creation, tirelessly breaking up into innumerable worlds that are not at all eternal, but are born and perish.

According to Conche, Lao Tzu's Tao, which is "perpetual mutability," is close to Heraclitus's *panta rhei* ("everything moves") combined with Anaximander's *Phusis*, the source and principle of birth and growth of individual beings, which deploys a generative force. Now, Nature constantly creates forms that themselves do not or barely evolve. Among them, man is incomplete and knows it. So, to be in accordance with the natural innermost depths of his being, with his Tao, man has to reduce the level of obligations in life as much as possible and to escape, if possible, from the contingent duties arising from fixed forms as well as from making any commitment that can be avoided.

This implies that to live according to the Tao we do not have to "fulfill ourselves," to be socially "recognized," to become "real," "fixed." The *Tao Te Ching* allows the artist and the philosopher to live according to Nature, to place their confidence in the flow of things, to be led by inspiration, unlike the man of action who attempts to master Nature and the course of things through calculation. The "man of Nature" simplifies his life and can live with the feeling of how tiny we are in the immense and infinite, and of the urgency of living without doing anything other than that: living and nothing more.

The man of Nature is no ordinary man—the one, who, by reflection, can return to natural simplicity—is the philosopher whose infinite activity (which differs from action because he does not build anything) frees him

from enticements and fixed forms. The philosopher's activity is a particular application of the method of "non-action" (*wu wei*). It consists of being open to realities and to allow them to reveal themselves, to meditate.

Such activity requires, first, to be free from anxiety (*ataraxia*). This serenity is a wisdom which is not the aim of philosophy but its condition. Second, the preoccupation with the self must be absent.

The philosopher's quest for truth gives meaning to his life, while passionate affection (distinct from passionate love) opens him to infinity and gives the life of the one he loves and his own a shared lightness and an overtone of happiness.

Post-Bergsonian Nature: The Pre-Socratic Infinite?

On the day after the death of Bergson in 1941, Jean Wahl wrote: "Right from the outset, this 20th century philosopher modestly but unquestionably involved himself in the dialogue that had taken place twenty-five centuries earlier between Zeno of Elea and Heraclitus. By his critique of the idea of nothingness, it could be said that he is continuing the ideas of Parmenides. By his theory of movement, he is a Heraclitean. Maybe one day we will see that the prestigiousness of Plato, the consummate art of Aristotle to write down and delve deeper into common sense ideas, the severe Cartesian meditation, the Kantian idealism, and the Hegelian dialectic, have all been so many ways to separate the mind from the real. . . . Bergson very often draws us to himself. It would be a lovely dream, and is not an impossible one, that the post-Bergsonians concur with the Pre-Socratics."[1]

Concurring with the Ante-Socratics[2] and therefore recognize, through the "real," the *Phusis* or "Nature," is exactly what happened to me.

Anaximander already understood the essential fact about Nature: that it is *The Incomplete*. It is "the infinite" (*to apeiron*): an infinity which is, in a sense, closed in on itself and without an exterior, because there is only itself, yet this infinity is open, because it is nothing but continuous creation. It is the generator of innumerable worlds, which are as much coexisting—because they are "in infinite number, in infinity, whichever way you turn"[3]—as they are successive to and succeeding each other in infinite time, some created, others destroyed; and which can have no ending, said Aristotle (explaining the position of Anaximander), "because the generations and the destruction of worlds necessarily presuppose movement," which will "always exist."[4]

Nature is that which has always been there. This is also the thinking of Heraclitus. In his eyes, it has always been made up of the world (*cosmos*) as what "was, is and will be."[5] This is to make Nature finite, to diminish its power. Nature did not create itself, that is to say permanently structure itself into the world, but unceasingly and tirelessly builds itself and becomes finite by forming itself into a multiplicity of worlds. This means that it breaks up into innumerable worlds that are not at all eternal, but are born and perish. It is like a perpetual laboratory of endless and multiple trials because it is not only one order (*cosmos*) that is born of Nature, but all systems of the order are born of it at one time or another.

Lao Tzu's Perpetual Mutability: Heraclitus's *panta rhei* Combined with Anaximander's *Phusis*

By his cosmology, Heraclitus is the ancestor of Plato's followers. However, by his *panta rhei*, "everything moves," he is the prime example of all the philosophies of movement, from Montaigne to Bergson, before and after. Furthermore what is the Tao, according to Lao Tzu, but "perpetual mutability itself,"[6] that is to say Heraclitus's river? Yet it must be added: with certain characteristics of Anaximander's *Phusis*, because the "Path" (Tao), which is infinite in that it is unqualified, undetermined, and conceptually incomprehensible, is also the source and principle of birth and growth for individual beings: differentiating themselves and becoming finite, it thus deploys a generative force, *Te*—a word that is generally translated as "Virtue." Nothing prevents this "Virtue" from showing itself in innumerable worlds.

