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Julio Cabrera

A Critique of Affirmative Morality
(A reflection on Death, Birth and the Value of Life)



A Critique of Affirmative Morality

(A reflection on Death, Birth and the Value of Life)

Julio Cabrera

(Translation from Spanish by Ygor Buslik)

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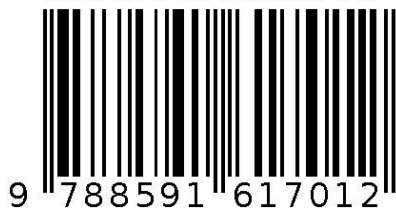
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Foreword

The issues concerning birth and death often occur in the available literature, in books on “applied ethics” or in essays on “bioethics”. This suggests ethics is already constituted and that *afterwards* the question will be to see how ethics “applies” to those matters. The present book aims to drastically break this usual expositive mold: *birth and death are part, as it will be seen, of the very theoretical structure of ethics*, of its constitution as such, not as “mere applications” that could be made or not. This work argues ethics has been constituted on the basis of not explicit answers, of fundamental character, given to these two issues: birth and death.

Someone once considered the *Introduction to formal logic* of the Spanish Thinker Alfredo Deaño as “logic for children.” In some ways, I wish this book will be considered an “ethics for children.” Indeed, the questions - often exasperating - this work raises, are the basic questions of life that usually appear in the stubborn and monotonous questions of kids: Why are we here?, Why should we live?, Why do we have to die?, Why may be not kill our family?, Why should we love our parents?, Why not kill ourselves?, Why have we been brought to the world?, etc., and these questions are raised here exactly with the same innocent cruelty of children. That will no doubt infuriate the “adult” ethicists who promptly want to surpass the stage of the children’s questions and to analyze “the serious moral crisis of our time”, the political, ecological, diplomatic, military subjects. These “adult” issues do not interest children and they are not interesting for the present book either. Philosophers and poets share with the child the unbearable conviction life is a badly told story, and that no “big issue” newspapers talk about and the more powerful countries of the world discuss will be able to extinguish the disturbing flames of Origin. In this sense, the child has his own maturity. All the “naive” and childish spirit this book could transmit is strictly intentional precisely because one of its main points is that jumping directly to those “great ethical issues

of our time”, ignoring the original problems, is one of the basic features of the lack of moral sense of our time, and maybe of all times.

Nor do I mean to say something particularly "profound" or "interesting" about my questions, but only to expose what appears as true to rational argument and unquiet moral sensibility. The idea truth must be "profound" and "interesting" is strangely uncritical. If truth is superficial, irritating and banal - as the relations between truth and death suggest - this book will inevitably be superficial, irritating and banal. As jugglers, writers and directors of horror films, philosophers have always tried to “surprise” their readers, telling them something new and never heard; and their best procedure has been questioning of the obvious: they have tried to demonstrate the world we see does not exist, that the other humans may be robots, that we have no images in our minds, that there are no intentions in our actions, that we do not make representations of things, that our expressions have no meaning, and that it is not true that if I push a billiard ball with my finger, my action has been the cause of the movement of the ball.

Philosophies seem to assume the obligation of saying something different, extraordinarily interesting and strongly counter-intuitive, and whoever fails falls under the stigma of banality, and listeners move to another place where they could be told "something they do not already know". As if philosophical astonishment would be lost and replaced by mere surprise. Philosophers seem to have lost the ability to hear "the same", the ability of re-position, and think that truth must necessarily move, change its skin, shining in different stances. As if the dynamics of truth would be confused with the dynamics of life. It is part of the vivacity of life to keep incessantly feeding with "the new", but we do not need to think of truth as a stimulus to life. Why would not truth have a much greater affinity with the monotony of death than with the always renewed exuberance of life? This book has been written for those who are able to bear the irritating sound of a hammer hitting always on the same nail. All the "depth" of the book - whether it is even possible to

be "deep" in radical philosophy - will be achieved through its banality and monotony, and the book does not aspire to any other deepness.

Nor have I intended the book is, in Fernando Savater's words, particularly "innovative" or "revolutionary", an impression which could be given by the deliberately radical character of the reflection. On the contrary, the intention is to show an uncommon way of visualizing morality that could be repetitive, insisting on the monotonous trivialities of human condition; a procedure far from any proclaimed "revolutionary" style of thinking.

Writers and filmmakers have indeed lingered more in the monotony of human condition than philosophers. Artists seem more gifted for pointless repetitions than philosophers, who frequently felt obliged to assume the clarity and precision of science. But it is difficult for philosophers to make scientific philosophy and, at the same time, to say something relevant about the monotonous human condition, of which science knows little. The notion of "affirmative" criticized in this book shows, however, that under the current philosophical practices following the model of science, literary motivations are hidden in a sort of narrative impulse to tell moral (or moralist) tales where the heroine is moral law and the villains, skepticism, relativism and nihilism. Perhaps in the impossibility of philosophy to refrain from telling an "edifying" story to their readers - despite its professed scientific objectivity and universality - is concealed some kind of revenge of what is neither art, nor science nor philosophy, but religion. The "metaphysics of life" presented here in the form of a "natural ontology" aims to move away from scientific arbitrariness - whereby nothing is essentially linked to anything - as from religious fatalism, according to which, magically, everything is inextricably connected to everything.

This type of subject also facilitates the temptation for *ad hominem* arguments. As it occurs with firearms, when someone handles ideas about life, death and suicide, he or she should take extreme care in their manipulation. With "mortal questions" happens the same thing as with "deadly weapons": when we have them

in hand, we must “freeze”: never point a mortal idea to anyone, even unloaded. This book has *not* been written, for example, for those who, when we talk about morality of suicide, brutally snap: “Well, so why don’t you commit suicide once and for all and leave us alone?” A book that tries to submit procreation to ethical questioning and argues for a possible morality of suicide may easily, in our type of society, be considered “nihilist”, “pessimistic”, “immoral”, “destructive”, “irresponsible”, “dangerous” and other labels disguising the laziness or fear of thinking the roots of life. This book, anyway, is not written by a nihilist, but by a radical moralist shocked by the familiarity with which we have come to accept manipulation of the other, in particular manipulation of newborns and cold elimination of the enemy in the organization of “fair wars”, the stifling lack of freedom in our lives, monitored by health, legal and religious policies. Properly read, this is the book of a moralist who decided to lead moral reflection to the last consequences. If that strategy opens the way towards “nihilism,” it will be something sensibly different from much of what has been called by that name throughout the history of thinking.

The ethical approach presented here is “negative” only in a relative sense, and may be regarded as a counterproof – *perhaps ad absurdum* – of the Nietzschean account about the essential immorality of life, from two simultaneous angles: the unavoidable need to organize society on the basis of the destruction of others, and the impossibility of looking for a truth not compatible with indefinite self-defense. Negative ethics is, at the same time, the ethics denied and omitted by all the others, the ethics capable of displaying the last roots of the structural difficulty of being ethical in a world like ours.

The book also will have to struggle against academic tendencies of production of philosophical ideas, which requires that what has been thought should be properly “placed” in some of the geopolitical spaces of research, adopting a style, a jargon, a way to quote, a way to omit. Nowadays, a philosophical work may simply stop existing if it does not comply with some rules of

appearance in the world of culture. I fear the present text totter on the edge of non-existence, to the extent it is not a self-explanative work that does not fit within usual "professional" rhythms of exposing concepts.

The idea of writing this book dates back to 1982. Between that year and 1987, I collected texts, informal notes and stormy personal experiences. In 1987 – traveling from Marseille to Paris and back for six months – I began to develop a programmatic text on those issues, which I finally published in São Paulo with the title *Project for a negative ethics*, in 1990, being professor of ethics in the University of Brasília. The present book aims to be a more argumentative presentation of that project written in aphorisms.

It is difficult to summarize here all that meant for my own ethical reflection the encounter - in the beginning of the 1980s - with the books of Fernando Savater on ethics and correlate issues. Despite my almost total disagreement with everything he affirms in ethics (particularly with regards to his very impossibility to conceive the negative except under the form of "nihilism"), the seduction his way of composing philosophy (and the musical term is not casual) has exerted on me has been far more decisive than any "agreement of ideas". I also want to emphasize the intellectual hospitality of Javier Muguerza, Agapito Mestre and Santiago González Noriega during my stay in Madrid in 1991, and Cnpq of Brazil for having sponsored that stay through a scholarship of "post-doctorate." I would also like to remember the students of the "Mortal Group", who discussed with me about these issues at the University of Brasilia during the year 1990. And my teacher of shooting, Marcio Garretano, for teaching me to be careful with weapons.

Julio Cabrera

Madrid, 1991

Addendum to the Foreword

I am involved in the questions of birth, death and value of life since the eighties of the past century when I begin to collect the material for the Project of Negative Ethics. The Critique of Affirmative Morality appears at 1996 in Barcelona. From this time to the present I continued to make research in this area in numerous papers, articles and communications in congresses and meetings. I develop this line of research in Negative Ethics in many places of Brazil and other countries in Latin-America. The stigma of not writing in English can condemn a lot of philosophical work to literal disappearance in present communities of discussion. This is the main objective of editing now an English translation of the Critique. This edition adds a commentary to David Benatar's book of 2006, whose positions concerning the same matters did not exist in the time of the publication of my book. Another epilogue is also added to the present edition containing a summary of Negative ethics and some recent issues on suicide.

Julio Cabrera
Brasilia, 2011.

