THE EGO AND ITS RELATION TO OTHERS

In our subject today we shall find that the distinction, in any case uncertain, between child psychology and psychology pure and simple has practically no importance. If we forget, as I think we should, the theories and definitions of philosophy in order to learn all we can from direct experiences, we are led to the conclusion that the act which establishes the ego, or rather by which the ego establishes itself, is always identically the same: it is this act which we must try to grasp without allowing ourselves to be led astray by the fictitious speculations which throughout human history have been accumulating in this field. I think that we should employ current forms of ordinary language which distort our experiences far less than the elaborate expressions in which philosophical language is crystallised. The most elementary example, the closest to earth, is also the most instructive. Take, for instance, the child who brings his mother flowers he has just been gathering in the meadow. “Look,” he cries, “I picked these.” Mark the triumph in his voice and above all the gesture, simple and rapid enough, perhaps, which accompanies his announcement. The child points himself out for admiration and gratitude: “It was I, I who am with you here, who picked these lovely flowers, don’t go thinking it was Nanny or my sister; it was I and no one else.” This exclusion is of the greatest importance: it seems that the child wants to attract attention almost materially. He claims enthusiastic praise, and it would be the most calamitous

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thing in the world if by mistake it was bestowed on someone who did not deserve it. Thus the child draws attention to himself, he offers himself to the other in order to receive a special tribute. I do not believe it is possible to insist too much upon the presence of the other, or more exactly others, involved in the statement: “It is I who . . .” It implies that “There are, on the one hand, those who are excluded about whom you must be careful not to think, and, on the other, there is the you to whom the child speaks and whom he wants as a witness.”

The same affirmation on the part of an adult would be less openly advertised; it would be enveloped in a halo of false modesty where the complexities of the game of social hypocrisy are discernible. Think of the amateur composer who has just been singing an unknown melody in some drawing-room. People exclaim: “What is that? Is it an unpublished song by Fauré?” etc. “No, as a matter of fact, it is my own . . .” etc. If we leave on one side, as we should, all the elaborations of social convention, we shall recognise the fundamental identity of the act. The difference has only to do with the attitude adopted or simulated regarding the expected tribute.

To go on with our analysis, we observe that this ego here before us, considered as a centre of magnetism, cannot be reduced to certain parts which can be specified such as “my body, my hands, my brain”; it is a global presence – a presence which gains glory from the magnificent bouquet which I myself have picked, which I have brought you; and I do not know whether you should admire more the artistic taste of which it is a proof or the generosity which I have shown in giving it to you, I, who might so easily have kept it for myself. Thus the beauty of the object is in a fashion reflected upon me, and if I appeal to you, then, I repeat, I do so as to a qualified witness whom I invite to wonder at the whole we form – the bouquet and I.

But we must not fail to notice that the admiration which I expect from you, which you give me, can only confirm and heighten the satisfaction I feel in recognising my own merits. Why should we not conclude from this that the ego here present certainly involves a reference to someone else, only this other someone is treated as a foil or amplifier for my own self-satisfaction.
“But,” you will object, “self-satisfaction, self-confidence, self-love: all this takes for granted a self already established which it is necessary to define.” I think that here we must be careful not to fall into a trap of language. This pre-existent ego can only be postulated, and if we try to describe it, we can only do so negatively, by way of exclusion. On the other hand it is very instructive to give a careful account of the act which establishes what I call myself, the act, for instance, by which I attract the attention of others so that they may praise me, maybe, or blame me, but at all events so that they notice me. In every case I produce myself, in the etymological sense of the word, that is to say I put myself forward.

Other examples bring us to the same conclusion. Let us keep to the level of a child’s experience. A little stranger stretches out his hand to take the ball which I have left on the ground; I jump up; the ball is mine. Here again the relationship with others is at the root of the matter, but it takes the form of an order: Do not touch. I have no hesitation in saying that the instantaneous claiming of our own property is one of the most significant of our experiences. Here again I “produce” myself. I warn the other person that he must conform his conduct to the rule I have given him. It can be observed without any great subtlety that the sense of possession was already implicit in the previous examples, only it was possession of a virtue rather than a thing. Here, however, more clearly than just now, the ego is seen as a global and indefinable presence. I, here before you, possess the ball, perhaps I might consent to lend it to you for a few moments, but you must quite understand that it is I who am very kindly lending it to you and that, in consequence, I can take it back from you at any minute if I so wish; I the despot, I the autocrat.