The Tao: Liberating the Incomplete Man from Fixed Forms

Yet, "What is man in Nature?" asked Pascal. Then he removed the word *Nature*, and replaced it with the word *Infinite*. The infinite: the Incomplete. The *Phusis* being all-enveloping, man is not, any more than the other beings, outside Nature. He is even more in accord with the essence of Nature than those species that are fixed. Bees are the same as they were at the time of Virgil, but man is something else. "The very depths of Nature [*der Kern*] are at the heart of man," said Goethe; just like Nature and life itself—whose evolution cannot stop at fixed forms—man is incomplete. He

is the being whose essence, I say, is that which is most in accord with the essence of Nature and life, the most natural and living being. However, man *knows* that he is incomplete and possesses the ability to always break with what is stagnant. It reasonably follows that man is spirit.

Life is incomplete, but it constantly contradicts this essential incompleteness, not by the creation of forms, but by the fact that these forms last for millennia without any variation and are like impasses. Man knows himself to be incomplete. However, society is the place of fixed forms, and, by means of the State and its institutions, demands from the individual, under threat, subjugation to these forms so that the individual is unceasingly dispossessed of himself, of his creative essence. Fixed forms do not evolve, or barely evolve.

Hence, at various times throughout history, there are processes of substitution of old fixed forms with new forms such as wars, coup d'états, and revolutions. The individual, who owed respect to a code, institutions, laws, and important people, now owes respect to a different code, to new institutions, to other laws, to other important people. He is told he must go to war. He goes and he dies without having had the time to experience a reality of his own. Existence is necessarily a compromise between society and the self. One cannot completely escape from the pressure of fixed forms (which Plato, with his theory of Ideas, wanted to make absolute to establish his authoritarianism), and live a purely natural life, but one must strive to be in tune with oneself, with one's Tao. It is necessary to reduce as much as possible, the level of obligations in life and to escape, if possible, from the contingent duties coming from fixed forms and from making any commitment that can be avoided.

Living in harmony with the course of things, the flow that unceasingly institutes and causes them, that is to say being in agreement with the natural innermost depths of our being; that is the advice of the "Old Sage," where he concurs with the Greeks and Montaigne. However, the latter wrote of the difficulty of coming back to Nature, through the barbed wire of artificial forms: "Nature is a gentle guide, but no more gentle than wise and just. I seek her footprints everywhere. We have confused them with artificial tracks and for that reason the sovereign of the Academics and the Peripatetics, which is 'to live according to nature,' becomes hard to limit and express; also that of the Stoics, a neighbour to the other, which is 'to consent to Nature.'"[7] The reference to the Academics and Peripatetics is somewhat misleading here, because for them, "nature" means the very nature of man, of reason. For the Stoics, the same applies, if only because reason, before being human, is the immanent *logos* of all things, and

unlike human reason, not susceptible to error. The Epicureans do not see in Nature anything like *logos*, which signifies destiny, finality, providence: the nature of things comes from an original chance happening. Yet, it is to this Nature, which is now created, that it is necessary to conform, because what it asks, through the needs that express it, is essentially *finished*, while the desires society gives rise to are insatiable.

The Tao: Renouncing to Fulfill Ourselves to Be in Accord with Nature

Lao Tzu does not theorize on the system of Nature. Like Montaigne, he sticks to the evidence of the conflict between two kinds of living—depending on whether we like to find fulfilment or not in relation to values or ideas linked to fixed forms. Or rather, let us say that in one of these ways of living, we have to *fulfill* ourselves, become real, in the Hegelian sense, meaning by "real" that which is fixed. This can be done if and in so much as we obtain social recognition, qualifying by means of a fixed form. This realization makes it possible to exist in the collective memory and representation, not to say in history. In the other way of living, we consider that we don't have to "fulfill ourselves," if that means becoming settled, because nothing is fixed, and that we have, throughout days and hours, all the true reality of what constitutes life.

Certainly, there is no society without fixed forms, and there is no individual outside society. By means of education, society prepares the child to maintain or even perpetuate forms. Becoming an adult and a man of his time, he fulfils himself in forms defined by the spirit of the era. As he lives not in the immense time of Nature, but in a shrunken time, where ephemeral realities establish themselves like beings, he believes himself to be real, forgets the disappearance of things and nothingness. He has the satisfaction of being "recognized"—a satisfaction that could be considered unsatisfactory because it is obtained at the price of alienation of the self, but he is not aware of such alienation, and in truth there is not much alienation any more, the individual having exhausted himself with regard to what is different, unspeakable, and unique. This is why the satisfactions given by achievement and social promotion repress the obscure fear of missing out on life.