Part I

On the route to a morality of non-being

From the question on the sense of being to the question on its value. Value of being and oblivion. Ethics and ontology

In this text, I intend to achieve a similar type of radical approach to the question on the *value* of being as the assumed in the purely “descriptive” ontology. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger has put the interrogation about the question of the sense of being, and he has insisted at various points in this work that the question is not a matter of valuating or of raising ethical issues. Thus, for example, Heidegger writes: "To the constitution of the being of 'Dasein' is inherent the fall... Dasein, being essentially decaying, is, because of the constitution of his very being, in 'falsity'. This term is used here ontologically, and the same with the word 'fall'. We must beware of any negative 'valuing' that would be ontic (referring to beings) on its analytic-existential use." (*Sein und Zeit*, § 44; my translation from German). I have a skepticism of principle about this supposed neutrality: contrarily to the warnings of the author, *Being and Time* leads to wonder *if there is not always a necessary link between ethics and ontology*, and therefore whether it is not a superficial and naïve statement to say that the analysis had given us "only" an ontology, so it "still owes us" an ethics.

Regardless of what one can decide, in a more or less categorical way, about this connection in the specific case of Heidegger, I can say that, in the present book, I am interested on *an evaluation of the world that takes into account the ontological clarifying of it in the light of the Daseinanalyse*. Or saying in another way: what should be valuated when one asks about the value of the world are precisely those structures displayed in the existential analysis, that is, the being-in-the-world of Dasein as such, and not the value of this or that intra-worldly being. Just as Dasein is the place where we ask about the sense of being, Dasein is also the place where we ask about its value. This results in a kind of radical ethics

which, due to a historical juncture, takes the aspect of a “negative” ethics, in a sense that will become clear gradually.

In the context of clamorous controversies about Heidegger's relations with Nazism, it has been said the way of ontology is closed to the ethical dimension, to the extent the thinking of being does not leave space for the must-be. There is no *holzwege* from ontology to ethics. I believe this point of view is based on first impressions, as it stays in a non-radical range of questioning. To the strict extent the valuing of *being* is done at a radical level – that is, literally, a valuing of *being* and not a mere pondering of intra-worldly beings -, ontology and ethics will appear inseparable. If Heideggerian fundamental ontology reveals, for example, death in the existential dimension of a being-towards-death, allowing to distinguish between, by one side, death as the most proper choice and, by the other, punctual death usually feared in the intra-worldly fear, it is unavoidable to derive, from this knowledge of being, an evaluative-ethical separation, very close to the one performed by Heidegger in the duality property/not-property. Heidegger uses the idea of a “proper death”, removed from daily “ontization” (to turn ontic), as fundamental illustration of the notion of a “proper existence” (Ibid., § 45). At this point, he recites again the presumed evaluative neutrality of his existential analysis. “... it falls outside the circle of an existential analysis of death what could be discussed under the title of a ‘metaphysics of death’. The issues of how and when death ‘came into the world’, what meaning it may and should have as evil and pain... presuppose... the ontological clarification of evil and negativity in general” (§49).

But the thesis of neutrality and the “purely descriptive” character of the existential analysis seem untenable. The normative space is marked by the hiatus existing between the regular ontization of being in everyday life and its awaited “ontological recovery”. In the work, it is described, with sometimes apocalyptic colors, a situation of loss, of non authenticity, of vulgarization, depersonalization and anonymity that should be overcome by “something better”. “Having lost and

having still not won can only be, and in fact is, in its very essence, possible 'proper' Dasein..." (§9). The irritated pejorative tones with which Heidegger refers to the process of leveling and becoming ordinary - "Every privilege results eliminated without making a noise. All originality is flattened, as a long known fact, from night to day. Everything that was ardently conquered becomes vulgar. All mystery loses its strength" (§ 27) - seems very scarcely "descriptive" or "neutral."

In addition, at various moments of his work, Heidegger explicitly uses dispensable moral terminology: "In his state of humor, Dasein is always already effectively 'open' as a being whose *responsibility* was given to him in his being, as the being Dasein has to be by existing" (§ 29). "... as what is mine, in each case, is being able to be free in the property or in the not property or in the modal indifference of both" (§ 45). "This exegesis leads to see that a 'to be able to', characteristic of Dasein, lies in the will to have '*moral conscience*' (§ 45). On the other hand, notwithstanding his warnings, in many cases it is impossible to separate the existential analysis from what Heidegger had called "Metaphysics of death", in a moral-evaluative sense. (cf. §50, §54. In characterizing the proper being-towards-death, he defines it as a standing "...before the possibility...of being himself, but himself in the passionate *freedom* relative to death, disconnected from the illusions of the impersonal One (*Man*), certain of itself and that gets anguished" (§ 53)). As in all moral schemes, there is something that does not work, the possibility of a "trans-course", of a "restoring journey", of recovering something lost, etcetera. Other non-ethically loaded words were available to describe the existential process.

Also in the field of the questioning about the value of being is present the phenomenon of the millenarian concealment, or the "oblivion of being." But in the light of the results of Heidegger's negative ontology, at least as appropriated by my reading of it in this book, it would be better to use a less elliptical expression than "oblivion of being". Given this negative character of ontology, in a primary impulse one could speak rather of something like "oblivion of *non-being*". What is forgotten

in the "oblivion of being" is forgotten because of something usually interpreted as "negative", as something suspected of "not being". By contrast, fearfully covering in the middle of beings is also a kind of *escape towards the affirmative*, however fictitious or temporary, the regular and daily affirming of beings and supporting on beings. *The affirming of beings seems to reassure or at least indefinitely postpone the fear of negative.*

Heidegger's "*tour de force*" is precisely trying to show this false "negative" as being simply ontological, and as the most proper possibility of Dasein: the abandonment of the attitude of "forgetting" coincides therefore with the denegation of being, retreating death from the negativity in which it is usually set in affirmative societies by force of the impersonal "One" (*Man*, in German), in everyday intra-world, ruled by intra-temporality and the "time of clocks". So it is not strictly oblivion of being, but rather forgetting the fact the non-being of being "belongs" to the being, and in an entirely proper manner. What is forgotten is therefore the non-being of being, interpreted as something strange and adventitious, as absolute otherness, as something that would "occur" to the being "from outside". So the term "oblivion of being" is elliptical, since in that expression is hidden the dialectics being/non-being developed inside the phenomenon of forgetting.

In the field of the issue about the value of being, perhaps it is possible to better raise the question of why there has always been given a negative interpretation of the non-being. What is the motive of such "oblivion"? Before that, let us ask: What is non-being? In terms of analyzing the structure of *Dasein*, of *human beings*, and their situation concerning ethics (which is our primary concern here), non-being manifests essentially in three very concrete facts: dying, killing and refrain from procreating, that is, stopping-being-the-own-being, interrupting-the-already-being-of-others, and abstaining-from-making-another-be. In affirmative societies, the usual ontical ethics (or ethics of beings) has consistently interpreted as "negative" some of those possibilities of Dasein in the form of "moral

condemnations", both voluntary death and, more attenuated, the denial to reproduce and, much less - as we shall see – homicide. Dying (regarding one's own life or the life of another) is an attitude of Dasein before already existing life, as refraining is an attitude of Dasein about possible life. Possible life cannot die, but can be refrained from existing. *If the question of birth is raised, the existential structure should consist not only of a "being-towards-death", but, in general, of a "being-for-the-not-being", including a being-for-refraining, a being-for-not-being-born and a being-for-not-giving-birth.*

The existential intentionality towards death is just one dimension of Dasein, which should also include intentionality towards not being born and towards not giving birth. Being referred to death in a structural way is, at the same time, being referred to never being born, as a complementary form of non-being, because birth and death are inseparable in an existential analysis of Dasein, in its structural relation with both, sense and value of being.

The lack of radical reflection in the current ethics of beings (both classical and modern, of Kantian or, specially, Utilitarian inspiration) consists of the fact the crucial question has been, throughout the history of philosophy, *how* one should live, without considering in a positive way the possible ethical character of dying and abstention. Asking, in the ethical field, *how* to live is admitting ab initio there is not and there cannot be any moral problem *in the very fact of being*; that all moral problems arise "afterwards", in the domain of *how*. If the initial ethical question is how to live, it is assumed beforehand that *living* has not, in itself, any moral problems, or that living is, *per se*, ethically good, or that, for some motive that should still be clarified, the matter of good and evil does not concern to being, but only to beings. *Affirmativeness is the historical form taken by the lack of radical character of the ethical reflection.* (Indeed, a reflection that would answer "no" to the initial question would not be radical either). But what is the philosophical-rational justification of living as ethically good (valuable) *per se*, and of the idea the

only thing that ethically matters is *how* to live, that is, how to turn into ethically good this or that ontic human life, excepting life itself from any questioning whatsoever?

A radical inquiry could show there is a fundamental ethical problem *in the mere fact of being* and, therefore, it could be radically impossible to transform a human life in a morally "good life". Precisely, a fundamental ontology on the footpaths of Heidegger could provide the grounds for such radical ethical theory, regardless how irrelevant this type of project may be for Heidegger's philosophical program. This ethics would be "negative" - as described in my *Project* of 1990 - only in a relative sense, as a radical ethics born inevitably within the prevailing affirmative ethics, and *negative with respect to it* (in the sense the Heideggerian being-towards-death is not itself a "negative" nor an "affirmative" existential fact, although it is certainly negative within the context of affirmative oblivion of being on behalf of beings, with its punctual and dated conception of death as "interruption" of projects).

Considering the issue of the value of being, and not only that of its sense, may help better understand the motives of oblivion and concealment. Why is being regularly hidden into beings? In terms of value, one might ask: *Why would something (supposedly) valuable regularly be hidden? Why ethical-ontological problems of procreation are simply ignored in the noisy reception of the newborn and, later on, in the ontical details of his or her education? We do not speak here of the obvious value of beings. We have several criteria for valuing beings like cars and pieces of furniture, human actions and attitudes. We speak here of the value of being itself.* It seems we hide ourselves in the domain of the value of beings, as if in the situation of having to decide the value of being, we could only stammer. But when we present the fundamental issue of the value of *being* in a context of an ethical inquiry, are we not asking ourselves if the being has an intrinsic *ethical* value itself? That would sound completely absurd for many philosophers who agree with Wittgenstein that "In the world everything is as it is and all occurs as it occurs. There is no value in it." It seems values are always transcendent to the

world. So, what meaning would our initial question have? The following: the fundamental ontology will certainly not determine being, by itself, as ethically valuable or the contrary. The fundamental ontology will simply describe how the world is.

