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DIVERGENT REASONINGS AND DIALOGUES OF THE DEAF: WHY DO WE OFTEN FIND OTHERS "IRRATIONAL"?

Rather than set out conclusions and theses, I would like to present a series of questions on rationality and social discourses that I feel could interest everyone. This series of questions is the basis for my most recent book (to be published in Paris in a few months) called *Dialogues de sourds*, or Dialogues of the Deaf, which can be summarized by this simple question: *Why Do We Often Find Others "Irrational"?*

"We judge each other mutually as follows: to each other, we appear to be lunatics" (Translation for the purposes of this document, TFTPOTD), according to St. Jerome in talking about arguments between Christians and Pagans. St. Jerome was indeed right, at least in the following respect: when Pagan polemists talk about Christians, they refute them in the name of reason, of course, but without imagining for a single instant the possibility of being understood by these absurd, fanatical and life-hating people who the gods deprived of all good sense.

I invoke this Father of the Church as well as Don Quixote in submitting the following remarks.

One may know of Antonio Gómez-Moriana's wonderful analysis of the meeting between Don Quixote and the Merchants. This analysis shows the cognitive clash between humans meeting on *the same road* as a key subject of novelistic irony, just as the genre was coming into being.[1] Don Quixote orders several merchants who cross his path to admit that Dulcinea del Toboso is the most beautiful lady in the universe. Taken aback by such swaggering, but of a mentality we shall call modern, commercial and practical, the merchants point out to the noble knight that they could judge based on actual evidence if he showed them a cameo or a portrait of the lovely lady. What nerve! The Man of La Mancha responds passionately that if he showed them a portrait of Dulcinea, they would obviously have no merit in admitting the fact, and that it would be advisable for them to recognize the lady's charms based on his word. The archaic Don Quixote's logic of feudal honour conflicts with an emerging "experimental" logic which is its opposite in this dialogue of the deaf. Cervantès presents this comic episode, at the dawn of modernity, as the meeting of two mental universes from different eras, an *ungleichzeitig* as Ernst Bloch would have called it, which will remain absurd and illogical to one another.

The feeling of being surrounded by ideological fools has a modern history. I have studied romantic socialists in several recent books, and imparting this feeling is the effect they had on the level-headed bourgeoisie that woke up in 1848 surrounded by raving lunatics who had taken the streets. Louis Veillot massages his temples as he moans, "They are mad! Mad!"[2] (TFTPOTD).

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[2] Gómez-Moriana, Antonio. «Discourse Pragmatics and Reciprocity of Perspective: The Promise of Juan Haldudo ("Don Quijote", I, 4) and of Don Juan», *Sociocriticism*, 1988, 4:1 (7), 87-109. [En espagnol dans la *Nueva Revista de filología hispánica*, XXXVI-2: 1988].

Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie* "could pass for the work of a madman"[3] (TFTPOTD). Pierre Leroux is a "brain abandoned by doctors without resources," it's "the beautiful ideal of madness"[4] (TFTPOTD). For Proudhon, Leroux's case was even more clear, and quotations like "he will have to be sent to a madhouse,"[5] etc. support this assertion.

In his major works on crowds and socialism written at the beginning of the 20th century, the famous sociologist Gustave Le Bon applies a scientific veneer to what was the prime example of a reactionary intuition: that the socialist adversary did not call for discussion, but for the straitjacket. Moreover, the mere fact of imagining grand projects of social reorganisation was an indication of a "sick mind" for this psychologist of crowds. The thesis held by Le Bon and others was that socialism is a religious phenomenon, but that socialist leaders, in the tradition of ancient prophets and sect leaders, were "misfits due to degeneracy," "degenerates" and "half-lunatics whose study will be of special importance to mental pathology, but who have always played an immense role in history"[6] (TFTPOTD).

"Irrational," "Rational"?

There is nothing as muddled and as charged with latent controversy as the words "Irrational" and "rational." They are words even whose impact is only clear in controversial contexts because it is at this point that we can identify *their aims*.

Every type of ideology that political science devotes itself to describing, such as the diabolical causality of racism and anti-Semitism, the *Paranoid Style* (Hofstadter), the Gnostic thinking of revolutionary socialism (Eric Vogelin, *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis*), the nationalists' and populists' arguments of ressentiment (Nietzsche, Scheler), have been deemed "irrational" by each other. "Irrational" is essentially a term to condemn logical thought processes that are different from one's own, a term whose content varies depending on the position of the speaker.

A word, for example, on the *Paranoid Style*, a concept no doubt borrowed from psychiatry but well established in American political science and on which doctoral these have abounded since Richard Hofstadter's now classic 1965 book, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. What this thinker describes in his famous book was what he calls a widespread "style of thinking" marked by "exaggerated" arguments, by the spirit of suspicion and by "conspiratorial fantasies."

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[2] Veuillot, *Le lendemain de la victoire*, 1850, 67.

[3] Chenu, *Les conspirateurs, les sociétés secrètes, la préfecture de police sous Caussidière*, 1850, 27.

[4] Bussy, *Histoire et réfutation du socialisme depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*, 1859, 72.

[5] *L'Anti-rouge*, 44.

[6] Le Bon, *Psychologie du socialisme*. Paris: Alcan, 1898. Dépouillé sur la 7ème édition, Paris: Alcan, 1912. 352 et 99.

Melley and Knight's most recent works show that the empire of paranoia continues to expand in American public life. Ian Dowbiggin just published *Suspicious Minds: The Triumph of Paranoia in Everyday Life*, in which he explains the meaning he gives to this psychiatric metaphor:

> I do not use the terms "paranoia" and "paranoid" in a strictly clinical or reductionist sense. I use them to refer to a way of seeing the world and of expressing oneself ... describing what I believe to be an elementary condition of the human psyche.[7]

His thesis is that early 21st century American public life is experiencing an increase in "paranoid rhetoric;" in particular, that if paranoid reasoning was until recently more a distinctive feature of the extreme right in the U.S., it has slowly became dominant on the left as well, especially amongst sectors of the "*Politically Correct*," communitarians, feminists and alterglobalists. "Indeed the political left may be beating the right at the paranoia game as seen in its recent embrace of political correctness."[8] When it comes to Knight, he suggests that a polarisation is establishing itself in the United States between two somewhat cognitive "camps" - not the right and the left, but the paranoid and non-paranoid who are quarrelling over hegemony:

> The spinning of paranoia in the American media represents a hegemonic struggle between the conspiratorial camp and the defenders of common sense over the status of social reality.[9]

Therefore, first we can examine the sociological observation that some people find others to be nonsensical - and that, logically, this feeling is mutual. It should be noted that these people are further disoriented when they find others they consider to be rational one minute being completely unreasonable the next, even though they continue to argue and reason in the same manner. We can ask why this phenomenon occurs, but we can hardly get to the root of these contradictory descriptions, nor can we take sides.

Outside the nature of reasoning, we can recall the following truism: on the one hand, smokers, extravagant spenders, misers, big eaters and skirt chasers are all "irrational" and blameworthy to those who observe them without sharing their passion; on the other hand, a chaste person who eats with as little gusto as others purge and drinks nothing but purified water is no less "irrational" to those who do not share his contempt for worldly pleasures.

The exploited worker who takes the boss' side during a strike and the hungry man who does not steal bread is no more "rational" than those whose blind faith leads them to believe in some sort of revolutionary "millenarianism." In his later years, Sartre said that "We are always within *reason* in revolting" (TFTPOTD): this assertion is typically irrational for those who do not share his somewhat senile leftist views. It is merely from the perspective of my personal convictions

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[7] 6-7.

[8] 4.

[9] *Conspiracy*, 21.

that I would label one "irrational" rather than the other – unless I refuse to make a decision, the position I am left with is that of the lampoonist in considering myself the only reasonable one in a world that is, in many ways, crazy.

Furthermore, there is everything that falls under the extra-rational, the "sacred" according to Rudolf Otto, the "mysterium tremendum," the "numinous," the mystical, the revelatory and all the *Cognitio fidei* written about in thousands of books. For calm spirits, all of this amounts to nothing more than fodder for the vast category of the irrational.

Logical, rational and reasonable are three ambiguously superimposed terms (since everything I consider logical will not necessarily be reasonable in my opinion, and vice-versa).

All thinkers who claim to be rationalists denounce *ipso facto* forms which have deteriorated or been perverted by rationality. They scarcely believe in the universality of reason in this respect. Such is Karl Popper's point of view in his book *Conjectures*, as it denounces and dismantles the "pseudo-rationality" of historicism and of the utopian spirit.