I have used the term presence several times; now I will try as far as possible to define what I mean by it. Presence denotes something rather different and more comprehensive than the fact of just being there; to be quite exact one should not actually say that an object is present. We might say that presence is always dependent on an experience which is at the same time irreducible and vague, the sense of existing, of being in the world. Very early in the development of a human being this consciousness of existing, which we surely have no reason to doubt is common also to animals, is linked up with the urge to make ourselves recognised by some other
person, some witness, helper, rival or adversary who, whatever may be said, is needed to integrate the self, but whose place in the field of consciousness can vary almost indefinitely.

If this analysis as a whole is correct, it is necessary to see what I call my ego in no way as an isolated reality, whether it be an element or a principle, but as an emphasis which I give, not of course to the whole of my experience, but to that part of it which I want to safeguard in a special manner against some attack or possible infringement. It is in this sense that the impossibility of establishing any precise frontiers of the ego has been often and rightly pointed out. This becomes clear as soon as one understands that the ego can never be thought of as a portion of space. On the other hand, it cannot be repeated often enough that, after all, the self is here, now; or at any rate there are such close affinities between these facts that we really cannot separate them. I own that I cannot in any way conceive how a being for whom there was neither a here nor a now could nevertheless appear as “I.” From this it follows paradoxically enough that the emphasis of which I have spoken cannot avoid tending to conceive of itself as an enclosure, that is to say as exactly the thing it is not; and it is only on deeper reflection that it will be possible to detect what is deceptive in this localisation.

I spoke of an enclosure, but it is an enclosure which moves, and what is even more essential, it is vulnerable: a highly sensitive enclosure. The incomparable analyses of Meredith in The Egoist would fit in very naturally here. Nobody, perhaps, has ever gone so far in the analysis of a susceptibility for which the term self-love is manifestly incomplete. Actually, this susceptibility is rooted in anguish rather than in love. Burdened with myself, plunged in this disturbing world, sometimes threatening me, sometimes my accomplice, I keep an eager look-out for everything emanating from it which might either soothe or ulcerate the wound I bear within me, which is my ego. This state is strikingly analogous to that of a man who has an abscess at the root of his tooth and who experiments cautiously with heat and cold, acid and sugar, to get relief. What then is this anguish, this wound? The answer is that it is above all the experience of being torn by a contradiction between the all which I aspire to possess, to annex, or, still more absurd, to monopolise, and the obscure consciousness that after all I am nothing but an empty void;
for, still, I can affirm nothing about myself which would be really myself; nothing, either, which would be permanent; nothing which would be secure against criticism and the passage of time. Hence the craving to be confirmed from outside, by another; this paradox, by virtue of which even the most self-centred among us looks to others and only to others for his final investiture.

This contradiction is constantly appearing here. Nowhere does it show up in greater relief than in the attitude which our everyday language so aptly terms pose. The poseur who seems only to be pre-occupied with others is in reality entirely taken up with himself. Indeed, the person he is with only interests him so far as he is likely to form a favourable picture of him which in turn he will receive back. The other person reflects him, returns to him this picture which he finds so enchanting. It would be interesting to find out what social climate is most favourable for posing, and what on the other hand are the conditions most likely to discourage it. It might generally be said that in a virile atmosphere posing is unmasked immediately and made fun of. At school or in barracks the poseur has practically no chance of success. A consensus of opinion is almost certain to be formed against him; his companions see through him at once, each one of them accuses him of infringing a certain implicit pact, that of the little community to which he belongs. It is not easy to formulate it exactly, but it is a distinct perception of the incompatibility between a certain reality in which each one participates and this play-acting which degrades and betrays it. On the other hand, the more artificial, unreal and, in a certain sense, effeminate the environment, the less the incompatibility will be felt. This is because in such circles everything depends upon opinions and appearances, from which it follows that seduction and flattery have the last word.