But let us suppose that ontology states being as having some empirical property A. This is obviously not, by itself, an “ethical determination”. But, if we know the world is A, starting from the features of A, we might ask, for example, if it is ethically good to abandon a world that is A, or if it is ethically good to refrain from setting people in a world that is A, or if it is ethically good to withdraw a person from a world that is A, and so on. From the purely descriptive and factual features of the world, as elucidated by fundamental ontology, we could indeed ask ourselves, *on a second step*, if it is or not ethically valuable to take certain attitudes concerning these features. The internal connection between ethics and ontology is seen in the fact we can determine the value of being-in-the-world, or of stopping-being-in-the-world, or of letting-the-other-be-in-the-world, or of letting-the-other-not-to-be-in-the-world, etc., based on the structural features of the world elucidated by fundamental ontology; with the advantage our ethical appreciations of the world will have the same radical character of the ontological elucidation itself. That way, it is not the world we value, but the being or the non-being or the stop-being or the non letting-be in the world. *Although in the world, as Wittgenstein said, there cannot be any value, in the being-in-the-world and its modalities, there certainly is.*

One of Heidegger’s fundamental ideas in *Being and Time* is that human life – in the sense of what he calls “existence” – constitutes an *access to being*. Thus, although living and being are not the same thing, they are internally connected through this “accessibility”. That is an appropriate clue in order to understand the motives for the systematic concealment and oblivion of being in benefit to beings. Human being, the only being who can question about the sense and value of being, cannot do it coldly, as if he or she was in conditions of observing being from outside without commitments. Within being is the human already involved and the

questioning about being is inevitably addressed from inside, in a living. This being in question “squeezes” humans who ask, under the form of a “life” that has some intensity, some urgency, a tone, an affection. Humans cannot make this question about being without trying to assure for them some space supposedly free from the dangers of this very questioning.

The space from which humans ask about the sense and especially for the value of being is precisely the space they need *for a living*. What human beings conceal or “forget” is in strict connection with the space from which they can allow themselves to make the question about the value of being. This way, human beings are compelled to forget, if they intend to keep living a life. Because the oblivion of non-being of being, which is an obstacle for their reflection, is, at the same time, what they need in order to preserve the space in which they will be able to continue living, which is what usually matters a lot to them. The empirical conditions of their reflection might, therefore, get in conflict with its “transcendental” conditions. When we make a reflection, we empirically need some space, this same space reflection challenges in the very heart of its legitimacy.

On that perspective, it is necessary to ask if a condemnation of the oblivion of being, throughout the history of Western metaphysics, can be made from an ethical-ontological point of view, to the extent this ability to forget seems to be *conditio sine qua non* to keep developing a life, even a philosophical and questioning one. Heidegger faces the problem all the time as if it was about a sort of available option. But the ontological analysis itself should decide whether there is really an option or not. If, on a magic situation, we could examine the issue of being from outside, maybe the results obtained would be quite different. However, how to ask, coldly and without caring about the consequences, over a being from which we run out day by day, about a being that, hour after hour, slides from our hands? The human configuration of being as “life” has a direct connection with the structural motivation for oblivion and concealment, and the question about its inevitability (and, therefore, about the impossibility of overloading those attitudes by

ethical appreciations) directly relate to the Nietzschean question about how much truth can a human life tolerate. The motives of oblivion are not, however, independent from the “pathetical” (from *Pathos*) level in which we are inevitably situated when we make the question about the value of being. Oblivion is not simply an epistemological “error” or a moral “sin”, but maybe the indispensable component of the very situation of asking philosophical questions in general.

Note 1: About the radical character of thinking

Radical questioning has been, throughout the history of philosophy (from Aristotle and Plato to Husserl and Wittgenstein), an inescapable demand of thinking. Nevertheless, what I sustain here, at least in the case of the question of the value of being – to the extent this has been able to affect the very possibility of opening that space in which the existent is situated, or intends to be situated, in order to think -, is that the intention of radical questioning has been usually damaged in the history of philosophy, precisely in the mode I call “affirmative”. I want to show this affirmative commitment in the attitude concerning reflexive radicalism – that makes that radicalism itself dissolves into a fiction – by alluding to the case of Heidegger’s master, Edmund Husserl.

On the Second Part of *Erste Philosophie*, entitled “Theory of phenomenological reduction”, in the first chapters of first section, Husserl develops some ideas about the philosophical attitude and the starting point for making philosophy, one of his favorite subjects of reflection. There he describes the person who chooses himself as a philosopher as someone “who takes a decision of will compromising his whole life...” (Lesson 28. page. 8; my translation from French). On the next Lesson, Husserl criticizes the fact science has disconnected from philosophy, taking distance from the need for justification, “losing, that way, the spirit of radicalism”, and falling into a semi-naïveté. (p. 14). “*It is precisely that*

defect of science what justifies the philosophical demand for a start without requirements, of a new life of knowledge, really radical..." (p. 15). Notwithstanding, Husserl continues declaring this radicalism must necessarily commit the philosopher to what he calls "supreme good". *"It is about a decision through which the subject determines himself... based on his best, in the universal domain of the values of knowledge and of a life eternally devoted to that 'supreme good'"* (Id).

On Lesson 30 we read: *"Everywhere the realization of pure and authentic values required more and more from the creator subject, this radicalism of intention that could never be satisfied with the finite, the imperfect, the unfinished, and that, on the contrary, aspire to the eternal poles of the idea"* (p. 23). And furthermore: *"It is this way the need for a new radicalism is imposed, the necessity for a universal and absolute radicalism that, by principle, proposes to destroy all naiveté and, triumphing over it, intends to achieve ultimate truth... in such way arises the will to start and maintain systematically an absolutely original science... a science, at last, no longer threatened by the abysses of skepticism, and in which, on the contrary, everything is, from one side to another, bright, clear and right"* (p. 27).

However, what kind of radicalism is this that excludes beforehand the possibility that reflection may lead, if performed with full responsibility and criticism, to supreme evil, to finitude, to imperfection, to the unfinished, to obscurity and to skepticism? How can the radical philosopher *propose* to himself the task of achieving the Good? How can a radical philosopher know beforehand what his reflection will find along the way? How could the radical practice of philosophy have the previous guarantee of finding what it has intended to seek, renouncing to the risk which seemed intrinsic to the very practice of radical reflection? The "radicalism" of Husserl seems more a "mission" or an "apostolate" than a strictly philosophical enterprise. One thing is to find the limits of thinking in the very process of reflection and another is to impose these limits beforehand, as part of a program of inquiry.

In the present investigation about the value of being, we will precisely use the same evaluative categories of ethical values that are used in affirmative approach... but *radicalized*, that is to say, applied not only to intra-worldly beings but also to the very being as such. The application of ethical categories to the being of the world itself might bring, as an unavoidable consequence, the opening of the spaces of “negativity” – in the relative sense already mentioned – that were suffocated in the prevailing affirmative organization of intellectual societies. On that sense, the question about the value of being intended in the present work is strictly *internal*, in the sense that a moral questioning of the very establishment of being must be as door opened strictly by the current ethical affirmative categories.

Note 2. Being and beings.

An initial skepticism could arise concerning the possibility of making questions about being itself (about its sense and value) independently of questions about beings. On the other hand, the possibility of a second skepticism also stands out in what refers to the illegitimate “ontologization” of simple psychological attitudes, as the oblivion of non-being of being or the fear before death, and so on. Both skepticisms are about the possibility of opening a *structural* range of analysis beyond what can be determinable in the domain of beings. The structural level that matters here is of a *formal* nature, I would almost say in the *logical* sense of this term. It refers to the very functioning of being, with independence from its contents. A phenomenology of attitudes would allow discovering this structural level. Frequently in daily life, what does not work is the very mechanism and not the data we handle, as sometimes everything we eat makes us sick, and the problem *is not what we eat*, but our assimilative system as a formal structure “that does not work”. The distinction that matters in the present reflection is nothing of excessively technical or subtle nature, but one distinction that goes in the direction of these everyday issues describable by a simple phenomenology.

On the domain of ethical matters themselves, both common people and intellectual moralists tend to admit life can be worth living independently from intra-worldly pain and suffering. This idea has been expressed, for example, by William James, in *The Will to believe*: "... sufferings and hardships do not, as a rule, abate the love of life" (James, "Is life worth living?", included on this book). Also Aristotle has distinguished, in the Nicomachean *Ethics*, between the intra-worldly functions of human beings (being a doctor, a warrior, a teacher) and the worldly-structural function of purely *being a human*. Also Wittgenstein presents, in his *Conference of Ethics*, the difference between being frightened by something empirical (as, for example, the size of an animal), and to be frightened by the simple fact the world "is over there and it is as it is". This current distinction, which seems strictly connected to the very establishment of the philosophical view into the world, shows it is perfectly possible to distinguish between a structural-worldly domain and an intra-worldly level of analysis, to the point we can, in an evaluative vein, devalue beings without, because of that, devaluing being itself. It is the valuing of the very "*function of living*" what the present investigation proposes to make, and not primarily of "what is lived". Is such thing possible? This is one of the main concerns of the present investigation.

The ontic/ontological distinction is of *logical* character, related to levels of understanding and analysis; it relates to the distinction form/content. The distinction ontological/psychological is a particular species of the ontic/ontological distinction. The oblivion of the non-being of being is not merely a psychological attitude but also structural. We can visualize different levels of helplessness, the intra-worldly helplessness of orphans or impaired people and the structural helplessness of human beings as such. Helplessness, fear, oblivion, etc, tolerate psychological versions in the intra-world, but anguish is not just an "ontologization" of fear. Radical fear, lived in the level of the world itself, is anguish, that is to say, worldly-structural fear. Much more than an ontologization of the psychological, there is here a naturalization of ontology, in a peculiar sense that will be explained

furthermore. From the formal-ontological point of view, it is clear that what is said about the value or disvalue of being will be independent of the psychological particular experiences such as fear, oblivion, intra-worldly helplessness, and so on. We can live life in a good psychological state even when we understand its questionable ontological structural and vice-versa. On this structural level, we do not manage a purely intra-worldly discourse, but neither an extra-worldly one; it is situated neither inside nor outside the world, but precisely *in the world itself*. Throughout this book, these distinctions will be, I hope, more clarified by their use in argumentations.