Irrationality and rationality are both normative concepts, and neither philosophers nor psychologists agree on the nature and role of this norm. I know that what I deem rational is essentially what I can understand. As a result, describing my adversary as irrational is, all things considered, no more than a *noise of disapproval*, a "tsk, tsk, tsk" to say that I do not understand him. It is a circular reasoning. It is rational to steal a loaf of bread if I am dying of hunger; it is not rational to rape a little girl, no matter how strong the urge that pushes me to do so – such is the unanimous opinion of those who do not feel this violent urge! The unreasonable is often the situation or the decision with which I cannot *empathise*. In short, the unreasonable is an *affective* category. Now, if I claim to talk about the rationality of behaviour, I must see that the choices and decisions of others often result from restrictive dilemmas and that, in reality, these dilemmas have their own logic which I am unable to consider unless I project myself into such a situation. Is it rational to do so while pretending that the urges I do not feel must not exist?

It is noted that the accusation of insanity often results from the observer's *apathy*. He who observes instead of acting, while judging the disorganized actions of others to be unreasonable, says to himself: how do those who are in the middle of the action not see what I see so clearly?

Another specification of "rational," which lends precision to the term but runs into difficulties of no lesser importance, consists of confusing it with *coherence*. We cannot, as a matter of course, deem rational a discourse that manifestly contradicts itself. However, it happens that coherence in itself is a contentious notion. Being at once an engineer or a physicist as well as "profoundly catholic" is contradictory to the agnostic. It amounts to having a split personality that reasons incomprehensibly and, thus, to being irrational or, if we are going to call a spade a spade, almost pathological.

The following notion is a good example of the fact that the idea of coherence in itself is open to debate: *tolerance*. The legitimization of tolerance as a civic value follows from a two-sided reasoning, which is a complex rhetorical device that is not always easy to make others understand. This two-sided reasoning is Voltairean in spirit: "the ideas of this individual are repugnant. I will fight them without hesitation, but I also support without reservation (his)

freedom of expression." He who says this recognizes two distinct levels, one being ethical and personal, the other civic and legal, and he deems the resulting contradiction between the two judgments made about the same man to be completely coherent. It is a logic we can call liberal which assumes that I have legitimized – to the same degree and in the same breath – the right to combat vigorously that which in other respects I tolerate, or rather what I ask society to tolerate. However, to most activist and militant spirits, this *distinguo* is unbearable because it is made in terms of linear reasonings: if it is ethically, that is to say ideologically, repugnant, it is also politically repugnant and must be censored when possible if I have the secular arm at my disposal – and these activists have an intense feeling of their own virtuous "coherence" and of the inconsistency of their liberal adversary's confused mind.

Grand ideological systems are always more coherent and a great deal more black and white than patient, partial and not very conclusive sociological observations; he who subscribes to a complete system believes fervently in its coherence and in the accuracy of this concrete coherence, while the practitioner asks himself if its extreme coherence is a big indicator of irrationality.

Precisely because being logical or too logical has been a known way of talking nonsense since Antiquity, a recurring *topos* opposes reason to something like an extremely desirable corrective statement it calls "wisdom." It is not enough to be able to argue correctly, as Erasmian folly does with talent in an *ad hoc* world, as you must also have a healthy, cautious, shrewd and perceptive relationship with the world which, in traditional societies, held particularly to a long life experience rather than a juvenile learning of categories and analytics.

Science vs. the Rationality of Common Sense

From Newton to Einstein, science has introduced laws and paradigms that go against common sense. Science is counterintuitive not only because it refuses opinion-based foundations, never taking them for granted nor deeming them to be certainties, but because it seeks to distance itself from spontaneous argumentations by reasoning differently and conversely. Robert Lyell, the founder of geology, indeed argued during the "heroic" times of the emergence of positivist sciences at the beginning of the 19th century that a promising scientific hypothesis (such as the very long period of geological times – which he still underestimated immensely) is recognizable *a priori* by the fact that it goes against common sense and makes ordinary minds denounce it as crazy.

The legend of scientific progress that developed during this period, a legend adopted by all dissident minds who also considered themselves "scientists" in this respect, as we have seen with Fourier and Collins, considered Copernicus and Galileo as its iconic figures. This, not only for having refuted the Ptolemaic model to the point that none of its antiquated evidence remains credible, but for having the audacity to turn common sense, the spontaneous observation of the world and the "evidence" they suggest on their heads, in addition to having been derided by the masses and persecuted by people of influence.

Even today, the stubborn resistance of common sense is denounced by scholars. One must only read a neo-Darwinist like Stephen J. Gould to see how he constantly underlines that the processes of a *non-teleological evolution* are strictly unintelligible and untranslatable in the realm of

"common sense." How could common sense advance that functional organs evolved for thousands of years before developing into their present forms and, having only a layman's idea of the concept of natural selection, it would insolently ask what purpose did 5% of an eye or 5% of a wing serve? Confronted with an ignorant audience, every creationist adversary takes the easiest victories because of the absurdity and imposture of atheist evolutionism! What astonishes is not just that something evolved over thousands of years in a process of selective and adaptive evolution to finally become a functional eye, but that the reasoning to explain this process goes against common sense.

In short, as the debates of logicians, philosophers and epistemologists can attest, there exists no stable and unified conception of reason. (I acknowledge the transcendence of pure, mathematical and logical reason, but I do not think that it clarifies communicational reason.) This is indeed true, but my object of study lies elsewhere.

Historicity of the Rational

I feel that I must put things into a relative and historical context, because in refusing to do so I would immediately fall into antinomies. It was long thought reasonable and rational to acknowledge that the Earth was flat and located at the centre of the universe; by contrast, the current zealots of the *Flat Earth Society* are without reason; as a result, and we shall look at this more closely, reason is a historical variable.

That the *genus Homo* dates back three million years[10] was outrageous not only in 1860, but still in 1960 because this idea was beyond what could be conceived of and discussed even in the world of human palaeontology – and that which can be discussed, which varies according to history and one's sector, is in fact one of the contingent but precise specifications of the "rational."

The rational gets mixed up in this historicising context with the *doxa* and the topic, with the "probable" in Aristotle's own terms, with "the opinion accepted by all or the majority or the wise or the most reputed amongst them . . . ."

This probable works (for those who believe in an unscholarly homogeneous logic) according to an "informal logic" and "secular epistemology"[11] that was beyond all rationality for logicians who were unanimous on this point before 1960.

The great historian Carl L. Becker developed during this same period the equally essential but unclear concept of successive "climates of opinions" in the history of ideas, between which – with or without the unity of human reason – there is a radical lack of comprehension. He quotes and analyses a passage on natural law by Thomas Aquinas and an exposition on monarchy by Dante: it is not that the modern reader disagrees with or thinks differently about these subjects, but that he is faced with a *radically different* way of reasoning, a way that he can perceive only as absurd from start to finish. To transpose Michel Foucault's words, he is confronted with "the naked impossibility of thinking that"[12] (TFTPOTD). Becker writes, "What bothers me is that

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[12] Ce que date Pascal Picq en 2005.

we cannot dismiss Dante or St. Thomas as unintelligent people. If their argumentation is unintelligible to us, this fact cannot be attributed to a lack of intelligence. Whether or not an argumentation is met with approval depends not so much on the logic that supports it, but on the climate of opinions in which it is immersed"[13] (TFTPOTD).   This "climate" is defined as a filter that imposes on Dante and Aquinas "a particular use of intelligence and a special type of logic" (TFTPOTD). This definition remains undoubtedly obscure, but Becker puts his finger on an intriguing, omnipresent and neglected fact. He places the literal belief in the book of Genesis and a type of *ad hoc* gnoseology in this "climate," since "existence was conceived of by medieval man as a cosmic drama composed of a supreme dramaturgy that follows a central plot and a rational plan" (TFTPOTD).   What of *reason* and *logic* if they are so radically altered by successive "climates" that are unintelligible to each other?   We can neither be persuaded by Thomas Aquinas nor refute him, according to Becker, because he has become *untranslatable*. We cannot even call his demonstrations fragile or specious; they are quite simply rationally unintelligible, that is to say with regard to what we consider rational.   "The one thing we cannot do with the *Summa* of St. Thomas is to meet its arguments on their own ground. We can neither assent to them nor refute them. ... Its conclusions seem to us neither true nor false, but only irrelevant."[14]

If few historians have examined the problem directly and asked this type of question clearly, the question still remains latent in all studies on modes of thought from the past: all of these discredited theories – the divine right of kings, the privileges of the Church, the hierarchy of races – were supported by very intelligent people armed with strong arguments and demonstrations that appeared solid and irrefutable. Studying outdated scientific theories and theological argumentations from a bygone era is to understand neither the premises in many cases nor the approach, all the while acknowledging that they are or, rather, were rational. In other words, that they were "founded in the spirit of those who adhered to them based on arguments they had good reason to accept"[15] (TFTPOTD).   One after the other, all the scientific theories of the past have proven to be false; to us, they appear to be conceived of through demonstrative patterns that have been discredited (some of which seem "crazy" in retrospect, as Guy Thuillier shows in his monographs on bizarre theories of the 19th century), but which were well established at one time.   It is not that the ways of reasoning in question would be implacable and coherent but founded on a Πρωτον ψευδος and ridiculous premises; it is that the entire manner in which their mode of thinking operates in a given sector and at a given time has become foreign to us. I am thus pushed to acknowledge as rational a sequence of ideas that I cannot *understand* in the strongest sense of the word. Here we find, albeit in widening it to include all discourses with cognitive pretensions, Kuhn's notion of the "incommensurability of

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[11] Kruglanski, Arie. *Lay Epistemics and Human Knowledge. Cognitive and Motivational Bases.* New York: Plenum Press, 1989.