Returning to natural simplicity, following the "Tao," presupposes a minimum commitment to fixed forms. The word *Tao* is composed of a root which means to walk step by step, one step at a time. *Te*, "virtue," is

composed of elements of "perfect honesty" and "heart."[8] Living according to the Tao is to be in accord with things, advancing in conformity with things. Everyone has his or her Tao, which can already, by privilege of birth, be attuned to the Tao. Hölderlin writes: "There are two ideals of our existence: a state of extreme ingenuousness, in which our needs themselves are in concord, both with our abilities and with everything related to us, solely through the organisation of Nature, without our interference; and a state of highest culture where the same would take place through the organisation which we are able to give to ourselves."[9]

The Artists' Way of Non-Action

The *Tao Te Ching* allows us, thanks to the power of thought, to establish a state of organization of our being in its relations with itself and the world, similar to that which Nature herself produces spontaneously in the case of certain privileged individuals. These privileged natures are the artists, while the first are philosophers.

"Follow your inspiration," said Bergson to Raïssa Maritain. Such is, in any case, the advice that the artist gives to himself. Because he is about to create, he finds himself on the margins of society and fixed forms. If he consents to a paid profession, it is only to earn what is necessary for life and work. Literally, the artist "works without acting" (*wei wu wei*, Chinese for "non-action"), because, contrary to the entrepreneur who sets an objective for himself and then uses means to obtain it, the artist cannot know in advance what the work will be. He advances step by step, innovating where necessary, incapable of rationalizing his steps. What else does Nature herself do? We can say that she actualizes eternal essences, that, for example, she causes bees to be born by regulating the eternal Idea of the bee? What does the word *bee* signify? This would be impossible to know before Nature created them.

Just as Rimbaud's *The Drunken Boat* could not exist anywhere, not even in the head of the poet, before the poet had written down the words. What is at work in the artist is nothing other than Nature herself, indefinitely incomplete, infinite creator, and pushing blindly the future forward. The man of action is the opposite of the artist, because he wants to know in advance all things concerning his actions, in order to move forward in complete safety. He wants, as much as possible, to avoid risk, which is precisely what the artist cannot avoid. To master Nature and the course of

things by calculation is the dream of the man of action; nothing pleases him more than the progress of science and technology. The artist places his confidence in the flow of things, allowing himself to be led by inspiration.

The Philosophers' Way of Non-Action

What is left for he who refuses action and achievement in the world, and who, however, is not artistic in any way due to lack of natural talent? It only remains for him to live poetically, following the example of the "Old Sage." This presupposes that one passes from a state of dependence on fixed forms to a state of simplicity. The individual depends through his roles and functions on a society that encloses him in set obligations, which have been defined without him, and also by what is title, dignity, grade, mark of honor, etc., all things that hold him captive like so many enticements. Who says "enticement" says "lure," who says "lure" says "desire." We must rid ourselves of the desires that enslave us. "Have few desires," Lao Tzu advises us. Epicurus explains: limit yourself to desires without which we cannot live as human beings—and which are, in fact, needs because we have to eat, dress ourselves, find shelter, and have friends. Just as we cut off the useless branches of a tree, we should cut the strings that keep us attached to social forms and fashions, that throw us into the future and that prevent us from living fully in the present because they make us inattentive to others.

The Cynics had already noted that we clutter our lives with innumerable things that we do not need. Having pruned what is of no use to happiness is to be like uncut wood, not like wood that has been cut and worked. This is the origin of Lao-tseu's advice: "Return to the state of uncarved wood."[10] Then what about the individual who has thus simplified his life?

He is as man has always been—the man of Nature, I mean. Regardless of place, era, family and social structures, institutions, that is, regardless of fixed forms, he has to deal with night and day, the sun and the stars, the phenomena of the atmosphere and the necessity to eat and protect his body, in short, the human phenomenon par excellence: meeting the other. This man would be said to be an abstraction; in fact, he cannot abstract himself from his social group. So be it! Yet in societies like ours, where the individual has several degrees of freedom, it is possible to create a situation where the structured social ties are so stretched that there is meaning to speaking about a return to a natural way of living—the man "of

nature" being then a product of civilization because we can be relatively indifferent to social reality, to what fills the pages of newspapers or even to notable upheavals, in as much as it concerns the ephemeral, is only passing, and will soon be forgotten. Thus, we can live less with a historic conscience than with a feeling of how tiny we are in the immense and infinite, and so, of the urgency of living without doing anything other than that: living and *nothing more*.