Fragments of a map for the re-conduction of non-being to the very structure of the world

The negative interpretation of non-being (of dying, killing, letting-someone-die, abstaining-from-letting-other-live, letting-another-die, letting-someone-live, and so on) is a crucial component and a key for understanding oblivion and concealment. Societies organized around diverse *policies of beings* are noteworthy “affirmative” societies where suicide and abstention from procreating are ethically condemned. Every attempt of ethical defense of these forms of non-being is stigmatized as pathological, irrational, subjective or socially disturbing. The incessant battle against the supposed “nihilism” of these attitudes, from the part of medical, religious, juridical and philosophical flanks, can be seen as an attempt to transform the non-being of being into an external “danger” that can be avoided through procedures, an incessant movement that transforms the non-being of being into something that “comes after” the being, as something that could have been avoided some way.

Affirmative societies interpret as “nihilist” any attempt to give the non-being a positive interpretation. It prefers to give it a moral sense that currently determines non-being as being some kind of “evil”. The “presence of evil in the world”, one of the premises of theodicy, is supported on a purely negative interpretation of non-being, in contrast with the being seen as non problematically affirmative, where non-being seems indefinitely “postponed”. Affirmative ethics lives under the expenses of the presence of “evil” in the world, and prefer not taking notice of the non-being of being (or maybe the policy of beings prepares a polite pretending “not taking notice”) even when this attitude leads to extreme points as of the Kantian ethics affirming there has never been in the world one single moral action, or as of

the Christian ethics in general, declaring every man is a sinner. Not even when “evil” fills the world and occupies the totality of spaces, affirmative conceptual organization of society accepts thinking about the possibility that non-being admits a positive interpretation, as structural part of being, instead of considering it as a foreign negativity or a passing anomaly.

To that affirmative ethics corresponds, by force, an affirmative ontology. The basic postulates of this ontology are assertions such as: “being is better than not-being”, “being more is better than being less”, and so on. Usual completely basic ethical assertions can be derived from this, such as: “the being is good; the non-being is bad”; “being bad is better than not being anything at all”, and so on. There is, within this affirmative ontology, a systematic favoring of being against non-being, and also a kind of ontological-ethical “maximalism” (“The more being, the better”). The incongruence of affirmative societies seems to consist of the simultaneity of the basic belief in the goodness of being (and in the “evilness” of non-being) with the regular mechanisms of concealment of this being. *How is it understood that something basically “good” must stay hidden and forgotten?*

So, being is considered basically good (as when, in William James’ vein, it is said that “in spite of hardships and sorrows, life is worth living”), but affirmative societies imperiously need to appeal to beings of all kinds in order to paradoxically endure the good being and be protected from it! The almost compulsive looking for beings seems to show, on the contrary, an implicit devaluing of being as such, far beyond the explicitly declared in a phenomenology of usual speeches and expressions. The policies of beings move in the level of the manageable and subjected to manipulation. Affirmative ontology alleges a curious “privilege of being over non-being”, of accomplishing projects over maintaining them in pure possibility. Our culture is built on the idea that it is always better to carry out projects than keeping them unfinished. It is usual to say that, among all the possible worlds, the present one (ours) “has the privilege of being real”. What may those strange expressions rationally mean?

Our societies are characterized by the simultaneous activity of affirming and concealing, not as two distinct operations but as the two faces of the same coin. *Affirmation is itself concealing: in affirming, societies support, consolidate and postpone.* It seems that affirmation is not, therefore, genuinely evaluative, but strictly constitutive and founding. This “supporting” foundation is regularly confused with an *evaluative* declaration about the “goodness” of being. But nothing prevents from thinking affirmative performance is precisely based on the opposite, on a full (and promptly concealed) visualization of a radical “lack of value”, which constantly demands the “support” of urgent affirmative moves. That the being is good (and non-being is bad) is almost an automatic and fatigued statement, when in fact what we see is incessant affirmative work looking for “supporting”, not in the sense of “considering good”, but of pure enduring. Considering something as good is postponed until the meeting with all sorts of beings. And it is only among beings within the world where is finally “supported” a being that seems to be in decaying all the time, losing balance under the weakest blow.

With the interpretation of affirmativeness as supporting and not only as positive valuation, the mentioned incoherence between something admitted as good and, notwithstanding, regularly concealed, can no doubt be avoided. It is perfectly understandable that affirmative societies sustain it is “worth while” to conceal what could not be openly accepted as positively valuable, in such a way this “worth while” could get along with the admission the world is not precisely “worthy”. This clearly points to a total preference for beings and their political ethics of distribution and managements. Does this indicate “negative ethics”, in a sense strictly relative to the current affirmative one, could achieve the ontological-existential levels of analysis the affirmative-supporting-forgetting ethics could not? Does it mean an affirmative ethics cannot, in any way, be radical in the sense of thinking within the domain elucidated by a fundamental ontology?

A “privilege of being over non-being” cannot be nevertheless, sustained neither ontologically-existentially nor in a descriptive level, nor in the evaluative-ethical level. In a phenomenology of experiences one can verify the presence of structures connected to a fundamental “disappointment” before being. All that can be achieved, even the most glamorous from the ontical point of view, will carry the stigma of impoverishment, limitation and disappointment. The pure possibility was always greater and broader, more developed and more fulfilled than any realization of possibilities, however amazing. The non-being of pure possibility cannot do less than to limit itself in order to occupy a space into some form of being. The unlimited expressivity of non-being is necessarily restricted to limits and constrained in order “to be”. The being, any being, is born from suffocation and strangling, from an inescapable basic narrowing.

An alleged “privilege of being” should be understood as the acceptance of the impoverishment as the price to be paid for abandoning non-being, by preferring an extremely poor being rather than a non-being exuberant in possibilities. *Nevertheless, the matter of why it is a privilege to leave the non-being towards being, since such step impoverishes and disappoints, is precisely the problem that is not usually put nor answered by affirmative ontology.* The being seems to be characterized by impoverishment, strain and limitation. A phenomenology of experiences of being and non-being would remind, for example, the disappointment of the artist before the finished work, so inferior to the project (at the end of the movie *Decameron*, of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Giotto exclaims, looking to his finished work: “Why performing a work if it is so beautiful to dream with it?”).

An existential ontology, assisted by such fundamental phenomenology of experiences does not get intimidated by the hypothesis those “disappointments” are nothing but “psychological delusions”. As it was clarified on a previous note, it is sure those difficulties, within the field of naturalization of ontology, *do not stop being psychological as well, but they are so, precisely within a structural-worldly level.* Concerning “delusion”, existential ontology describes experiences, deceptive

or not, to the strict extent that “delusion” and self-cheating also open, as much as truth and righteousness, the fundamental domain of being.

Disappointment towards being faces, as compensation, an increasing appraisal for pure possibilities and non-being. The intensity of absences in contrast with the inevitable wearing and erosion of prolonged presences, the aura of those who leave to long journeys, including the ones who leave to a journey without return, the sinking of events and experiences into nostalgia of the past, specially the remote (think of Marcel Proust's *Recherche*), the huge strength of everything we did not do and could have done; in our experiences, constantly appear those “negative primacies” of the distant over the near, of what departs over what remains, of what was not done over what has been realized, of the past over present, of the remote over the recent. Does a good part of the invincible power of Christ not reside in the fact it has been a long time since he left the world and remains infinitely distant, so nothing can stain or harm him? Is not part of his truth based on his eternal refusal? (Is he distant because he is divine or did he become divine for being distant?) On the other hand, the very enjoying of the world appears mediated by negativity, both joy and contentment lived by exclusion, by absence or lack, much more than “positively” (Freud's theory of desire and the negative theory of happiness from Schopenhauer give important conceptual tools to study these crucial phenomena).

These experiences suggest some cautions concerning the very idea of an unquestionable “ontological privilege of being over non-being”. It is curious and intriguing the fact people keep believing, in spite of frequent disappointment, being “is more” than non-being, and that it is worthwhile passing from non-being to being. The wearing of prolonged company or intimacy is not seen as a destruction of the fascination of pure possibility, and people keep escaping from silences, absences, lack, emptiness and loneliness as phobia, calling these things “bad” without realizing the systematic dissatisfaction of being when finally obtained, and without taking into account the scarce enjoying of the world is gained much more through

the hiatus of being, from its interruptions, as furtively and always pushed by the anxious search of a being that satisfies less, the more one tries to make it positive in experiences.

But also on the ethical perspective, it should not be sustained an alleged “primacy or privilege of being over non-being” either. In ethical theories of all persuasions (eudemonists, stoics, Kantians, Utilitarian and combinations of them), the apotheosis of immorality consists of manipulation of the other for one’s own benefit. The aggression towards the others, in the sense of invasion of their forum of possibilities, is certainly the paradigmatic case of manipulation. One may consider as the “*fundamental ethical articulation*” the attitude consisting of being disposed not to follow, systematically and regularly, the unrestricted defense of what is convenient to one’s own interest and not taking into account also the interest of others, using any mean, including violence and forced persuasion, to get one’s own purposes. Günther Patzig has expressed it this way: “... *the most important function of moral behavior rules is to counteract the lack of consideration with which people try to fulfill their own interests also to the harm of others*” (Patzig G., *Facts, norms, propositions*, p. 202; my translation from Spanish). This “fundamental ethical articulation” is independent from particular ethical *theories*: it may concern the “humiliation” before the moral law in aprioristic Kantian ethics, or the regular sacrifice of individual happiness in benefit to “happiness of the largest number” in Utilitarian ethics, and so on. The formal core of immorality consists in an expansive movement incapable of self-limitation.