[12] *Mots et les choses,* 7.

[13] Ma trad., *Heavenly,* 5.

[14] 12.

[15] Boudon, *Raison,* 60.

paradigms" and "the incommensurable ways of seeing the world and practicing science in it."[16] That the past's ways of reasoning no longer seem rational does not allow us to dismiss them, for it is unreasonable to think of the present as the ultimate judge of the past – it is not irrelevant to note that, in the past, certain ideas and theses resulted from sustained efforts at reasoning, even though these very reasonings have become absurd to us. As a result, I consider the term "rational" to have only a historical sense: it is the whole of the patterns accepted at a given time and place by people that society judged to be especially wise and reasonable.

Questions

From all of this, I look to formulate a series of questions that address the analysis of texts and discourses, specifically when it comes to rhetoric as a theory of argumentation.

The uncritical and classic textbook definition of rhetoric is "the art of persuading through speech"[17] (TFTPOTD). This simple definition passes only because we do not stop to examine it. Let us do so now. We will offer a few basic objections to it: humans argue constantly, of course, and in all circumstances, but the fact is that they persuade each other rather little and on rare occasions. This is in any case the impression we consistently get, assuming you are like me, in observing everything from political debates to squabbles over housework to philosophical arguments. Perhaps the rhetor persuaded his fellow citizens by means of enthymemes, sorites and epichiremata, but it would seem that this no longer works. A nullifying question to this secular science arises as a result: a science cannot be constructed from the effective ideal of "persuasion," which presents itself only in exceptional circumstances. What is knowledge that sets out a defining criterion only to confirm its failure and unfulfilled state in life's ordinary circumstances?

The first objection having been formulated, many other questions now come to mind: why, since we persuade each other so rarely, do humans not get discouraged and persist in arguing? Despite the fact that individuals and groups generally fail in altering the convictions of others, apparently nothing discourages them in continuing to try; they are thus able to withstand endless arguments (philosophical, religious, political, etc.) that result in failures of persuasion repeated indefinitely.

And why these repeated failures? What is wrong with this reasoning that has been put into words, with this exchange of "good arguments"? What is there to learn from a practice so often doomed to failure, but nonetheless endlessly repeated? When "speakers" are engaged in a communicational situation, they look to attain their goal – which is to communicate, and it is generally acknowledged that this process works. However, if we are talking more specifically about people and when they start arguing, it happens very quickly that the adversary not only arrives at a different conclusion, but that he reasons *badly* or does not respect certain implicit rules which render debate possible. The result is that we wind up with the impression – and this leads to the other big question worth pursuing – that when persuasion fails, it is not only because

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[16] *Structure,* 4.

[17] Reboul, *Introd.,* 4.

of the differences in which the world is perceived, but because of form, the *way of going about it*, the way of proceeding and the way of following logical rules.

I am not thinking of cases where, all things considered, the interlocutors remain in disagreement on a given thesis, having acknowledged for example divergent and incompatible *interests*, but those where we cannot accept the way our opponent supports his thesis, where we do not manage to follow his line of reasoning, where we consider that his line of reasoning or series of arguments break at a certain point. The other's arguments are not dismissed because they are deemed to be unilateral or self-seeking (which would allow us to understand them and assume that we do), but they are dismissed as *specious* and *invalid*, that is to say (we will examine all of these descriptions) as "illogical," "absurd," "irrational" and "outrageous" – if the name of argumentative validity is "logic" and "reason."

From the "Dogmatics," "Sceptics" and "Pyrrhonians" of Antiquity, who hated each other, to our contemporaries with their *Wertfreiheitstreit*, *Positivismusstreit* and *Historikerstreit* (those long battles between sages who seem to amuse armchair German intellectuals), philosophers have shown a perpetually stubborn capacity to forever set certainties against other certainties – including, in the case of relativists, the certainty of their scepticism - without ever swaying their opponents by one *iota*. What is this? What is the point of these endless disputes that seem coextensive to the very existence of a field of intellectual activity? What are the issues at stake? Why, let us have another crack at the question, do they carry on in perpetuity? Why do people, ordinary people or philosophers, begin a discussion courteously to later find themselves in disagreement on everything and accusing each other of absurdity? How is it that, after ten years or even a century, the other camp has *still not* understood its adversary's point of view and still finds it to have no merit? I am using the example of philosophers here because they are the appointed specialists of wisdom and reason, but public, political and militant controversies have the same character of perpetuity. I could have rehashed the case of the two fellows in a bistro, but they do not enjoy the leisure of staying at their table for years on end for the sake of squabbling. Dialogues of the deaf are not the privilege of philosophers, though they do persist more stubbornly than the ordinary layman.

I am surprised then by something that is at the very least commonplace, if not simple, and that I will now take the time to illustrate. Jürgen Habermas and Hans Albert are both philosophers. They do not agree with each other. Not only do they disagree on the correct method for social sciences, as that is just the beginning, they disagree on everything when all is said and done. The more they dig with each passing month and each passing chapter, the more their general state of disagreement grows wider and deeper. This is precisely what was named the *Positivismusstreit* in Germany, the Positivist quarrel that begins with a dispute in 1961 between Adorno and Popper in Tübingen. The more they accuse one another of not understanding the other's approach, the more they feel compelled to let the public know how they deem their opponent's approach to be not only erroneous, but to be harmful and *beyond all reason*. At the end of this month long dispute into which they drag the intellectual class, their disagreement remains complete, even more complete than at the beginning, and in the end they refuse to continue speaking with each other – which is evidently the only rational thing to do. Try as Habermas might a bit later on to develop a democratic theory of communicational behaviour, he is forced to admit that when it comes to behaving through communication with the likes of Karl Popper and Hans Albert, his patience and logic are tested to their very limits.

Philosophers acknowledge the following perpetual situation without too much difficulty: "No philosophical system has ever reached conclusions not open to cogent challenge by other systems; hence ... no progress has ever been made in philosophy."[18] However, one might ask what philosophy's goal is if it is not to one day produce valid reasonings? (This objection from an amateur suggests that the non-philosopher likely does not possess the adequate competence to object, and philosophers would reconcile once more to make sure he knows it.)

Cognitive Divides

If a lack of cognitive comprehension was necessarily the result of misunderstanding – to miss understanding – it would suffice to unplug your ears, to be patient and kind, and to pay closer attention in order to solve the problem. But perhaps in certain cases, the cases a post-modern philosopher would classify as the "differences of opinion," humans do not understand one another's reasonings because, even if they speak the same language, they do not use the same *rhetorical code* (or not quite, as we have not established what *quantum* of divergences is enough to block debate).

This notion assumes that in order to persuade, to make your arguments understood and to understand your interlocutor, you must have at your disposal, amongst other intellectual abilities, certain *shared rules* of what is arguable, knowable, debatable and persuadable. And a major problem surfaces if these rules are not regulated by a universal, transcendental and ahistorical Reason, or if these rules are not the same everywhere and for everybody.

My problem can henceforth be expressed in the following terms: public languages, argumentations and discourses that coexist in a social state distinguish themselves from one another in a self-evident fashion by differences in perspective, by the disparities in how much data is put forward and how much is retained, by the incompatibility of vocabularies and notional patterns that *inform* this data, by the clash of premises and conclusions, and by the conflict of interests that drive those who produce them – all these elements are already sufficiently capable of sustaining the patience and good will postulated by the interlocutors and, thus, of blocking discussion – but do they not divide themselves by chance and more radically and *profoundly* by cognitive characters, in particular by heterogeneous, conflicting, divergent and incompossible argumentative logics?[19] Do discourses, discursive sectors and ideological "camps" all fall within *the same reason* and the same argumentative rationality? Taking this into consideration, are they accountable to the same transcendental criteria of rational validity?