The objection could be made that this condition, where man is stripped of all the things that make up the action of life, would leave him in a void and in boredom. We could quote Pascal about "diversion." Let us listen to the sublime author: "Nothing is so intolerable for man as to be completely at rest, without passions, without business, without diversion, without study. He then feels his nothingness, his forlornness, his insufficiency, his dependence, his weakness, his emptiness. Immediately, from the depth of his heart, will come boredom, gloom, sadness, grief, vexation, despair."[11]

This objection is based on a misunderstanding. It is true that if the ordinary man finds himself "without passions, without business, without diversion, without study," he will be bored and in a void, but we don't have concern for the ordinary man. Until the end of time, men will desire power, riches, honors, and consideration and will need to rival, criticize, dominate, defy one another, and quarrel, etc. They will continue to go to war, to destroy, and to kill. If the *Tao Te Ching* has some effect on the ordinary man, it is the sign that he was not an ordinary man.

The one who, by reflection, can return to natural simplicity, is the philosopher, insofar as he is capable of achieving the state of what Hölderin describes as "that of the highest culture." Not to be haunted by any desire for honors, power, consideration, or glory, to guard against any form of rivalry or confrontation with others, condemn the use of arms, armed revolts, insurrections, or war, not to participate in any violent undertaking at the risk of bringing upon oneself public blame and legal sanctions, which in time of war strike pacifists, to know that we can, "without going beyond the doorstep, know the world,"[12] to have no interest in ourselves, nor "private ends,"[13] to live in a hidden and anonymous way with those who make up obscure history, but yet to reject the life of the hermit, to be welcoming to all, however limited their capacity to listen may be, to live in communion and agreement with all beings—plants, animals, stars—to always be of the same mind as all children of the Earth, and from there, to know internal peace and "serenity"[14]—this is what the philosopher can do. It is not that this serenity is the aim. It is correlative to the activity of the philosopher.

which, by itself, frees him from all that has just been said. If the ordinary man is powerless to free himself from enticements and fixed forms, it is because he is not capable of this passion for reason, which is what the philosopher is made of. Pascal reflects upon the man who, without passion, without business, without activity, only finds emptiness and boredom. Yet to philosophize is an activity, and is singularly absorbing because the task of the philosopher is an infinite task.

When I say "activity," I do not say "action." The authors of systems have assimilated the philosopher to a man of action. They conceive the search for truth as an enterprise whereby, through analyses and demonstrations, we arrive at a result. Descartes wanted to rebuild philosophy, like a building that would be the work of a single architect. Philosophy, however, is nothing like a building. "Beware of prejudices," said Descartes. Undoubtedly he is right, but it is also necessary, said Bergson, to be wary of "habits formed in action, [which,] when they find their way up to the sphere of speculation, create fictitious problems there."[15]

What sort of activity is that of the philosopher who follows the Tao? We can say it consists of a particular application of the method of "non-action" (*wu wei*). This method is universal and makes it possible, in all areas, to be efficient without conflict or violence. The way the philosopher applies it to the domain of knowledge consists of this: to be open to realities and to allow them to reveal themselves. Most likely not knowing the Tao, Bergson is close to the idea of "non-acting" by his intuitive method of coincidence with the "actual flow of the real."[16] Let us leave the word *intuition* to Bergson. Let us content ourselves with the word by which we ordinarily design the activity of the philosopher: the word *meditation*. To meditate is to be waiting, like lying in wait, for thoughts that are going to surprise us, bringing sudden clarity. "We will never succeed in having thoughts, they come to us," said Heidegger, with great accuracy.[17] We anticipate, with variable probability, the result of an action, and it is for this reason that we act. Yet we don't anticipate thoughts. The philosopher is, in this regard, similar to the artist. Thought is "work of a poet," said Heidegger.[18]

The Requirements: Ataraxia and Absence from Self-Preoccupation

What is required so that thoughts come to us? First, the soul must reach "freedom from anxiety" (*ataraxia*), serenity, a sort of negative happiness

that we can call "wisdom"—a wisdom that is not the aim of philosophy, but its condition. Then and correspondingly, preoccupation with oneself must be absent. "The self is detestable," said Pascal. However, we shouldn't attach so much importance to ourselves that we hate ourselves. We will avoid the trap of *Cogito*, which, by enclosing thought in self-reflection, separates it from things, depriving it of all immediate relations. Above all, it is necessary to empty oneself and put aside all cultural acquisitions—be they beliefs or preconceived ideas—so that there are only things themselves, their elusiveness, their infinity and their immensity under the horizon of eternal Time.