But here resides the paradox of an alleged “ethical privilege of being over non-being”. In its original emergence from non-being, being, as we have seen, limits and cuts, restricts and wares out. However, once appeared it expands, crawls, covers the greatest area, gets space, invades, offends, disturbs, eliminates. All that was mere limitation in its relationship to non-being and possibility turns now into expansive non-limitation in its relations to other beings. *In the very establishment of being in relation to other beings, there seems already to be a kind*

of risk of moral transgression in a purely “formal” sense, because this establishment has the capability of harming, on a very basic ground, the fundamental ethical articulation. While the articulation invites to a certain “going against oneself”, the relationship among living beings has the exactly opposite direction, the unconditional self defense, self-supporting and going against the others. *It is an ontological oddity that, within the realm of non-being, the totality of space was available and notwithstanding it was abandoned in benefit of being; and now, within being, where there is no space enough, being intends the occupation of the greatest possible spaces.*

Being seems to successively transgress an ontological law in its mere establishment and an ethical law in its intention to stay forever and to continue in any way. The abandon of non-being stains and disappoints; on the other hand, being disturbs, gets in conflict, expands and makes noise. It seems that being, far from sustaining any kind of “privilege”, commits an ontological mistake in establishing, and an ethical mistake in continuing. Those lines of thought suggest a “negative” ethics could – hammering precisely over what was “forgotten” by current affirmativeness, over what lacks and not on what there is – could recover, at the same time, the ontological-structural levels of reflection and *enjoy the ethical reserves of negativity, in the sense of the radical respect of the fundamental ethical articulation.*

PART II

**Birth and Suicide: the arguments of a radical and anti-skeptic
moralist**

The structural-worldly suffering and its connection with moral disqualification

The matter of the value of life does not reduce, as it seems to be the case in the very well-known essay by Albert Camus, to the problem of “suicide”. Suicide refers only to already existent lives and is, therefore, half the problem. If, as Camus argues, there is a great responsibility around the issue of the “value of life”, to the point that if somebody comes to the conclusion life has no value, this person would be, according to Camus, ethically obliged to commit suicide, it is also plausible to think, coming to that same conclusion, *we are also obliged to refrain from procreate other beings*, because how could we understand life does not have enough value for me to continue, but, however, it does have enough value so my possible children would start living?

In the stubborn denial of talking about these questions, it is usually assumed the trivial and trivializing objection that it is not worthy to discuss the problem on the value of life because, anyway, when we put this question, we are already alive, so the question “arrives too late”. Our life would be taken, therefore, as “a fact”. This insignificant argument would have certain force if the problem about the value of life was reduced as in Camus’ work, to the matter of suicide, that is, to the non-being of the already present life, but not if conceived, at the same time, in both axes, suicide and abstention; because even though *our* life is a fact, the life of our possible children *is not*. If life becomes ethically problematic, we *can* avoid the appearance of another life through a decision that arrives perfectly “on time”. There is no reason for a supposed solution to the problem of continuing to be also a solution to the problem of coming for the first time into the world.

But the question of non-being and its several forms may easily get trivialized if it is argued only in the intra-worldly level; the level of philosophical reflection is certainly the worldly-structural one. The non-being that primarily matters here – as explained on Part I – is *the non-being of being* and not any kind of intra-worldly specific non-being. It matters here the several kinds of letting-not-to-be, making-not-to-be, making-oneself-not-to-be, etc., affecting the very being of the world. More concretely, *what matters here are what we can call formal suicide and formal abstention, and not only empirical suicides and abstentions*. The issue about the value of life's structure – and not of “what goes on in it” – is so presented in two fundamental axes: *Are there structural ethical-ontological motives for making-oneself-not-to-be and for not-letting-others-non-yet-existent-to be?* Or, presented in all its strength: *Is there any moral obligation of continuing to live and of giving life to others based on the very structure of the world as elucidated by fundamental ontology* and not only based on ontic advantages or on some furtive affirmative prejudice of religious order? Or on the contrary, is there any kind of “right”, structural-ontologically founded, to ethically and rationally realize these forms of non-being?

In order to show the internal connections between ontology and ethics, it is necessary first to make an ontological description within what I propose to call “*naturalization of ontology*”, but in a different direction from the contemporary analytic philosophy, which also uses this expression sometimes. From that, on a second moment, a presentation of the ethical figures that are possible after the structure thus elucidated of the world is in order. The “naturalizations of ontology” in the analytical field are much more “socializations” or “social conventionalizing” (in the sense, for example, of a “scientific community of investigators”) of ontology than, strictly speaking, “naturalizations” in the sense of crude nature. When I speak of “naturalization”, I refer literally *to nature*, in the sense of generation, death, the distinct forms of animal conflict, stain, aging, assimilation and expulsion of elements, metabolism, blood circulation, and so on. It is a common sense in current philosophy saying that we constantly live in an already totally cultural world,

distanced from the natural; and, therefore, “nature”, in its strong and literal sense, should be considered, beyond the metaphysical and theological references of the past, as a traditional and dogmatic element of thinking that must be presently dispensed with, overcome by categories connected to language, symbolic activities, hermeneutic, critique of ideologies, and so on.

Without denying the oppressive truism of this persuasion, *what I ask here is if a total disconnection of the ethical-rational universe of people from crude nature is even thinkable*. That means: if given certain “natural” characteristics of ontology, certain kinds of ethical directions keep being viable or not. We may accept contemporary thinking gets free from metaphysical and theological structures of thinking without accepting it should also be totally free from nature.

In reality, the three things – metaphysics, theology and nature – are usually gathered under the same philosophical condemnation, on behalf of the criticism against traditional “fixed” or “immutable” structures of thinking. However, in philosophy, as I conceive it, we are not searching for the mutable (or for the immutable), as we neither seek something edifying, emancipator, uplifting, anti-nihilist or anti-relativistic. *Philosophy should not be made in a movement of escaping from anything, for example, from “the immutable”, but simply following the thread of its own arguments*. The “immutability” of nature could be of an essentially distinct kind from the immutability of God and from the immutability of Aristotle’s substances, for example, and this could turn desirable getting rid of those metaphysical references without ignoring the firm framework of nature. On the other hand, we may be in accordance with Husserlian and Heideggerian criticisms against the naturalization of conscience or the naturalization of being. But what matters here is to visualize *the most general and basic natural structures of being*, flying at the same time from the empiricist conception of nature and from the temptation of describing the being in metaphysical-theological terms. It is the world itself what is searched to propose a radical reflection on the value of life, not the

mere empiricist intra-world or any ultra-world in the sense of the traditional theological metaphysics.

In this “naturalized ontology”, human beings are included in a description in terms of their *natural affections towards the world, that is, in the perception of how they are affected by it*. It is not the case, in a natural level, but to strictly describe the commerce of humans with nature in the most basic, elementary and trivial terms. In this level, this strictly sensible-natural commerce with nature has currently been understood by philosophers in the light of the dualism *pleasure/pain*, or acceptance/rejection, and this seems to be a good clue to be followed. Even though this world would not have any kind of “intrinsic ethical value”, it has, inevitably, natural characteristics, some of relational character concerning the particular receptivity and elaboration of sensible stimuli by human beings. Kant, following a Stoic tradition, has insisted on a clear difference between the order of what is pleasant and delightful on one side, from what is ethically good on the other; and what is painful and unpleasant from what is ethically wrong. From the world itself we may only obtain something like a “value of sensible affection”, in the sense of an impact. Utilitarian ethics have been much more concerned than the aprioristic ethics in establishing links between those two fields that should not however be mixed. The most important link for my purposes here between the sensible-natural level and the ethical one is the following:

The intense pain (in a sense relative to the quantity and strength of pain that each person is able to stand), if understood as the own pain (not as someone else’s pain, even of the “closest” ones) and understood as strictly physical pain (not just as any kind of “moral pain”) may have an inevitable effect of moral disqualification.

Certainly pain does not lessen a human being (and who would once sustain such an absurd?), but it could put her on a situation of inevitable immorality (as extraordinarily shown in George Orwell’s “1984”). A human in a situation of torture

may accept humiliation, betrayal, corruption and extreme moral diminution, even the very contempt of the ones she loves, etc. It is only about, as said the Great Inquisitor of the mentioned novel, reaching the adequate degree of torture, or increasing the volts or tightening the ropes a little more. Every human has his own limits in front of the instruments of torture, and torment is the end of all ethical organization of the world, compulsively replaced by a crude empirical and urgently present organization, of total adaptation to the stimulus of the moment, without any possibility of introducing the so typical “postponements” of the conceptual organization of the world.

When we suffer physical pain, we get completely alone, disabled to practice any kind of morality, Kantian, Utilitarian or even Stoic. And we are urgently thrown on ourselves with no one to go with us. At the same time, not even those outside the situation can ethically condemn *the person* who betrayed or lie in a situation of torture, even when continuing to condemn, abstractly, this type of action as wrong in general. Even considering X as morally wrong, we may not consider wrong the actions X takes under a situation of torture. Here, I intend to indicate to a kind of *post-moral* level of analysis, a level where the domain of morality has already been opened but it cannot be made effective for structural motives. Intense physical pain is, this way, the terminal point of morality, in the sense we can always be disposed to go against our own interests (the fundamental moral demand) to *the extent the integrity of our own body is not drastically threatened*. Ethics is not in conditions to ask me to be disposed to “go unlimitedly against the integrity of my own body”, even when, physically, I could be able to endure extreme pain.

The situation of intense pain obliges me to “ardently defend my own interests”. Hannah Arendt points out intense pain brutally withdraws us from the public arena and, in an unrecoverable way, buries in the private. “...*the most intense feeling we know – intense to the point of eclipsing all other experiences, which is the experience of great physical pain – is, at the same time, the most private and less communicable of all... it deprives us of our perception of reality to*

the point we may forget it more rapidly and easily than any other thing" (Arendt, Hannah, *The human condition*, chapter II, 7).