I consider this line of questioning to be central because it seems to me that *dialogues of the deaf* are the rule rather than the exception in our social interactions, and that misunderstandings and never-ending controversies often seem to result from clashes between certain "schools of thought." These clashes are regarding how we approach the world, how we derive and produce meaning from it, and how we end up with "convictions." Some of these dialogues of the deaf, particularly when it comes to political struggles in public life, can last a generation (or several generations, for that matter), with the problem usually being resolved by the disappearance of the adversaries concerned and the emergence of a new generation that no longer even understands

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[18] Johnstone, *Validity*, 135.

the meaning of the impassioned and divisive argument, nor the issues of the confrontation – the question of knowing who "was right" at the end of it all becomes insignificant since the issues as well as the terms of the dispute that the adversaries used to confront and refute one another, without really ever having listened to what the other had to say, have also become obsolete and been discredited.[20]

My question comes back to whether it is necessary to distinguish from the category, a component part of the rhetoric of argumentation, those divergences in ideas susceptible to being arbitrated by discussion or subject to the opinions of a third party, who is supposedly impartial to the competing interests but nonetheless able to evaluate and weigh the *arguments* of the supported theses. It is a category of *insurmountable* disagreements because the very rules of argumentation and the fundamental presuppositions as to what is "rational," "obvious," "demonstrable" or "knowable" would not form or no longer form a common ground, thus creating a situation where opponents of ideas end up perceiving one another as "crazy" and refusing quite simply and very *reasonably* to speak to each other.[21]

Example of a Divide: The Logic of Ressentiment

It seems to me that the idea of a diversity of logics that are social, divergent and unintelligible to one another dates back first to Nietzsche, and particularly to his *Genealogie des Morals*. By distinguishing between the aristocracy's and the "slaves'" moral codes, and by opposing them to one another, Nietzsche attributes to each ways of evaluating and of conceiving the world that are diametrically opposed. "From the outset," Nietzsche writes, "the slaves' moral code opposes a *no* to that which is not a part of itself, to that which is 'different' from itself, to that which is its 'nonego': and it is this *no* which is its act of creation"[22] (TFTPOTD). This "moral code" lives from its own logic, which Nietzsche calls "ressentiment."

In its standard usage, this word describes psychological tendencies and frames of mind. Ressentiment is then close to frustration, rancour, covetousness, envy and desire for vengeance. But in its philosophical sense, with Søren Kierkegaard as well as Nietzsche at its source, and followed later by Max Scheler (*Ressentiment*, 1912), it is concerned with "moral codes," ideologies, doctrines and political programs.

Ressentiment, which I classify as one of the *four great types* of recurring logics, relies on a few paralogisms of principle: that acquired superiority in the world as it is indicates "moral" degradation; that the values which people in positions of dominance recognize and encourage be discredited as a whole; that all situations involving subordination or inferiority give reason to the

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[20] J'entends par *doxa* le répertoire topique et les règles rhétoriques et narratives qui, dans un état donné de société, organisent hégémoniquement les langages de la «sphère publique» (au sens de Habermas).

[20] Mais deux sortes de motifs très différents peuvent expliquer cette obsolescence: soit que les circonstances aient changé, soit que les façons de raisonner dessus se soient modifiées...

[21] Fragm. DL 9.51

[22] Nietzsche, *La Généalogie de la morale,* Paris, Mercure de France, p. 47.

victim; that any failure or powerlessness to take the advantage in this world transforms itself into merit and legitimises itself *ipso facto* as grievances against those who are supposedly privileged, allowing for a complete denial of responsibility. This transvaluation, this inversion of values, this *Umwertung aller Werte*[23] at the heart of the rhetoric of ressentiment was of ethico-religious origin, that is to say of Christian origin, for Nietzsche.[24]

Ressentiment's moral code relies indeed on a few paralogisms: that acquired superiority in this world indicates "moral" degradation; that the values which people in positions of dominance recognize are contemptible; and consequently, that all situations involving subordination or inferiority give reason to the victim, - that any failure or powerlessness to take the advantage in this world transforms itself into merit and legitimises itself as grievances, allowing for a complete denial of responsibility.

Ressentiment forms the logical basis of nationalisms – but not of chauvinisms that wield great power, of course: I am referring to the ideologies of small national entities that are holding on to the memory of being subjugated or bullied. Nationalism is to be viewed above all as *separatism*, as the need to secede in order to rediscover your own identity, and as a fantasy to no longer have to compare yourself on the historical adversary's territory and terms by following the logic which assured his success, - to rid yourself of him, to sever all ties, to isolate yourself from him so that you are no longer accountable to anything but the People's values of ressentiment, convinced that criticism, competition and contempt only ever came from the outside and that it will be possible to reduce this suffering from past failures as seen by the other (in perpetuating them, unfortunately).

Polarisation into Two "Camps"

The very polarisation that takes place most commonly raises new questions. Why does "common" reason, when it is applied to a problem in a given situation and sector, seem to typically generate a configuration with *two poles*? And why do these poles become irreconcilable "camps" that debate for an indefinite period of time and often wind up railing against one another? This is an intriguing phenomenon. It cuts across, for example, the history of philosophy: Sophists, Platonists, Sceptics, as well as Dogmatists, Relativists and Objectivists . . . If we examine a particular sector, we notice the same phenomenon – in the middle of the 20th century, two "camps" divide the philosophy of language: the first, that of *The Ideal Language Philosophy*, gathers together Frege, Russell, Carnap and Tarski; that which opposes it is what

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[23] Voir l'ouvrage fameux de Max SCHELER, *Vom Umsturz der Werte*. Le premier à faire du ressentiment un objet de philosophie morale, c'est Kierkegaard -- c'est par ce mot français que son traducteur anglais rendra une expression danoise dans son livret de 1848, *The Present Age*.

[24] Si ce que je vais définir et faire voir comme le «ressentiment» a quelque chose à voir avec ce que l'expérience courante identifie comme de la rancune ou de l'esprit de vengeance, le ressentiment n'est aucunement à confondre avec cette autre chose, la juste «colère contre le monde», qu'elle soit dostoïevskienne ou rationnellement et stoïquement militante, avec le refus d'**accepter** — tant qu'il ne s'accompagne pas de fantasmes compensatoires, de griefs transmués en horizon cognitif, de dénégation du dialogue nécessaire avec l'autre et du devenir.

was called the Philosophy of ordinary language, with Austin, Strawson and Grice as its adherents . . .[25] Such a bi-polarisation also divides the modern extreme left, as I have mentioned: it sets anarchists and socialists against each other in all respects, with the former describing the latter as "authoritarians." The time will certainly come when the controversy devoid of partisans will be forgotten, but without having reached an agreement or having moved beyond the differences of opinion.

Rather than recall the aggressive and vindictive nature of human psychology or the unilateral nature of human convictions, with people always acting in their own self-interest, we should find hypotheses that can be supported rationally or illustrated from a sociological or historical perspective.

The presence of two polarised camps supposes, moreover, the possibility of a third category that is even more frustrated than the two groups officially battling against each other: the category of the "excluded third party," composed of those who think that the entire question has been asked incorrectly, that the opposing camps agree to ask it incorrectly at the third party's expense and that both are mistaken in an identical and symmetrical fashion.

Unity and Universality of Reason?

I want very much to consider equality of mind and human reason as man's shared trait and the one bond that can unite them. I acknowledge that it is also a democratic value or in any case a reasonable fiction to consider the *Body Politick* as being endowed with reason. I acknowledge that critical and "communicational" reason merit defence as the only alternative to violence in social relations known to date.[26] These acknowledgements do not take any relevance away from the observation that triggered my reflection: that there exists various ways of managing one's potential for reason and of guiding one's reasonings, and that this deserves to be studied – and that the capacity to reason and to argue has but a distant relation with the metaphysical idea of reason as an instrument for truthful knowledge. Although it is sometimes normative in certain respects, all the work that has been done since Toulmin and Perelman on rhetorical reason, that is to say on informal logic, shows that invoking a transcendental reason where the reference to an ideal and absolute Logic, of which "standard reason" is no more than a degraded derivative, produces nothing of interest and leads to the wrong paths. If nothing else, I know what this standard reason is not: it is not a sorite, a series of propositions that have been rigorously deduced and mutually verified; it is not in the form of a geometry textbook, with axioms, theorems and correlates. If reason does not resemble these things, if it varies in consistency and degree, if it is a quality of discourse (and if discourse is *informed* by the immanent logic of natural languages), if it is something that is meant to be communicated through argumentations, if all these rules are debatable and debated, and if these boundaries are porous, then there is a place for this reason's own science not belonging to the *more geometrico* rationalists. The science of a problematological (Michel Meyer) and dialogical (M.M. Bakhtin) reason.

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[25] Ce qu'expose Recanati, *Literal*, introd.

[26] Popper in Adorno, *Positivist*, 292.

Furthermore, if knowledge is neither a "mirror' of nature nor the reflection of reality in the mind, and if we dismiss these metaphysical ideas, then there can be several competing and relatively "true" ways of knowing the world through reasoning. Truth can be unique and the ways of searching for it can vary and be historically conditioned. These ways of searching are what interest me. It would be pushing, stylizing and aestheticizing things a little to say that the world is exactly as it is represented in *Rashomon* or Pirandello. However, if what I call reason regularly leads to debates without resolution and to dialogues of the deaf, it must be asked – which I do in these conclusions – why argumentation is nonetheless so central to life in society, why humans spend so much time arguing and what pleasure or misfortune pushes them to do so.