All of this is understood under the inspiration of the "Old Sage." I have therefore called this chapter: "With the 'Old Sage' *and without him*," because Lao Tzu, like Socrates before him, is unique. He reaches the plenitude of wisdom and lacks nothing, like a god. Tuned like an instrument to the flow of things,[19] he is in sympathy and communion with all beings; he shines for them like a benevolent jewel and is a blessing to them by his very existence. Yet, even if the philosopher can perceive something from this height of wisdom, he is himself down in a valley. For, if he has been able to break away from or treat as nothing his social attachments—I do not say "family"—if he has delivered himself from any dependence on fixed forms like trends and fashions, there still remains what he was not able to reduce to nothing within himself, and which comes from the fact of not simply being a human being, but a *masculine or feminine* human being, and—in our hypothesis—a "man" (*vir*, or in Greek, *anèr*).

The Philosopher and His Loved One: A Shared Tone of Happiness

Yet, in this respect, the philosopher is astonishingly similar to the ordinary man we mentioned earlier. He has within himself an ordinary side, by which he simply needs to love a woman and to be loved by one. The kiss that Lou Salomé gave to Nietzsche at Monte Sacro without thinking or at least without attaching any importance to it, was for Nietzsche the opposite of an insignificant event, because whatever brings joy or sadness—according to whether or not it happens only once—and can put more sparkle into living, is not insignificant.

For the philosopher as such, the quest for truth gives meaning to his life, but for the human being, love is the meaning of life. But the philosopher is also a human being. Hölderlin's oak tree, Titan stripped of his

chains of social dependence, is the image of the sage, but the poet adds: "If my heart did not attach me to communal life—this heart which cannot give up love—how I would like to be an oak tree!"[20]

Is this in good faith? Who would want the barrenness of a life without love? Neither the soul of a poet nor the soul of a philosopher—if at least the philosopher must really *live* and be more than a thinking sleepwalker.

Real love implies the infinite, because everything else pales in comparison. Are we not then falling into the "Either-or" (the *Enten-Eller* of Kierkegaard)? There is on the one hand, *joy*, the joy of marvelous moments, and on the other hand, the responsibility of the philosopher and the duty of a choice. But we have distinguished the closed infinity of passionate or emotional love, that of Tristan and Iseult, and the open infinity of passionate affection. If "crazy" love excludes all other interests, passionate affection, far from excluding other interests, enfolds them in its infinity. The mutual belonging of affectionate lovers does not prevent each one from having his own activities; and one can devote himself to philosophy, with the other not even having access to it.

Yet love gives each of the two lives a shared lightness, a shared tone of happiness. What about the loving embrace? The lovers live the tension of the inapproachable proximity that is both painful and marvelous. As for the philosopher, he reflects on these words of Hölderlin:

> The deepest thought loves the liveliest life;
> it is after taking a glance at the world that we understand the high virtue;
> and the sages, very often
> finish by clinging to beauty.[21]

All of this, we understand very well, must remain somewhat mysterious. Any conclusion would be contrived. Life ends at death, which is not a conclusion.

PHILOSOPHY

One of France's preeminent historians of philosophy, Marcel Conche has written and translated more than thirty-five books and is recognized for his groundbreaking and authoritative work in Greek philosophy, as well as on Montaigne. In *Philosophizing ad Infinitum*, one of his most remarkable and daring books, Conche articulates a unique and powerful understanding of nature, inclusive of humanity, as infinite in time and space—ever self-renewing, eternal, and beyond complete understanding or control.

In today's world the notion of infinity is at the core of the crisis humanity faces understanding nature. For the last two hundred years economies have been running at full speed, fueled by the implicit belief that natural resources are infinite; however, it is clear that they are not and that humanity needs to radically rethink the foundations of environmental and economic systems. Conche seeks to begin this rethinking, illustrating along the way insightful and sometimes unorthodox ideas about Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Montaigne, Nietzsche, Bergson, and others.

"*Philosophizing ad Infinitum*: this book paints a perfect picture of the life of Marcel Conche, a natural-born philosopher. His aptitude to question absolutely everything drove him to the pre-Socratics, even at an early age, in his relentless quest for the truth. With Montaigne, the thinker to whom he feels most akin, Marcel Conche stands tall as an exceptional figure in contemporary French philosophy, renewing and enriching a great philosophical tradition."

—Françoise Dastur, University of Nice Sophia Antipolis

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