As a consequence of this, running away from pain is not a merely sensible conduct people do simply to satisfy their own "self love" or "selfishness", as the Kantian ethics seems cruelly to think, neither to increase the gratification and happiness of the greater number, as occurs in Utilitarian ethics, but it may constitute, when it refers to the own intense physical pain, the pure and simple recovery of the person's moral capacities. Not all people do for their own benefit is done in order to satisfy the sensible selfishness, or to obtain happiness. Between the pure searching for sensible pleasure and the strict obedience to pure moral law or to the principles of happiness of the largest number, is located the simple and minimal level in which we run away from pain in order to maintain our basic conditions as ethical persons. It will neither be "benevolent" with human sensible selfishness (Kant) not a procedure to increase my happiness in harmony with everyone's (Utilitarianism) the simple fact of intending to withdraw a human being from the situation of intense pain. Removing humans from intense pain is not an attempt to make them happy or worthy, but an attempt to conserve them human. The ignorance about this fundamental connection between sensible characteristics (pleasure/pain) and the ethical level is a sign of lack of radical character – in the sense pointed before – of Kantian and Utilitarian ethical thinking in general, which always imagine human actions in situations of evaluative middle term but never or very seldom in dramatic and conflictive situations in which one's own values get radically put to dramatic testing.

However, one might certainly think a situation of torture is exceptional and, as such, a sort of "useless pain" that could be avoided within a certain development of human civilization ethically and politically evolved and well constituted. Even though this is highly doubtful, we admit it. But maybe it is not exceptional the mutual aggressiveness among natural beings, whose one of manifestations is torture, and there might be other kinds of it when torture no longer exists. *Being*

regularly submitted to other's aggressiveness, under its different styles, certainly does not seem exceptional, but one of the current features of our being-in-the-world. We may suppose a mythical civilization in which the mutual aggressiveness among natural beings such as humans is totally suppressed. Nevertheless, all of them would be still submitted to the situation of wearing and sickness, given the fragility of human organism up against the vicissitudes of the world and the consequent difficulty of protecting themselves in a reliable way. An illness can lead us to degrees of pain as intense as the situation of torture. And neither is illness exceptional but a regular event in any human life (beyond the progresses of medical sciences and the raise on "life expectancy") and, therefore, a part of our very being-in-the-world. Illness and its consequent threat of intense physical pain is a structure internally connected to human condition.

In the structural level, there are no "healthy" people, in spite of the intra-worldly discourse that makes the ontologically unsustainable distinction between healthy and not healthy. It is ontically administered the dysfunction which keeps all of us regularly ill, that is the point. The ontic-political administration of pain cannot cloud a more radical ontological analysis. (Certainly, in the most optimistic alternative, we can also imagine a society in which illness is totally suppressed, but what we soon realize is that, in fact, we continuously "move" suffering from one place of reflection to another)

Wilhelm Kamlah has presented human beings as *structurally indigents*, with independence from their intra-worldly specific indigence (given by their socio-economic, racial, cultural conditions.): "*In descriptive anthropology, it has been formulated the general proposition: human beings are indigent beings always in need; that is to say all of them are put in a situation of indigence... we humans are all indigent beings and reciprocally dependent on each other...*" (Kamlah, *Philosophical Anthropology*. Part II, chapter 1, p. 97; my translation from Spanish). Human being is presented as helpless, insecure, decadent, ill and at risk, and such determination is structural, in the sense it is independent from the particularities of

this or that life. Being fragility structural, it must appear in any ontological-natural description of the world. This fragility organizes, in a necessary way, a structural domain of “ailment”, the always open possibility of pain and, as we have seen before, of the consequent destruction of morality in the extreme point of ailment.

In fact, even when we are not submitted to a specific painful illness, we are always submitted *to its current and constraining possibility*, an ontologically tormenting possibility (beyond ontic “hypochondrias”). *And the single possibility of intense pain has already a certain minimum level of moral disqualification.* It is correct to think humans morally disqualify themselves to the strict extent they suffer and feel bad, in the sense of already living, from ever, the structural pain of being, that becomes enormous and unavoidable in the case of an effective and declared illness. (Those issues are masterfully seen in the film of Ingmar Bergman, *Screams and whispers.*) Thus, structural pain determines *levels of moral disqualification.*

Certainly, those structural characteristics of ailment may be lived with stoicism or serenity until a certain point, but that possibility does not suppress anything in the structural-worldly level, however “controlled” those characteristics might be. The fundamental and relevant ontological fact is: these characteristics can reach uncontrollable levels. The stoic and the skeptical might keep their phlegm and arrogance for a while in contact to the structure of the world, but the counter-proof ad absurdum of that ataraxy is precisely intense pain. The very intense physical pain demonstrates everything, refutes everything, ends with all skepticism and all stoicism, it is strictly the absolute. The characteristics of human condition may be submitted to the usual relativist skepticism of “all depends on the attitude taken before difficulties or pain”, since one does not come to the very intense physical pain (in the relative sense explained above, “what is intense to someone might not be to another”).

There is no ethical theory that can be practiced by a man with hands and feet tied, receiving electrical shocks, not even “stoicism”, even when there might be, for

example, some theory for living in Auschwitz but only while one does not come to that extreme point of pain yet. Faced the very intense physical pain, all humans are equal (or, I insist, only different in terms of voltage, as exposes the Great Inquisitor of Orwell's novel), because we are put in a situation where neither subtlety nor humor fit. The own intense physical pain does not depend on "the attitude taken" because it is pain that determines and makes uniform all the attitudes in the extreme case.

This does not mean there is merely pain *in* the world, but that the world itself "hurts", the world itself *is* pain situated in different levels of intensity and commitment. The hurting-of-the-world is visualized, for example, in the necessarily conflictive relations among natural beings imprisoned in a common and forever scarce space, in the regular situation of being-ill, in the "evidences" of the fragility which constitutes their being-in-the-world, and so on. It seems possible to show the painfulness of the world *as such* and, at last, its consecutive opening of moral disqualification (a much weaker thesis, no doubt, than the Gnostic thesis of a possible "ethical evilness of the world" or than the thesis of a "radical evil of human nature"). The so called "evil" is an unavoidable result of the fundamental "lack of space" and "lack of time" of the structural human condition, and not of an "intrinsically evil nature" of humans. In the daily and concealing regularity of our lives, we can exercise a certain morality for "times of peace" because we still have time for postponing, for giving ourselves the hope: "tomorrow yes, tomorrow will be different". When that space is closed (not only in the extreme case of intense physical pain but in daily life), it is automatically produced moral disqualification.

Seeing things radically, out of the regular concealing of every-day life, human being is structurally put in a situation impossible to be solved only with ethical categories without intervention of intra-world politics or ultra-world religion: in the very world, it is not allowed for human beings to be. The world itself is, in that sense, inhabitable, unlivable. World is pain and pain regularly produces moral disqualification. In the light of a radical naturalized ontology, the "ethical evilness of

the world” shall be, in the better case, a completely derived outcome. Traditionally, it has been thought that either human beings were “naturally bad” or the “circumstances” turned them bad. In the first case, they would necessarily be bad, in the second, empirically or circumstantially bad. But opening the worldly-structural dimension within naturalized ontology, we see human beings turn bad not by their nature or by intra-worldly causations, but because of the structural-worldly situation in which they are found since ever. They are “situationally bad” but in the scope of a “situation” in which they cannot, in any way, not to be.

In the ontological-worldly level, the force of the trivial sea-saw of ontical “pleasures and pains” is over, the sea-saw currently expressed in the vulgar sayings: “After the bad moments, come the good ones”, “Life is a succession of pleasures and pains”, “Tomorrow will be another day”. This symmetry of possibilities finishes in the structural level, because tomorrow will absolutely not be another day but the same day as yesterday, and the same as the day before yesterday and the same as always. The being-towards-death has only one direction, ontology is “one-way”. There is not a death-life direction explainable by naturalized ontology. “Being alive” is a dimension of being-towards-death, as being “wealthy” is a dimension of being-towards-illness and “being at peace”, a dimension of being-towards-aggression: they are all of them ontical postponing, small route corrections. Finitude and helplessness are not in oscillation with their contraries, we are not older some day and younger the next; the following day of helplessness is always helplessness. In the ontological level, we can never be “better” or “worse”. The so called “pleasure” is not a part of the structure of the world, but of the postponing strategy of humans.

There is no being-towards-pleasure, all pleasure is ontic and intra-worldly, and therefore the beings (*estantes*), on their forgetful run away from being, search precisely for refuge in the middle of the beings within the world. Only in the intra-worldly level one could also speak of pain as postponement of pleasure. But however “independent of beings” that pleasure might seem (this sensation of

feeling good simply “*for being*”, for being alive, without any particular motive), pleasure does not succeed in dispensing with beings and establishing an internal *rapport* with the proper being of being. If we give some time to beings, in the form, for example, of illness or any other feature of natural ontology, that apparent “ontological pleasure” will be destroyed; structurally it cannot happen; because the same beings that give “pleasure” are also in charge of hampering it. On the other hand, pain, in the worldly sense, does not postpone anything. Of course, the world could have been structured in a radically different manner than it is now, and other ontological tendencies (like, for example, the world as being structurally pleasure) would take place. But we are here talking on the world as it is, and not as it could possibly be.

The painfulness of being has to do with the narrowing and limitation connected to its own emergence. Pain is connected to a fundamental lack of space, a space that used to be abounding when non-being was in vigor and that now scants. And it is this same lack of space that, as we saw before, settles the conditions for moral disqualification. In order to be moral it is necessary to have enough space and the world itself, in its structure, as elucidated by naturalized ontology, consists of a fundamental “lack of space”. (The most despairing torture invented by human beings against others does not consist in leaving someone in contact with unpleasant beings (as electroshocks or clamps), but in simply leaving him *alone with being*, with his own being and without beings of *any kind* (for example, in a dark cell where there is nothing to hear or see), with nothing to do and with no opportunity to run away and embrace beings, as our troubled daily life conveniently allows. Observing this case, we will see with surprise that the pure and immediate contact with the “good being” of affirmative society... despairs! The contact with pure being is enough to torture.