Now, posing is a form of flattery, a manner of paying court while seeming to obtrude oneself. Beneath it all we invariably find self-love and, I might add, pretension. This last, by its very ambiguity, is particularly instructive. To pretend is not only to aspire or to aim high, it is also to simulate, and actually there is simulation in all posing. To realise this we only need to recall what affectation is in all its forms. From the moment that I become preoccupied about the effect I want to produce on the other person, my every act, word
and attitude loses its authenticity; and we all know what even a studied or affected simplicity can be.

Here, however, we must note something of capital importance. From the very fact that I treat the other person merely as a means of resonance or an amplifier, I tend to consider him as a sort of apparatus which I can, or think I can, manipulate, or of which I can dispose at will. I form my own idea of him and, strangely enough, this idea can become a substitute for the real person, a shadow to which I shall come to refer my acts and words. The truth of the matter is that to pose is always to pose before oneself. “To play to the gallery . . .,” we are accustomed to say, but the gallery is still the self. To be more exact, we might say that the other person is the provisional and as it were accessory medium, through which I can arrive at forming a certain image, or idol of myself; the work of stylisation by which each of us fashions this image might be traced step by step. This work is helped by social failure as much as by success. When he who poses is scoffed at by his companions, he decides, more often than not, that he has to do with imbeciles and shuts himself up with jealous care in a little private sanctuary where he can be alone with his idol.

Here we are in line with the merciless analyses to which the anti-romantics have subjected the cult of the ego. “But,” you may ask, “should we not take care not to go too far? Is there not a normal condition of the ego which should not be confused with its abnormalities or perversions?” The question is a very delicate one. It must in no way be mistaken for a problem of technical philosophy, with which we are not dealing here and which involves the question of the very existence of a superior principle of unity which guides our personal development. What concerns us here is only to know under what conditions I become conscious of myself as a person. It must be repeated that these conditions are essentially social. There is, in particular, every reason to think that the system of perpetual competition to which the individual is subjected in the world of today cannot fail to increase and exasperate this consciousness of the ego. I have no hesitation in saying that if we want to fight effectively against individualism in its most harmful form, we must find some way of breaking free from the asphyxiating atmosphere of examinations and competition in which our young people are
struggling. “I must win, not you! I must get above you!” We can never insist enough upon how the real sense of fellowship which shows itself in such striking contrast among any team worthy of the name, has been rendered weak and anaemic by the competitive system. This system does in fact encourage each one to compare himself with his neighbour, to give himself a mark or a number by which he can be measured against him. Moreover, we must notice a thing which is essential in our argument: such a system, which makes self-consciousness or, if you prefer to call it so, self-love ten times worse, is at the same time the most depersonalising process possible; for the thing in us which has real value cannot be judged by comparison, having no common measure with anything else. Unfortunately, however, it seems as though people have taken a delight in accumulating every possible confusion concerning this point, and I have no hesitation in saying that the responsibilities of those who claim to celebrate the cult of the individual are overwhelming. Maybe there is no more fatal error than that which conceives of the ego as the secret abode of originality. To get a better idea of this we must here introduce the wrongly discredited notion of gifts. The best part of my personality does not belong to me. I am in no sense the owner, only the trustee. Except in the realm of metaphysics, with which we are not dealing today, there is no sense in enquiring into the origin of these gifts. On the other hand, it is very important to know what my attitude should be with regard to them. If I consider myself as their guardian, responsible for their fruitfulness, that is to say if I recognise in them a call or even perhaps a question to which I must respond, it will not occur to me to be proud about them and to parade them before an audience, which, I repeat, really means myself. Indeed, if we come to think of it, there is nothing in me which cannot or should not be regarded as a gift. It is pure fiction to imagine a pre-existent self on whom these gifts were bestowed in virtue of certain rights, or as a recompense for some former merit.