This science, the science that asks these questions, is what I call *rhetoric*, a separate topic within the *Analysis of Discourse* as a whole.[27]

Rhetoric is a social science, and thus it is historical. Certain tendencies, habits and rational skills are acquired, tested and reinforced by the milieu's influence and approval; as ideal types, they are the logics studied in my book that are viewed as "penchants" and "styles." From this perspective, we can have reasons to postulate a reason that transcends cultures, eras and milieus, but this is hardly essential in practise. Having said that, a comparison of the argumentation from one era and one culture to another would be an interesting undertaking, but what we have in this respect is very incomplete.

I have very little interest in metaphysical reason or in any consideration about transcendental logic outside of the reasonings men make and the arguments they exchange. I analyse discourses that take place in a given culture, in a determined social state and in a moment in history. I ask myself very little the philosophical question of human reason and of its unity and diversity. If I brush these types of questions aside, it is to clarify the analysis of texts in their sociohistorical context and has very little to do with the pleasure of speculating after centuries of speculations. Furthermore, in acknowledging the diverse methods of reasoning, the frequency of cognitive miss-understandings and their political and social gravity, I do not see the need to rally behind a *relativism* that is no less metaphysical.

I have said nowhere that differences in logics, assimilated by indoctrination and connivances but which are not all encompassing and which coexist in the same spirit with the generally shared mundane topic, are insurmountable. Nor did I ever say that they create irreconcilable obstacles, even if they do create obvious difficulties.

I see an inherent merit in what Hans Albert calls *critical thinking*, which is simply a thought that does not feign the ability to create itself nor to find support outside of this world, but a thought capable of calling itself into question and, in this sense, having definitively given up, of *progressing*.

Reason as More Rational than the World

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[27] Je ne trouve que quelques travaux qui touchent en psychologie cognitive à la diversité rationnelle. Récemment, Stanovich, *Who is Rational? Studies in Individual Differences in Reasoning.* 1999.

I find nothing that is concrete in the old metaphysical idea that presents reason as this faculty conducive to producing truths about the world by the manner in which vision and my other senses allow me to have true perceptions of it (exception . . . optical illusions). Nor do I see any interest in concluding by shortcut to the strictly Pyrrhonian and dogmatically irrational idea that the world is my representation of it, end of story.

I believe that any reflection on reason as an exercise must *encompass* and explain both reasonings by common sense and the almost unlimited capacity of the theologian, the Nazi or the paranoid to accumulate fanciful or idiotic reasonings, as well as reasonings meant to offend and to distort their relationship with the world. Such a reflection must posit that if reason does not do so, then reasonings serve at least to hide the world, to conceal it by substituting a *being of reason* and to deny the inconvenience of reality as much as they grasp it and see it for what it is.

He who reasons and argues in an empirical world finds himself in a *difficult* situation – that of being without the smallest connection to the artificial and comfortable rationality of science. In contrast with the laboratory where I build a controlled and controllable *mini-world* about which I ask only confined, prepared and anticipated questions without being vitally concerned about the possible results, the outside world about which I reason, that is to say the empirical world and the future, is always less rational than my reason (or than its somewhat unreasonable use I am tempted to make of the world – would that not be because I must control it or give myself the illusion of doing so?). The world is to a great extent unknowable, unforeseeable and uncontrollable, though I am inextricably mixed up in it, often under urgent pressure. This world is im-probable. In maintaining the will to be rigorously rational when confronted with it, I risk quite simply to be lead astray. This was the sceptic Rivarol's opinion, and with him we find suspicion regarding the inherent irrationality of logic without sagacity: "From certainty to certainty and from clear thought to clear thought, the mind can only wind up in error" (TFTPOTD).

It is striking to see how far people with a certain doctrine or a definitive explanation will go by making a rigid additional effort of *logic* when the world eludes and contradicts them, instead of a more nuanced effort at observation and perception. No one is more logical that an anarchist theorist from *La Révolte* when his convictions are contradicted to the fullest extent:

> . . . we have always sought to rely on logic, reasoning and argumentation at the risk of being thought of as doctrinaires and pawns[28] (TFTPOTD).

The world about which I reason always hugely exceeds the perceptible and the verifiable: I reason and deliberate about what is happening in the minds of others, about what will happen, about what could happen and about the inextricable causes of what did happen. Reasoning consists of warding off and masking that which, in reality, in the course of events and in relation to what I believe I know, is at least inexplicable and unreasonable in some respects, if not completely absurd. This is what Hegel's philosophical model (and those, of course, of his contemporaries Saint-Simon, Buchez, Colins, Auguste Comte . . .) attests to in his *becoming-reason of history*.

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[28] *La Révolte*, III, 7 (1889), 1.

If I started to reason about this regrettable situation, I would say either reason is not a reliable instrument for knowing the world or the world is intrinsically unreasonable. Since it is difficult to declare outright that the world is unreasonable, I have come to acknowledge that the exercise of reason opposes an excessive rationality to the world and that it represents an unreasonable use of my reason "all the way through." But rhetorical argumentation and reasoning constantly exceeds the verifiable: the orator, the politician, the lawyer and the militant always want to impose too many words on the world, to convince and clarify too much, and to make things too coherent. This *too much* is part of the essence of rhetoric.

Rationalists have always known that too much reason inevitably leads to antinomies. This was Kant's opinion. Rhetoric, which does not enjoy the leisure of philosophical reflexiveness, takes great care in masking its antinomies in order to hide them from notice, so as to prove its legitimacy through its "coherence." I devoted a subchapter to the illusions of coherence and recalled Vilfredo Pareto's legitimate observation that the typical trait of the ideological *Docta Ignorantia* lies in systemic coherence.

Reason, by the nature of its mental operations and their limitlessness, is more rational than empiricism, to which it is somehow applied: it *tends*, in particular, to add stability, coherence, systematicity, structuring and binarism. It tends quite simply to add meaning: what do we make of a coincidence besides search for how it can be "significant"? Herein lies the very germ of what we have called paranoid Logic. As I have said from the beginning, this Logic is not "madness," but an excessive effort at rationality when confronted with a world that is not equally rational: nothing arises from chance or from the involuntary in this Logic; everything has been foreseen and calculated. What to do when confronted with that which is evasive, unknown and uncontrollable? The answer is found amongst all the historians that study ideologies, and it defines the very notion of *Ideology*: "to search for a comprehensive and definitive answer that puts an end to questioning"[29] (TFTPOTD). The ideological *ideal* is indeed that which is impregnable and cannot be identified, reinforced by an inexhaustible reserve of denying sophisms.[30]

Behind the various logics we have described and behind what we can find here and there to be irrational in them, there is a frustrated rationality that wished to find in the world more reason than it can offer. Ideo-logics are mechanisms for being right against the misfortunes of fate. Of all the definitions of socialism, the one that goes directly to the heart of things belongs to Edward Hyams:

> Socialism is the name we give to a rational attempt to give expression ... to an irrational belief in immanent justice.[31]

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[31] Taguieff, *Foire,* 80.

[30] C'est en quoi Popper a raison qui voit dans le respect de l'expérience et le fait que ce qui prime ce n'est pas la logique mais la confrontation l'essentiel de ce qui distingue la science de la métaphysique.

[31] Hyams, Edward. *The Millenium Postponed.* London: Secker & Warburg, 1974, 3.

Furthermore and concurrently, I remember some old theories of "false conscience," or at least their starting point, that show man being *thrown* into the social world: how can I use my reason not to judge from on high (unless I am ready to drink the hemlock), but *to survive* in a partially irrational system? At this level, the following question applies to all types of societies: how does my "conscience" put up with the role I must play in capitalism (Lukàcs et al.'s question) or communism (Gabel et al.'s question) and with the necessity from where I stand to give them logic and values, if not by strongly and persuasively suggesting to myself rational irrationalisations?

"Why did my daughter die? I loved her so much!" Is this a real question or the absurd expression of profound grief? What if it were a real question, even though no satisfactory answer is possible? What if reason were precisely to ask (oneself) questions like these?

In the empirical world, Zenon's arrow reaches its target. In philosophical reasoning, it misses. We could conclude that this leads to the following direct question: What is wrong with the state of reasoning? But there are people who would ask instead: What is wrong with the state of the world?

The typical *eureka* of ideologues is the moment when their reason makes them see the world as absurd – which condemns them logically as much as it does morally. Such was capitalism for the men of the Second International:

> What is a social organization that causes misery amongst the masses? It is not only unjust, it is absurd[32] (TFTPOTD).