The naturalized ontology only describes the direction of nature in terms of its raw and trivial sensible-natural mode of being. The being wears out and gets worn out, brakes, wrinkles, passes, decreases, withers, gets older, steals, limits,

evacuates, gives up, cracks. *The results of that naturalized ontology are certainly not “interesting”, but they are, so to speak, the most trivial*, something that cannot be made subtle in an “intelligent” way, but only boringly repeated. Intelligence will return only in the level of ethics, in the moment of thinking in ethical ways of behavior that could succeed in being “interesting”, against the natural and disturbing trivialities of nature. In certain way, every ethical theory in the usual affirmative sense has always proposed “to make life interesting” in the sense of regular concealment of natural triviality. A “*negative ethics*” will have to show how to deal with the radical lack of interest of life without falling into affirmative impositions, since it seems impossible to “affirm” the world in the sense of “considering it good”, but only in the sense of a “firming” (*afianzar*) on it.

Pain is obviously neither good nor bad ethically, but it can totally suppress the spaces of morality and, in that sense, be *the empirical-natural condition of evil* (not in the stingy sense, denounced by Kant, of the man who proclaims, self-benevolently, “he cannot do anything against” the temptation of evil, like the alcoholic or the adulterer). People in a situation of torture or tied to a hospital bed suffering a terminal illness *literally can do absolutely nothing in order to preserve themselves as ethical persons*. All apparent counterexamples of that are always imagined in a *not* extreme level of pain, contrary to what is required in my reflection here.

Throughout fundamental ontology it is also suggested a manner of passing from “being” to “ought”, from nature to ethical theory, without “naturalist fallacy” (in the sense of G. E. Moore). In the first place, it is shown pain is structural, which means, it forms part of the very natural world. Secondly, it is proved pain, as *intense, physical and own*, can ethically disqualify. From this, it follows that it is *ethically good* to run away from self intense physical pain, and not only “sensibly advantageous”. This last is a moral rule that has emerged from natural facts. Thus, when it is radically asked if being itself is good, independently from the traditional questions about *how* to be, or *how* to be good, now we can answer that *being itself*

is neither good nor bad, but it is possible to show, through a naturalized ontology, that the very being is painful; and, to the extent the intensity of pain can ethically disqualify, being is in itself ethically disqualifying, independently of how we decide “to be”.

Excursus on nature. Concerning nature, affirmative ethics had entertained an ambivalent attitude: on one side, they liked to emphasize there are certain impulses that are legitimate, to the extent they are “natural”, for example, the “impulse of staying alive”. “...*maintaining your own life is a duty and, moreover, we all have an immediate tendency to do so...*”, Kant affirms (“Fundament of Metaphysics of Morals”, BA 9, 10; my translation from German). And: “...*man experiences a natural repulsion against suicide; only when he puts himself to consider the question subtly he thinks in the possibility of committing suicide...*” (*Lessons of ethics*, p. 160; my translation from Spanish). So in this scope, nature appears as something *good*, as when one talks about “living according to nature”. But, on the other hand, within the same affirmative vein, nature has frequently been seen as source of immorality, in the sense humans should not live only “according to their natural tendencies”, but according to certain norms of conduct that “fight against mere nature” in a permanent attempt to “humanize it” (humanization of sexuality, of feeding, and other primary functions, on the direction of an appropriation of them to a human level). From this perspective, nature appears as something *bad*. Thus, the same human being who should seek “to live according to nature”, should, at the same time, “fight against the purely natural determinations” of actions.

It is usually admitted that something that is done by simple natural tendency, cannot be ethically qualified neither as good nor evil, for not being subjected to option. Thus, even though maintaining life by duty might be considered as a moral motivation, by contrast, making those actions simply because “we feel an immediate tendency to do so” is not moral because of this. So we see there has

been an ambiguous attitude regarding nature in affirmative traditions. Sometimes conciliation has been sought through the notion of a “properly human nature”: human beings should try to live “according to *their* nature”, fighting against the natural “non-human” tendencies. That way, in the case of our problem here, it would be the case, from the affirmative position, that continuing to live and procreating are actions determined by *human* nature, and committing suicide and abstaining from procreating would be, in that sense, “anti-natural tendencies”.

Nevertheless, this separation of nature in non-human and human is highly problematic. The expansive force and friction seem to be present in the totality of nature, but in the case of human beings the first appears under the form of a will to live, and the second as suffering. It is plausible to think animals are also subjected to structural pain; however, in the case of humans, structural pain gets into relations with the moral dimensions of life. The “natural” characteristics elucidated by naturalized ontology do not allow deciding whether it is “natural” or “more natural” to keep on living or stop living, to procreate or to abstain from doing it. The only thing ontology deals with is structural pain, in the sense of deprivation and decaying. If we want to take this result into account in the philosophical consideration of a possible morality of forms of non-being usually condemned by the affirmative approach (the stop being the own being (suicide) and the not letting be other people who are not yet (abstention from procreating)), we should ask ourselves again the question we have made from the beginning of this book: is there a moral duty of continuing to live and of giving life to others *based on the very structure of the world?*

But if radical and naturalized ontology gives us a structurally “painful” world that, in its intrinsic painfulness, can ethically disqualify, this allows us to say that, to the extent a certain kind of suicide and a certain kind of abstention are performed *taking strictly in consideration the painful structure of the world*, these two actions can be considered as ethically valuable actions to the extent they cut off the passage towards moral disqualification openly allowed by the extreme painfulness

of the world (letting aside, of course, ontic suicides and abstentions we can abandon to their usual affirmative condemnations).

It seems, therefore, there cannot be an unconditioned ethical duty of conservation or proliferation of life, to the extent they may open the scope of physical and extreme pain able to lead to moral disqualification. What should be ethically condemned is undoubtedly neither conservation nor interruption of life itself, but the conservation or interruption which leads to that disqualification. Considering “natural” the conservation or interruption is a not critical position, and would indeed cause a return to the traditional ambiguous use of the notion of “nature”. *It is neither the case of “living according to nature” nor “fighting systematically against nature”, but of taking nature into account at its most general and trivial features in the moment of ethically evaluating actions.* Neither stop living nor continue to live, neither procreate nor refraining from doing it seem to constitute “moral obligations”, if we consider the pure ontological-natural structure of the world. *Nature – as elucidated by naturalized ontology – shall constitute only an ultimate and insuperable reference point of our moral evaluations, but in any way should we put nature in benefit of one or another of the options of human beings in their being-in-the-world.*

Nature is not committed to any direction of action in an absolute sense. Perhaps what counts in that context is the pure inertia of the starting situation: when we ask about being, we already *are*. If in any fantastic situation (as the one imagined in my short novel, *The Report Office*) we could start that evaluation from the perspective of non-being, maybe the initial non-being would be identified with the “natural” and the subsequent being with the “anti-natural”. That the question about the (own) being is inevitably put as a question of “continuing or not” to be, does not commit us to accept pure continuing as being “natural”. If non-being has rationally supported rights, it will not lose them under the fact of “having arrived too late”, that means, under the fact that, when one asks about the being, one is already “being”, instead of “not being”.

Note 3. Tribute to Schopenhauer.

The classical European philosopher of a “naturalized ontology” is Arthur Schopenhauer, whose extraordinary contribution to ethics and ontology has not been recognized yet, neither by contemporary German thinking (in spite of Adorno and Horkheimer) nor, in general, by the rest of the world. Due to his easy and little technical style and the irrelevant particularities of his philosophical temperament, Schopenhauer is considered by many as the prototype of the “superficial philosopher”. But it is exactly from that quality of the Schopenhauerian thinking a negative ethics can take exhaustive profit. Before the incredible subtleties of affirmative ontology, from which not even Heidegger is free, what is most needed is an exhaustingly “superficial” negative philosophy like Schopenhauer’s. To him belong the ideas of the empirical character of metaphysics and the structural nature of pain, capital to the present reflection:

“... Metaphysics has not as its aim observing particular experiences, but explicating exactly the totality of experience. However its fundament shall essentially be of empirical kind... the empirical origin of metaphysics deprives itself, really, of the apodictic certainty which only corresponds to knowledge a priori” (Schopenhauer, A., *The world as will and representation*, volume II, chapter. 17, p. 178; my translation from Spanish). What Schopenhauer calls “the totality of experience” (*Erfahrung im Ganzen*) is approximately the level which I have called “structural” or “worldly”. This naturalized metaphysics adopts, in the case of Schopenhauer, the form of a philosophy of the “*will to live*” that in its insatiability, not different in nature from hunger and reproduction instinct, necessarily produces pain and, at last, some brief moments of pleasure among uncountable misery.

It is strictly this instinctive mechanism of desire that establishes the realm of pain. The core of each thing is this identical aspiration of will, but true satisfaction does not exist, since it is the starting point of a new desire, also difficult to satisfy,

and the origin of new pains. (*The world*, I, 56, p. 405) This is why for its origin and its essence, will is damned to pain. Each human being is determined by certain types and intensities of desire in an internal manner, which does not depend on external circumstances. Schopenhauer criticizes, from this volitional version of the structural character of pain, what I call the affirmativeness in philosophy and in everyday life: *“However most of the time we deny to accept that knowledge...that pain is essential to life and does not come from outside, but each one of us carries this non exhaustive source within ourselves...we always search for an external cause or excuse for pain...until we find a desire we can neither satisfy nor renounce to; so we achieve, in a certain way, what we desire, which is: something we can always blame to be the cause of our pains, instead of accusing our own being...”* (I, 57, p. 415). And: *“Every satisfaction... is, for its very nature, always negative, never positive... satisfaction or happiness can never be anything else than the suppression of a pain...”* (I, 58, 415).