This surely means that I must puncture the illusion, infinitely persistent it is true, that I am possessed of unquestionable privileges which make me the centre of my universe, while other people are either mere obstructions to be removed or circumvented, or else those echoing amplifiers, whose purpose is to foster my
self-complacency. I propose to call this illusion moral egocentricity, thus marking clearly how deeply it has become rooted in our very nature. In fact, just as any notions we may have of cosmography do not rid us of the immediate impression that the sun and stars go round the earth, so it is not possible for us to escape completely here below from the preconceived idea which makes each one tend to establish himself as the centre around which all the rest have no other function but to gravitate. It is equally true that this idea or prejudice, no matter how becomingly it may be adorned in the case of great egoists, appears, when we come down to a final analysis, to be merely another expression of a purely biological and animal claim. Moreover, the ill-starred philosophies which, particularly in the nineteenth century, attempted to justify this position not only marked a retrogression as far as the secular wisdom of civilised humanity was concerned, but, it cannot be disputed for a moment, have directly helped to precipitate mankind into the chaos where it is struggling at the present time.

Does it, however, follow that this egolatry, this idolatry of the self, must necessarily be met by a rationalistic and impersonal doctrine? Nothing, I believe, would be farther from the truth. Whenever men have tried to put such a doctrine into practice we must own that it has proved itself extremely disappointing. To be more exact, such an experiment has never been and never could be effective. Actually it is of the very essence of this doctrine that it cannot be really put into practice, except perhaps by a few theorists who are only at ease among abstractions, paying for this faculty by the loss of all real contact with living beings, and, I might add, with the great simplicities of existence. For the immense majority of human beings, the entities which such a rationalism claims to set up as the object of everybody’s reverent attention are only shams behind which passions incapable of recognising themselves take cover. It has been given to our generation, as to that of the end of the eighteenth century and that of the Second Empire, not only to observe but to suffer the disastrous effects of the sin of the ideologists. This consists, above all perhaps, of infinitely intensifying the inner-falsehood, of thickening the film which is interposed between a human being and his true nature until it is almost impossible to destroy it.
Moreover, this same point will enable us to understand the most characteristic elements in what today is commonly accepted as the meaning of the term “person.” Nowadays, the individual allows himself, legitimately enough, to be likened to an atom caught up in a whirlwind, or, if you wish, a mere statistical unit; because most of the time he is simply a specimen among an infinity of others, since the opinions, which he thinks are his own, are merely reflections of the ideas accepted in the circles he frequents and handed round in the press which he reads daily. Thus he is only, as I have had occasion to write, an anonymous unit of that anonymous entity “one.” But he almost inevitably has the illusion that his reactions are authentic, so that he submits, while all the time he imagines he is taking action. It is, on the contrary, in the nature of a person to face any given situation directly and, I should add, to make an effective decision upon it. But, it may be asked, is not this the ego appearing once more? I think not. Let us understand each other. There could naturally be no question of conceiving of the person as of something distinct from that other thing, the ego, as if they were in separate compartments. Such an idea would be completely fictitious. We must go further. The person cannot be regarded as an element or attribute of the ego either. It would be better to say that it is something compelling, which most certainly takes its birth in what appears to me to be mine, or to be me myself, but this compelling force only becomes conscious of itself when it becomes a reality. It can thus in no way be compared with a slight desire. Let us say that it is of the order of “I will” and not of “I would like . . . .” I claim to be a person in so far as I assume responsibility for what I do and what I say. But to whom am I responsible, to whom do I acknowledge my responsibility? We must reply that I am conjointly responsible both to myself and to everyone else, and that this conjunction is precisely characteristic of an engagement of the person, that it is the mark proper to the person. We will not stay any longer among abstractions where there is always a risk of becoming imprisoned by words. Supposing that I wish or feel bound to put a certain person on his guard against someone else. I decide to write him a letter to this effect. If I do not sign my letter I am still as it were moving in a realm of play, of pastimes, and I might readily add mystification; I reserve to myself the possibility of denying my action; I deliberately maintain my
position in a zone as it were halfway between dreams and reality, where self-complacency triumphs, the chosen land of those who, in our time, have made themselves the champions of the gratuitous act. From the moment that I sign my letter, on the contrary, I have taken on the responsibility for it, that is to say I have shouldered the consequences in advance. I have created the irrevocable not only for the other person but for myself. Of my own free will I have brought into existence new decisions which will bear upon my own life with all their weight. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that it was a reprehensible, perhaps even a criminal action to write the letter. There is nevertheless a radical difference of quality, or more exactly of weight, between this action and that of writing a letter without signing it. Let us repeat that I tend to establish myself as a person in so far as I assume responsibility for my acts and so behave as a real being (rather than a dreamer who reserves the strange power of modifying his dreams, without having to trouble whether this modification has any repercussions in the hypothetical outside world in which everybody else dwells). From the same point of view we might also say that I establish myself as a person in so far as I really believe in the existence of others and allow this belief to influence my conduct. What is the actual meaning of believing here? It means to realise or acknowledge their existence in itself, and not only through those points of intersection which bring it into relation with my own.