This was one of the great socialist arguments: capitalism is as *illogical* as it is criminal, and what is more is that it is condemned to disappear since it offends reason . . . to the point that the most astonishing thing is to see such an absurd and unsteady economic system last. The Marxist Charles Rappoport writes: "We have compared contemporary society, with good reason, to an upside down house with its base in the air, or to an inverted pyramid holding itself miraculously by its point"[33] (TFTPOTD). A witness armed with the rationality of the future would supposedly not believe his eyes: we will ask ourselves one day "how the capitalist regime, full of the most scandalous absurdities and contradictions managed to endure, and live on and on by the ruins it accumulated. We will have a hard time believing it in the future . . ."[34] (TFTPOTD).

Voltaire is presented as a "rationalist" but he is above all a man of letters, and all of his stories revert to the ironic demonstration of the limits of reasoning and the dangers of great systems, in addition to mocking philosophers' nonsensical speculations. If Voltaire hates anti-reason, priests' fables, dogmas and prejudices, he also doubts and is suspicious of reasoning's excess, an excess he blames as he constantly sees it in humans. As the Philosopher admits to Micromegas,

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[32] Deslinières, Lucien. *Qu'est-ce que le socialisme?* Bois-Colombes: L'Auteur, 1907, 17.

[33] *Pourquoi nous sommes socialistes?* [*Encyclopédie socialiste, vol. X*]. Paris: Quillet, 1913, 1.

[34] Rappoport, «Le rachat du capitalisme», *Le socialisme,* vol. 1908.

"we agree upon two or three points we understand, and dispute two or three thousand points of which we know nothing."

This is indeed why, amongst modern philosophers, there are many who doubted that reasoning reason could be usefully applied to life's concerns. For Schopenhauer, the world is passionate and irrational, so applying a worn out pure reason to it is useless. For Søren Kierkegaard, recourse to reason alone is the prime example of "inauthenticity." Reason has failed; it does not understand the vital questions, etc. Moral truths are indefensible because unfounded, the masks of ressentiment worn by the weak and the incapable. Even having arrived at this point, the philosopher still uses reason to see what we can take from it when confronted with an absurd world: if the Cosmos is stripped of meaning, if *Homo sapiens* are unnatural animals, if human destiny is a brief moment that leaves no trace, if the idea of a good and just community is a hopeless illusion, what *conclusion* should we come to? What's more, we can conclude in a different way, as nothing forbids this, and find – in combining absurdity and humanism – greatness, albeit a vain greatness, in the protesting of rationality that manifests itself in men who argue incessantly about an absurd world:

> The world in itself is not reasonable, that is all we can say about it. But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the frantic desire for clarity whose call resonates in the deepest reaches of man[35] (TFTPOTD).

An Involved Reason.   The World as Difficult to Know

Reason in philosophy textbooks is a disembodied and unsituated mechanism for researching what is true and good. The reason we are dealing with here is one that is *involved* in the world and inseparable from social milieus and ways of living. It is also inseparable from the decisions and actions of men, and is interconnected with them. It seems as though we would like their reasonings to be sounder and more reasonable than their actions because we have this disembodied image of a reason staying above the fray. A bit of reflection shows that this could not be the case. If I am part of a religious sect, a rigid political party, a fascist or an apartheid regime and I approve of them or simply want to survive, I automatically have the "reasons" that go with them and that legitimize my membership and course of action. To me, these reasons seem excellent if only due to the fact that they reduce the *dissonance* between my ideas and my actions – even if they seem "crazy" to the outside world. I hold as good those reasonings which make my relationship with the immediate world tolerable or less intolerable. Arguing, then, goes back in particular to finding "reasons" for criminal social systems, unreasonable morals and absurd sentiments that have been collectively instilled; these "reasons" are not mechanisms for unveiling the reality of the world, nor for seeing it as it is. Rather, they are Noah's cloaks that conceal the world's obscenity.

I recall Leon Festinger's notion of **dissonance**. Humans start producing argumentations when a concrete conflict is introduced into their world. I am profoundly antiracist . . . but I will remove my children from the school where blacks or little Arabs are "causing problems." Here, it is a

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[35] *Mythe*, 37.

matter of finding good arguments quickly to reconcile the two logics. Festinger, a social psychologist, posits the need for coherence as being supreme to humanity. It is not a question of Freudian rationalisations, i.e. of reasons given to sentiments whose unconscious motives escape us, but one of arguing against a conscious rational discomfort. In particular, it is to convince (myself) that I, rather than circumstances, determine my conduct. To justify myself in the eyes of others and in my own, to not disown myself.

Argumentation intervenes here *a posteriori* and its objective is to make my diverse opinions compatible on government, international, national and local politics, my allies, my enemies, my colleagues and my neighbours, for example. This would explain why the reasonings of "others" often seem not only crazy but *hypocritical* from my point of view: they seal off dissonances as best they can, which I nonetheless still see through rationalisations that, from my perspective, I perceive as denials.

In politics, if I like certain political positions belonging to the right and hate certain others belonging to the left, even though I am irrevocably "left-wing," I must justify all of this in order to re-establish some coherence. There are very good reasons (at psychological cost) for accepting my choice of career, the values of my social milieu, my gender and my destiny; what remains is finding *ad hoc* arguments. There are reasons that are not quite as good but that I can still justify in submitting myself to public opinion and the dominant ideology, and this submission will go smoother if I find "personal reasons" to give in and if I convince myself that I am behaving according to "my" ideas.

Outside of a laboratory, no one in "real life" ever has *all* the possible and relevant data, no one cares enough to gather all of it and no one tests and evaluates it all the time, with the result being that it becomes *reasonable* to take shortcuts, to simplify in black and white terms, to brush aside the complexities over which we have very little control, to extrapolate and to generalize, and to reach conclusions that go beyond the data, that delve into unknown territory, and that are firmer and more likely to establish a decision whether or not it is "logical." Most things considered to be "sophisms" are reasonable as shortcuts for thinking and for ways of avoiding uncertainty.

If I have a great many true facts at my disposal, I still do not have a reasoning to create connections and a hierarchy amongst them. The historian's problem is not in finding true facts, as he often has them in abundance, but in arguing using select facts that are relevant and "interesting" . . . while trying to avoid begging the question.

If I argue about the future, - which in itself is already far beyond what is knowable – how can I do so while controlling my feelings of precariousness, powerlessness and anguish? How do I exorcise the possible threats and misfortunes through reason? Above all, what kind of rhetorical theory would study conjectural and projected reasonings while dismissing all that is "psychological" as being trivial and of no interest?

The first modernity (the 19th and 20th centuries) had a passion precisely for arguing about the future and disputing the meaning of "progress," but did so little or very rarely on the possibility of experiencing it. One feels a sort of exasperated pity in reading Auguste Comte's demonstrations and scientific satisfaction "in finally introducing a perfect unity and a rigorous continuity into this immense spectacle where we ordinarily see so much confusion and

incoherence"[36] (TFTPOTD).   In this context, there were very few indeed who objected to this cognitive enthusiasm by stating quite plainly that history and the future in the short and long term are *unknowable*.   Gustave Le Bon, a Spencerian Positivist and Social Darwinist who sometimes offered pessimist prophecies himself, opposed to socialism, amongst his other angles of attack, the thesis of the immediate limits of all historical predictions.   He wrote: "What can we say about the future, we who know almost nothing of the world in which we live and who hit an impenetrable wall as soon as we want to discover the causes of phenomena"[4] (TFTPOTD).

Furthermore, the reasonings with which we are concerned are constructed using natural language, or the malleable areas of language and the lexicon to be more precise, no matter the effort made by judicial, sociological or psychological language.   When I say John is "dishonest," or "sly," or "generous," or "vulgar," I am not saying anything as precise as "acidic" or "basic" or "soluble." (There exists a solution, albeit a desperate one, to this problem in psychology: behaviourism consists of eliminating once and for all the discourse regarding the observed subject's "internal states.")

Our knowledge of reality, with its quasars, chromosomes, and unique individuals and their secret passions, is only ever very incomplete and very partial.   We perceive in it effects and results before anything else; we see exact processes or mechanisms very rarely.   We do not know what is going through our closest friends' minds, and thus we will forever be unaware of their hopes, their fears and their sorrow.   We reason and debate to substitute an artificial and conjectural knowledge for this profound ignorance.   In other words, we do it to make believe that we know.

Reality is not a timeless structure.   It unfolds over time and, from my vaguely or, rather, partially known immediate present, I reason about a past that is unfathomable and badly verifiable (even in its most recent form), as well as about an unforeseeable future with its series of consequences that are too long for me to compose a sorite.   I project the argumentation onto the past and the future, and I give myself the illusion that the present can hold them.