Person – engagement – community – reality: there we have a sort of chain of notions which, to be exact, do not readily follow from each other by deduction (actually there is nothing more fallacious than a belief in the value of deduction) but of which the union can be grasped by an act of the mind. It would be better not to call this act by the much abused term of intuition, but by one which on the contrary is too little used – that of synopsis, the act by which a group is held together under the mind’s comprehensive gaze.

As I hinted just now, one cannot strictly say that personality is good in itself, or that it is an element of goodness: the truth is much more that it controls the existence of a world where there is good and evil. I should be inclined to think that the ego, so long as it remains shut up within itself, that is to say the prisoner of its own
feelings, of its covetous desires, and of that dull anxiety which works upon it, is really beyond the reach of evil as well as of good. It literally has not yet awakened to reality. Indeed, it is to be wondered whether there does not exist an infinite number of beings for whom this awakening has never truly taken place. There is no doubt that direct judgment cannot be applied to such beings. I would go further: it seems to me that each of us, in a considerable part of his life or of his being, is still unawakened, that is to say that he moves on the margin of reality like a sleep-walker. Let us say that the ego, as such, is ruled by a sort of vague fascination, which is localised, almost by chance, in objects arousing sometimes desire, sometimes terror. It is, however, precisely against such a condition that what I consider the essential characteristic of the person is opposed, the characteristic, that is to say, of availability (disponibilité).

This, of course, does not mean emptiness, as in the case of an available dwelling (local disponible), but it means much rather an aptitude to give oneself to anything which offers, and to bind oneself by the gift. Again, it means to transform circumstances into opportunities, we might even say favours, thus participating in the shaping of our own destiny and marking it with our seal. It has sometimes been said of late, “Personality is vocation.” It is true if we restore its true value to the term vocation, which is in reality a call, or more precisely the response to a call. We must not, however, be led astray here by any mythological conception. It depends, in fact, on me whether the call is recognised as a call, and, strange as it may seem, in this matter it is true to say that it comes both from me and from outside me at one and the same time; or rather, in it we become aware of that most intimate connection between what comes from me and what comes from outside, a connection which is nourishing or constructive and cannot be relinquished without the ego wasting and tending towards death.

Perhaps we might make this clearer by pointing out that each of us from the very beginning, appears to himself and to others as a particular problem for which the circumstances, whatever they may be, are not enough to provide a solution. I use the term problem absolutely against my will, for it seems to be quite inadequate. Is it not obvious that if I consider the other person as a sort of
mechanism exterior to my own ego, a mechanism of which I must discover the spring or manner of working, even supposing I manage to take him to pieces in the process, I shall never succeed in obtaining anything but a completely exterior knowledge of him, which is in a way the very denial of his real being? We must even go further and say that such a knowledge is in reality sacrilegious and destructive, it does no less than denude its object of the one thing he has which is of value and so it degrades him effectively. That means – and there is nothing which is more important to keep in view – that the knowledge of an individual being cannot be separated from the act of love or charity by which this being is accepted in all which makes of him a unique creature or, if you like, the image of God. There is no doubt that this expression borrowed from the language of religion renders more exactly than any other the truth I have in view at the moment. It is, however, none the less necessary to remember that the truth can be actively misunderstood by each one of us at any time and that there will always be something in experience which seems to provide an argument for him who, following in the footsteps of the cynics of all time, claims to reduce his fellows to little machines whose every movement it is only too easy for him to examine and even to regulate according to his fancy.