It is the lesson Hamlet teaches us from the beginning of his tragedy: the world exceeds reasoning – "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy" – except that when confronted with this world that is unknown, or at the very least difficult to know, "philosophy" in its broader sense consists of feigning knowledge of the world and controlling it through reasoning.   Such that, when it offers denial upon denial of my convictions, I do not let it go and I do not admit defeat.   Instead, I start arguing with the world and put together adventitious hypotheses.   I do not argue when things are clear, but when the world gets muddled, when the points of reference dissolve and when the outside world resists my ideas and even contradicts me.   I argue more than ever when things are doubtful, and even more so when they are outrageous.   Apparently, we must admire the *Logic* of Port-Royal, but our admiration is not for the most surprising elements in its Art of reasoning: chapter XIII of Part IV, for example, shows how "to manage your reason well" in order to believe in miracles, or rather in order to distinguish well, clearly and rationally between true and false miracles.

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[36] *Cours de philos. posit.,* VI 457. Comte déclare avoir découvert les quinze principales lois sociologiques, avec lui, «l'esprit scientifique a atteint son degré suprême». La découverte par Comte des   lois de cette science était le grand sujet d'admiration de Littré, «Avoir assujetti les phénomènes sociaux au régime scientifique est capital. Car maintenant dans la décadence de toute théologie et de toute métaphysique, c'est l'unique condition du ralliement des intelligences.»

[4] *Psychologie du socialisme,* 449.

The rationalist will to abolish the unknown and our fears of it, in addition to erasing the invisible, is good in principle, even if this will is deceitful, excessive and allows for and invites us to reason in the emptiness of fanciful speculations. Because Hamlet should have added, alas, that there are also more things in "philosophy" than there are in the world. That there are perhaps ghosts in the world, as the first act suggests, but that a great many intellectual and hair-splitting ghosts also exist in the minds of those who reason. The great question historians ask, "What is an historical *fact*?," is answered by the other great question, "What is an historical *concept*?" It is always possible in the name of reason to go beyond the limits of the knowable and to move forward from dream to dream. It is always possible to set forth "laws" when we are sure of nothing. The fatal encounter between the finiteness of social systems and the unknowable of historical fate are the very conditions of what we have named the Great Narratives (Grands récits).[5] History started revealing laws and determinisms. It told the past of humanity's future and it *demonstrated* the immanent morality of legitimate human undertakings, or those that went in its "direction," at the very moment when the opening of possibilities, the mutations and the increase of the unpredictable linked to the first "globalization" heightened uncertainty, which had been noticeably smaller in routine societies.[6]

Philosophers concede all of this by turning it into a crooked form of human greatness: "Humanity is made in such a way that it is interested above all in problems it is unable to solve" (TFTPOTD), writes Marcel Gauchet (refuting Marx's optimism).[7] The great intellectual history to write would be the history of ways, for ancients as well as moderns, to *exceed* the knowable.

Everything that can be stated and everything that is arguable does not fall under the category of what is knowable *ipso facto* – it is a conquest of science to be a system that, contrary to older metaphysics, says: this sentence is correct and this appears to be a questioning or a reasoning, but it only appears to be so because it refers to *nothing*. A high school student in a planetarium might ask, "What happened before the Big Bang?" The question is intelligible and well constructed, but the correct answer is not "We don't know." Rather, it is that the answer will never be in the realm of what is knowable.

Reason as a Means of Negating Reality
We spoke of "falsification" in scientific statements, a condition that disputes the progress of sciences. But socially active human reason, outside of the constraints of a haughty academic community, is a mechanism for producing unlimited evasive reasonings that are protected from all radical challenges. I can continue arguing (and I can do so indefinitely until the day when no one will be interested anymore) that the Leninist revolutionary plan was excellent and construct history from 1917 to the present day as though there is no evidence to disprove this position. I might as well do it, for that matter![8] No falsification in the strong sense of the word will prevent

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[5] Voir Debray, *Critique.*

[6] C'est un peu ce que dit Taguieff, *Foire,* 79.

[7] Gauchet, Marcel. *Un monde désenchanté?* Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier / Éditions ouvrières, 2004, 164.

[8] Quine s'exaspère d'un cas non moins bien documenté: «Cigaret manufacturers proudly announced that they were about to have independent researchers prove that there was not, after all, any causal connection between cigaret smoking and lung cancer.» Quine, *Web,* 7.

me from doing it or from persisting. Here again, the observer who does not share these ever patchy convictions tends to qualify as unreasonable the stubborn explanatory epicycles and their alleged irrefutability. No "fact" disproves anything against the supported thesis – except the fact that it is possible to consider a thesis which nothing can refute to be outside of reason.

That it is possible to reason in order to mask and to escape reality has been a regrettable fact since Plato and Aristotle faced the Sophists. Truth-loving minds have sought rules to prevent such phenomena and to draw a clear boundary between valid reasonings and hateful sophisms.

To Chateaubriand, we opposed evidence of the world's great geological age as an objection to Christianity and the Book of Genesis. However, *The Genius of Christianity* (*Le Génie du christianisme*) had a ready answer that was hard to refute:

> God must have created and without a doubt did create the world with all the marks of deterioration and of complementarity that we see in it.[9]

The Empirical World and the Reasoned World

The world in its artificiality says nothing and does not reason. To argue about the world, I must first simplify it and put it into order. In order to do this, I must have criteria of organization and elimination. Then, I must make the world face non-realities, notions, types, values, paradigms and patterns. There are regularly occurring phenomena in the world, but there are no reasonings that *emanate* from them. Nothing guarantees the matching of words to things or of processes to inferences, which is the very reason I argue. The universal (universal values) is not a given, and it seems to me that it is even counterfactual and that it results from apagogical reasonings instituted against the course of the world.

The reasoned and debated world is indemonstrable, which does not exempt us from reasoning, and with as much gusto as possible, *precisely* because no argumentation will be decisive. No one has ever succeeded "in axiomatising ethics," according to Hillary Putnam,[10] and no one can demonstrate moral principles – for example, that it is not good to torture a child in front of his or her mother, even if the higher interest of the State demands it (at least in the way I understand it). This unproven rule is universally accepted (except in the case of Argentinean soldiers during Videla's era), even if it cannot be axiomatised nor rigorously demonstrated.

Reasoning and Speculation.   Reasoning Vacuously

A theory of rationality whose *central* subject is not the Byzantine debates on the gender of angels has partial and fallacious premises. Over the centuries, humans have debated and argued a great deal more over the gender of angels (and over the sovereignty of nations and the Proletarian Revolution) than over the textbook question, "Given that there are two subway lines, which one is better in terms of reaching my destination?" A theory of reasoning must distinguish firmly between argumentativity and the relationship to empiricism. I have noticed that theorists of natural logic are wary of doing this because it would ruin their approach and reveal that they surreptitiously introduce a systemic bias into their mundane and innocent examples. As in any

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[9] Cité par Plantin, *Argumentation,* 13.

[10] *Raison,* 159.

normative philosophy, natural logic starts with a "normal situation" which is anything but. From the theologian to the paranoid, we never argue as much or as well than when we have lost all contact with reality. Rhetorical demonstrations work very well when they are devoid of meaning and rather better than when they are full of it.

In reading the newspapers from mid-July 2005, I see that the debate over babies who die before receiving baptism has started up again: will they or will they not wind up in Limbo? Important contemporary theologians now doubt that Limbo is compatible with God's justice. This is a good argument, is it not? The Theodicy has the largest collection of religious reasonings that are also the most difficult, rhetorically speaking: God's wisdom and Goodness is proven by the evil and disorder of Creation, which was necessary in spite of possible objections – and it works. The Church has developed in this manner a theoretical corpus "of phenomenal logical inventiveness"[11] (TFTPOTD). God is just, though the innocent may suffer here on Earth while the wicked live and die happily; God is all powerful, though man is free. Theology convinces us that these assertions are not at all contradictory and that this is the harmonious way of the world.

Tertullien's *credo quia absurdum* is an exception, as theologians have always used reason to demonstrate faith even if religion is based on a Revelation. Miracles and wonders are understood rationally, and they have a rational role in their representation of the world. Religious statements are infallible without being *nonsensical* (as Carnap wants it): no undeserved misfortune refutes that "God is Love" and no slaughter committed in his name disproves that your religion is a "religion of peace." Religious beliefs can indeed be proven false, but theologians nevertheless contend that you will see if religion was not the truth at the End of Time or after your death. Nobody, not even Karl Popper, has said that it is unnecessary to wait for the convincing circumstances in order to make a possible falsification. And are scientific axioms, such as "Every cause has an effect," not essential "beliefs"?

Religion is not the only culprit. Until Wittgenstein, philosophy had the impression that its object of study was a particular and superior form of truth, superior that is to what common people of the empirical world thought of in their daily lives. I would say that with Wittgenstein the philosophical task becomes one of helping people think clearly, instead of having pretensions to superior thoughts that the masses cannot understand.

Why Do We Argue?   Argumentation and Justification

The rhetoric of argumentation still considers its norm to be the debate between people who ultimately share the same rationality, as well as where – if we are rationally optimistic and above all patient – the bitterest divergences are caused not by cognitive "deafness," but by *misunderstandings*. Without a doubt, rhetoric also presupposes an axiom it never questions since it seems to be so self-evident, which is that humans argue *to persuade each other* – or at least to persuade a third party of the adversary's error and of the weakness of his arguments. It is not paradoxical to say that this axiom, as it now stands, is untenable. All observation contradicts it: if I only argue with people I believe to have a chance of convincing or undermining, I would have a hard time explaining the abundance of argued discourses – everything from political debates to quarrels over housework – where the chances of persuading

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[11]Deconchy, *Psychologie*, 30. C'est peut-être d'ailleurs le caractère "non-rationnel" des propositions qu'elle agence entre elles qui, paradoxalement, stimule ce type de logique formelle jusqu'au paroxysme dit "scolastique". 41.

your interlocutor or of modifying his point of view are almost non-existent, and where the only vexing conclusion that remains is that of the housework quarrel: "You just don't understand!" Arguing is in any case the inherent acceptance of likely failure in what seems to be an effort of persuasion. (After this failure, I can console myself *in petto* by saying that, since I am reasonable, my interlocutors are indeed crazy for resisting the truth.)

We could and we have said that public argumentation does not seek an immediate perlocutionary act, such as /tell a joke □ make someone laugh/, but something like an expected long term effect resulting from a constant pounding and a slow and imperceptible influence. This would be especially true of "great intellectual ideas" involving politics and society. He who argues new ideas would console himself with the conjectural notion that he is not completely wasting his time, even if his views have no immediate effect. This is precisely the idea defended by Karl Popper, whose critical positivism and democratic convictions were both unconvincing at times, but who nonetheless justified his stubbornness: "arguing is no waste of time as long as people listen to you."[12]

The *stoic* notion that just ideas end up overcoming the most firmly entrenched and routine prejudices, a notion that was espoused by all misunderstood benefactors, scorned scholars and discoverers of new truths, is nothing more than a romantic topos that I often came across in reading socialism's prophets. The truth of the Great Narratives (Grands récits) was one that would simply have to wait for its time in the future, if it had not yet persuaded those who were bogged down by prejudice and error. Hoéné Wronski, another forgotten romantic prophet, presents his singular doctrine of "Messianism" with typically cool confidence in the future:

> Without any exaggeration, the possessor of this absolute truth can say in the manner of the Marquis of Posa in Schiller's *Don Carlos*: 'this century is not ready for my ideal. I belong to the centuries to come' (TFTPOTD).

"Our ideas are sound, for chrissake, we'll end up being right"[46] (TFTPOTD), repeats *Père Peinard* in this slang style that was popular around 1890. Historical truth has time on its side because it has the future before it. It is immune to present disillusions. It cannot *yet* persuade anyone, but it will prevail.

However, this forced confidence in a general conviction that is always to come could not be a substitute for a perlocutionary effect; it is rather a consoling topos that rationalises when confronted with a contradiction, which is the very thing that preoccupies me: when a perlocutionary failure of discursive reasoning clashes with a stubborn will to continue arguing, in spite of an inevitably worthless result. This is indeed something I must explain (to myself).

Moreover and complementarily, is it necessary to recall that when I see myself really, expressly and efficiently exerting an influence over others, including their minds, their choices and their actions, it is not to argumentations that I have recourse but, as all works of political persuasion

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[12][45] *Conjectures,* 359. Il ajoutait il est vrai qu'on ne peut toutefois obliger les gens à vous écouter avec des arguments ni convertir par des arguments les gens qui écartent toute argumentation.

[46] *Père Peinard,* 16. 2. 1890, 10.

can confirm, to subliminal means where reason plays no role? Commercial seduction, political propaganda and even *brainwashing* and rape of the masses (viol des foules) are perhaps atrocious practices that are unworthy of being considered rational, but it has been confirmed that they work.

Humans argue, debate and exchange "reasons" for two immediate motives that are logically prior to a reasonable, thin or non-existent hope of persuading the interlocutor: they argue to *justify* themselves and to obtain from the world a *justification* (in the theological sense as in the sociological sense of Luc Boltanski and Patrick Thévenot)[47] that is inseparable from a *being-right* – they also argue to *place themselves* in relation to the reasons of others by testing the coherence and the strength they attribute to their positions, to position themselves (possibly with like-minded people) and, following the polemical metaphor, to support these positions and be capable of resistance.

Argumentative pragmatics identifies a single perlocutionary effect, that of "convincing," but what is at stake in most circumstances is a pretence, a convention or a means of the *justificatory* intention. *Justification* and *positioning* are, on the contrary, immanent psychological and pragmatic goals.

Let us examine this idea more closely.   Why argue publicly and why are the beliefs which satisfy my interests, actions and way of life not enough for me?   Is it not true that, for whatever reason, I have to demonstrate my concern for their veracity and reasonability? To Aristotle's dismay, Protagoras said, "As things appear to me, so they are for me" (TFTPOTD); I think that I would have objected: but then why do we communicate these things and why does it seem like we want to share them?[48]   In fact, the desire to share my beliefs, even if I am unsuccessful in realising this desire, manifests itself in my remarks because I always couple them with "reasons."   There is much talk of interests and passions in my book, but, even if I am convinced that my interlocutor burns for and shares the same ones, I still offer "reasons" and arguments to transcend these bare interests and common passions.   I know very well that the reason of the strongest is always the best, except that in the logic of ressentiment, so too is the reason of the weakest. However, both the strong and the weak (especially the weak, of course) give (themselves) reasons.[49]

And to whom must I demonstrate my concern for the veracity and reasonability of my remarks if there is little chance that my opaque and unreceptive interlocutor will vindicate me by saying that "I am right"? We argue *before* someone, before an audience or against an adversary, but we actually always go above their heads in addressing *someone else*. In no way am I espousing mystical beliefs here, as I believe that I am making a precise empirical observation: it is here that I would have the universal Audience intervene as this "being of reason" before which, it seems, I seek tirelessly to *justify* myself, regardless of whether anyone is listening or approves of me.   If I may say so, there is an immanent conflict within argued discourse, even at the most personal and the best targeted and individuated levels. We argue before a determined addressee, but for argumentation to be as it really is, or quite plainly for it not to be an *ad hominem* influence, it

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[47] *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur.* Paris: Gallimard, 1991.

[48] Wittgenstein qui était assez déprimé à la fin, disait qu'au bout du compte, tout ce que je peux dire, c'est: C'est comme ça que je fais, c'est comme ça qu'on fait.

[49] Je n'ai pas eu l'occasion de dire combien les *Fables* de La Fontaine forment une théorie de l'argumentation.

must go over his head and address what the Ancients called "any Man enlightened by the light of reason." An invisible universal audience necessarily extends or envelops the real audience, and it is to *it* that the invocation of universal values and principles, with which I punctuate my discursive reasoning, is addressed.

At this precise juncture, it is necessary to call upon the Unity of reason not as an essence of previous metaphysics, but as this *ghost postulated* by the act of reasoning publicly. Justification consists of trying to make a ghostly Referee understand that *I think in accordance with reason and that I do well to try and share it with others*. Assuming only the silence of infinite spaces responds to this pretension, this is nevertheless what he who argues insists on doing.

The old treatises say it in stating that the rhetor must know two very different types of things: on the one hand, he must study and take into account the nature, the turn of mind and even the prejudices of the particular audience he is addressing; on the other hand, he must *also* address himself to something that is transcendental, to a feeling of justice and to the postulated reason of the audience, falsely constructed beyond its idiosyncrasies as a Being of reason that *suppresses* its interests and connivances. As Chaïm Perelman says, rhetoric proposes, in addition to the public's knowledge, "an argumentative technique that imposes itself indifferently on all audiences" because the real audience will not let itself be convinced if we say that the reasons offered are strictly only valid for it[50] (TFTPOTD).

Justifications are obviously things we communicate to others, but, if we do not follow our ideas and conclusions, the public expression of our "reasons" nevertheless justifies us. Justification is not a property of certain reasonings in certain circumstances, but the immanent meaning of the conflict between arguing and convincing.

Psychologically, this can be readily felt during an argument, such as a political debate, in which several minutes have passed since I have given up on the idea of undermining the other and even of coming out on top, assuming that I began by deluding myself of such a possibility: I continue arguing as though a transcendental Referee were listening to us and would eventually side with me.

Logic and justification of oneself go hand in hand. We still argue even when we are sleeping! The dreams that Freud analysed (and dreamt himself very often – refer to the dream entitled "Irma's injection")[51] are indeed *argumentations* that are undoubtedly extravagant, and that serve to deny responsibility, to exonerate and to justify oneself.

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[50] *Traité*, 34.

[51] *Traumdeutung.*