It must be understood that these observations are just as directly applicable to the relationship which binds me to myself, the manner in which it is given to apprehend my own being. It is indeed a fact that I also can conceive of myself as a pure piece of mechanism and make it my chief business to control the machine as well as possible. From the same standpoint, I can regard the problem of my life purely as a problem of tangible results. All that is perfectly consistent. The simplest reflection, however, shows that this mechanism must inevitably serve some purpose which I am at liberty to choose and which is recognised and established as a purpose by my own act. We know from experience, however, that this act can remain practically unsuspected by the very one who has made it. If, indeed, I passively accept a group of regulations which seem to be imposed upon me by the circle to which I belong by birth, by the party to which I have allowed myself to be attached without any genuine thought on my part, everything goes on as though I were really nothing but an instrument, a mere cog in the wheel, as if, in
short, the supreme human gift of free action had been refused me. Nevertheless, on reflection we see that all the time this presupposes the act by which the person has failed to recognise himself, or more exactly, has alienated that which alone could confer the dignity which is proper to his nature.

What then is this principle which it is given him thus to fail to recognise or on the contrary to guard and promote? It is easy to discover it if we penetrate the meaning of the notion of availability to which I referred a little way back. The being who is ready for anything is the opposite of him who is occupied or cluttered up with himself. He reaches out, on the contrary, beyond his narrow self, prepared to consecrate his being to a cause which is greater than he is, but which at the same time he makes his own. Here, moreover, it is the order of creation, of power, and of creative fidelity which is borne in upon us. We go wrong when we confuse creating with producing. That which is essential in the creator is the act by which he places himself at the disposal of something which, no doubt in one sense depends upon him for its existence, but which at the same time appears to him to be beyond what he is and what he judged himself capable of drawing directly and immediately from himself. This obviously applies to the case of the artist and to the mysterious gestation which alone makes the appearance of a work of art possible. It is not necessary to insist on this. We must remember, however, that the creative process, though less apparent, is none the less effective wherever there is personal development of any kind. Only here what the person has to create is not some work in a way outside himself and capable of assuming an independent existence, it is his own self in very truth. How can we help seeing that the personality is not to be conceived of apart from the act by which it creates itself, yet at the same time this creation depends in some way upon a superior order? It will seem to the person that sometimes he invents the order, sometimes he discovers it, and reflection will moreover show that there is always a continuity between the invention and the discovery, and that no line of demarcation as definite as that ordinarily accepted by common sense can be established between the one and the other.

If this is so, it must be seen that the personality cannot in any way be compared to an object of which we can say it is there, in
other words that it is given, present before our eyes, that it is part of
a collection of things which can, of their essence, be counted, or
again, that it is a statistical unit which can be noted in the calcu-
lations of a sociologist employing the methods of an engineer. Or
again, if we no longer consider things from outside but from with-
in, that is to say from the point of view of the person himself, it does
not seem that strictly speaking he can say “I am” of himself. He is
aware of himself far less as a being than as a desire to rise above
everything which he is and is not, above the actuality in which he
really feels he is involved and has a part to play, but which does not
satisfy him, for it falls short of the aspiration with which he identi-
fies himself. His motto is not sum but sursum.

We must be on our guard here. It certainly would not do to
underestimate the danger of a certain romanticism which belongs
to every age. This consists of systematically depreciating that
which is, in favour of some vaguely imagined and wished-for pos-
sibility, of which the transcendent appeal seems to be bound up
with the fact that it is not and perhaps never can be fully realised.
There can be no question here of an aspiration of that kind, for such
an aspiration really springs from the ego and not from the person-
ality, it is still a mere form of self-complacency. Here, and indeed
everywhere as I see it, the necessity for incarnation must be given
an important place. What I have been trying to say is that the per-
sonality is only realised in the act by which it tends to become
incarnate (in a book, for instance, or an action or in a complete life),
but at the same time it is of its very essence never to fix itself or
crystallise itself finally in this particular incarnation. Why? Because
it participates in the inexhaustible fullness of the being from which
it emanates. There lies the deep reason for which it is impossible to
think of personality or the personal order without at the same time
thinking of that which reaches beyond them both, a supra-person-
al reality, presiding over all their initiative, which is both their
beginning and their end. Here it would be well, if I had the time,
to mark as clearly as possible the opposition – difference is not a
strong enough word – between this supra-personal reality and its
rivals, I should rather say its caricatures, which are no more than
idols, and have led to the incredibly numerous false religions so
prevalent, alas, in our time.
Here comes the great question to which I would draw your attention in ending this paper: What is the sign by which we can discover whether the personality is indeed surpassing and transcending itself or whether, on the contrary, it is falling back in some degree and sinking below its true level? This question is tragically acute today in presence of the fascinated and fanatical multitudes who, taking their orders without a shadow of enquiry or reflection, rush singing to their death. Can we really speak of a transcendence in this case? Has that which is personal reached its fulfilment in the supra-personal? I do not think we can reply by a pure and simple yes or no to this question. Most certainly there is as it were a promise or aspiration in this sacrifice which confers an undeniable nobility upon it and places it infinitely above any conduct based on selfish calculations. Yet, at the same time, we cannot avoid seeing that this sort of collective heroism, in so far as it partakes of the nature of an intoxication, looks most disquietingly like various kinds of sub-human behaviour, and as such falls outside the order in which any true values find their expression. It seems to me that it is precisely from the point of view of these values – and of these values alone – that the indispensable discrimination, of which I just now pointed out the necessity, can be made. It is the property of these values, however, to be universal, and, if for the moment we do not consider the case of the artist as such, for he must be judged by a special metaphysical set of rules, we shall notice that among these universal values there are two which stand out above the rest. They are the value of truth and that of justice. Equally, I dare to claim that any “religion” which tends to obliterate them, even momentarily, proves by that very fact that it is tending to be degraded into idolatry. I scarcely need to insist upon the terribly concrete corollaries following from these propositions, which bear the stamp of such harmless generalities. It is clear in particular, that every concession made either to racialism or to the Nietzschean or pseudo-Nietzschean ideology which grants the masters the supreme right of treating facts like a plastic substance, easy to manipulate to suit their will, it is clear, I repeat, that every step taken in such a direction would be in no way a transcendence but a retrogression. We cannot be severe enough towards those who at the present time have thus confused men’s minds.
Of course, you must not misunderstand these suggestions. There is no question of returning to the dismal and bare rationalism which, alas, has for some forty years formed our official gospel. The claim of universality is impossible to define. True Christian philosophy and theology have the imperishable glory, not only of having never been mistaken about it, but of having honoured it and established it in the indefeasible foundations of our being. It is merely a question of incorporating this claim in the most concrete forms of human experience, without ever despising them, but, on the contrary, recognising that the most humble of them, if it is fully lived, can go immeasurably deep. You will, I know, allow me to end this lecture with some words of Gustave Thibon whom you heard in this very place only a few days ago, and who seems to me to have admirably expressed the need for incarnation from which the personality cannot escape without betraying its true mission, without losing itself among the mirages of abstraction, without paradoxically reducing itself to one impoverished indigent form of the very ego it falsely claimed to surpass in every way.

“You feel you are hedged in; you dream of escape; but beware of mirages. Do not run or fly away in order to get free: rather dig in the narrow place which has been given you; you will find God there and everything. God does not float on your horizon, he sleeps in your substance. Vanity runs, love digs. If you fly away from yourself, your prison will run with you and will close in because of the wind of your flight; if you go deep down into yourself it will disappear in paradise.”

Le Peuch.

\textit{November, 1941.}