The pain of existing is of a worldly, not intra-worldly, character, and the persistent attribution of structural pain to intra-worldly external causes can be read as a chapter of the history of the oblivion of being (not in the Heideggerian vein, but as oblivion of the non-being of being, in my own terms). This result of the structural character of pain as pain of living will be crucial in the passage to rational demonstration of the ethical character of some forms of instauration of non-being (as suicide and refrain from procreating). Only the idealistic-transcendent prejudices of Schopenhauer, mixed with his Platonic Buddhism, in particular on the idea suicide only affects the phenomenal being and not the noumenon, prevented him to pass from the idea of structural pain to a morality of suicide, in the first volume of his masterpiece. Removing these concepts taken from Transcendental Idealism, that step is, as we shall see, completely natural and ineluctable.

2

Procreation

In intra-worldly situations, it is considered we act in a morally reprehensible way when we put someone in a situation which we know is painful when it was possible *to avoid it*. What prevents from applying that evaluative criterion to the act of procreation, since, in the light of natural ontology, we have copious structural information about the possible being, referent to its structural helplessness and pain and the subsequent moral disqualification that will inevitably follow? If it is true Dasein is fundamentally a being-towards-death, *what is the point in giving birth to someone to be-towards-death?* If the very transference from the punctual conception of dying to the structure of the being-towards-death implies a so dramatic and conscientious effort *for current and effective life*, what would be the point of creating someone who would have to make such an effort?

If life itself consists of a fundamental directing to constitutive non-being, why withdrawing someone who is completely and absolutely placed in the pure non-being of being, in order to painfully fulfill that which he already represents, by not being, in his very constitution? Why disturbing someone who already does something in a perfect way in order that he, by being, could do it in an imperfect way? Are we not putting him under an evitable pain (since we can refrain from doing it), in a pain not worth-while, or in a situation where such disvalue is constituted in a situation that, literally, “is not worthy”?

These are the fundamental ethical-ontological questions previous to each and every question about the morality of *how to live*, or of *how to be in general*. I intend to understand here how the usual affirmative categories would be able to face those questions and to provide for them any convincing answer; and I make myself the question of until which point, in order to answer them, will it be necessary the introduction of “negative categories”, in the relative sense mentioned above.

In the light of natural ontology, it is not correct the argument that we do not know anything about our possible offsprings, for example, about the capacity they will have to overcome structural pain; because even we do not know, for example, whether they will enjoy traveling, working or studying classical languages, we do know they will be indigent, decadent, vacating beings who will start dying since birth, who will face and be characterized by systematic dysfunctions, who will have to constitute their own beings as beings-against-the-others – in the sense of dealing with aggressiveness and having to discharge it over others – who will lose those they love and be lost by those who love them, and time will take everything they manage to build, etc. By giving birth to someone, we impoverish her ontologically – if our previous considerations are correct about the problematical character of a “primacy of being over non-being” – and we also limit her ethically by putting her into the structural space in which, in addition to being always subjected to the possibility of moral disqualification, she will permanently have “to expand” in detrimental of someone and to inevitably elaborate a project of self-assurance, not always morally guided, in the sense of a purely strategic fulfillment, at most, of the fundamental ethical articulation.

Moreover, it would not mitigate anything of our moral procreation onus the fact that we suppose the newborn will have a sufficiently strong structure to *bear* the non-being of being, in a similar way we undoubtedly would not morally justify the behavior of someone who sent a colleague to a dangerous situation by saying: “I sent him there because I know he is strong and he will manage well”. The “strengths” of the newborn do not relieve in anything the moral responsibility of the procreator. Anyone would answer: “This is irrelevant. Your role in the matter consisted of sending people to a situation you know was difficult and painful *and you could avoid it*. Your predictions about their reacting manners do not decrease in anything your responsibility”.

In the case of procreation, the reasoning could be the same, and in a notorious emphatic way, since in any intra-worldly situation with already existing

people in which we send someone to a position known as painful, the other one could always run away from pain to the extent his being is already in the world and he could predict danger and try to avoid being exposed to a disregarding and manipulative maneuver. In the case of the one who is being born, by contrast, this is not possible at all because it is precisely *his very being* that is being manufactured and used. Concerning birth, therefore, manipulation seems to be total. Kant has condemned suicide, among other motives, for the usage of *life itself* as a mean, by committing suicide to run away from the hardships and boredom of life. Why not condemning, with the same argument, procreation to the strict extent it uses *the life of the child* as a mean to run away from the hardships and boredom of life?

We do not need to listen to intra-worldly motives that clearly present the manipulation of offspring (of the kind of “having a child who will do what I did not succeed doing”). Even when this is not ontically the case, it is ontologically inevitable that the newborn is manipulated, *restricting his being and ethically putting him at risk*, independently from eventual intra-worldly manipulations and from good intentions of claiming of non-manipulation (for example, saying the child will be left in “total freedom” to do “whatever he wants”). Even though the ontological manipulation of newborn is absolutely inevitable, it is evitable, for sure, to give birth, and that precisely indicates to a morality of abstention, to the extent this form of non-being seems to constitute a feasible way to free someone from structural pain and its consequent moral disqualification.

It seems there is no philosophical-rational argument (not, for example, religious or juridical) to recover the rationality and morality of making-someone-be, of birth, of appearing in the world. (See note 6 later about Leibniz and the problem of world creation). We can understand all forms of “salvation” developed by affirmative philosophy, but none of them allows us to understand *what means giving life to someone in order to save him or her*. Nietzsche has taught us to detect a mechanism of some behavior, elucidated by the genealogy of morals,

consisting of putting-someone-there-in-order-to-help-her, to dispose of someone there in order to be good and moral with her, and our consequent frustration if the other does not allow us to help her. "I need you there so I could help you. If you do not let me help, I abominate you, because you exist there to be helped." That mechanism, if used in a radical way, may be useful for understanding the morality of procreation. To people who are thinking in procreation affirming they will love intensely and take much care of future child, it is necessary to soberly remind that taking care, loving and saving someone who is already in the world makes full sense, but it is difficult to see the justification of giving birth to someone in order to love, take care and save him or her. This attitude seems to discard *ab initio* that the best way of helping, taking care, loving and saving someone is... not giving him or her birth! Through the Nietzschean suspicious, it looks like people are disposed to do all sort of things to avoid their children suffer, anything except... not bringing him or her to the structural pain and to moral disqualification.

Bringing someone to being in order to protect him or her from this same being, inaugurates, in a possible way, what I call "second degree morality". It seems all we can do is to build morality and rationality *from that point, from birth onwards. Thus, one may certainly be a good father, without never answering the radical question of whether it is good or not, in general, to be a father.* However, being a good father will be based on some intra-worldly morality that will drag with it the shadow and stigma of being a second degree morality presupposing a fundamental moral questioning, never answered in a more radical level. The act of giving to procreation only a secondary moral justification could not satisfy our moral concerns, to the extent even from war, death penalty and even crime, it is always possible do develop a second degree morality. If there are second degree moral justifications for the violence of making-not-be-in-the-world, the fact there might also be such kind of justification for the violence of making-be-in-the-world will not satisfy us.

It is important to say here that the current affirmative ethics, when concerned about suicide, homicide and birth, seems to inevitably constitute a secondary morality, and, by contrast, a “negative ethics” will make an extreme and radical attempt to establish itself as primary morality or morality of first degree (maybe an impossible enterprise). Part of this “negative” morality, in the relative sense mentioned above, will adopt towards procreation, as shall be seen, the attitude I propose here to call *formal abstention*; so I call the act of not-making-be someone when based on a concern of avoiding morally disqualifying structural pain, making a relevant distinction between this kind of ontological abstention and ontic-intra-worldly abstentions, in the line, for example, of “birth control”.

One of the most unpopular intuitions of my *Project of Negative Ethics* (1989) has been precisely that ontological manipulation, the manipulation of the *very being* of humans, constitutes a common point between the making-be and the making-not-be: *we dispose of the being of others when we make them appear in the world as much as when we eliminate them*. If someone replies that the difference between eliminating life and generating life resides in the fact that while people kill each other *for hate*, they procreate *for love*, the question about the relations between the ethical distinction good/evil and the sensible distinction love/hate has been posed. As we have seen before, Kant taught us to never confuse the level of pleasure/pain (or of pleasant/unpleasant) with the level of ethical or non-ethical articulation; so it seems we should have the same kind of precaution concerning the relations between ethics and love; because someone can be lead to quickly set ethics on the side of love and hate on the side of non-ethical, but this is not right.

Fernando Savater, in the last part of his *Invitation to ethics* situates love among the things that would be “beyond ethics”. “...I can more or less abstractly recognize myself in the other, respect him by principle, feel compassion for him... but not love him! It would be asking too much: nothing can demand me love...” (Savater, *Invitation to ethics*, p. 118; my translation from Spanish). And: “There

where love imposes itself, ethics has practically nothing to say... love...destroys and loses as well as it builds, annihilates and creates, sometimes in a same impulse..." (p. 119). "Love discovers the value of the other, but such 'value' is not its ethical category, the level of its virtue" (p. 120). "Where love resides, ethics is left over, and virtue ceases to have sense. The objectives of virtue, what they aim to obtain of value, generosity, humanity, solidarity, justice, etc... is achieved by love without even intending it, without neither effort nor discipline. And it does it in its own way, in a non (or very little) moral way, cowardly, rapaciously, unfairly, inhumanly... in the relation of love, it is revealed to us, at last, the true content of ethics...but we must not elude ourselves: ethics is irreplaceable, it cannot be supplanted completely by love..." (p. 121). I think love cannot supplant ethics at all.

The coincidence or approximation of ethics with love is accidental, in the sense I can have extreme consideration for those I do not love (most part of humankind) and, by loving, I may break moral rules. In the basis of these coincidences, we are disposed to be ethical to the ones we love (the "limited generosity" of Hume) and to be maximally tolerant and benevolent towards their self-defensive and hetero-aggressive mechanisms. However, at any moment, love can make us lose dignity, freedom, responsibility and the rest of our moral values. Nothing more erotically justifiable than a certain dose of voluntary slavery (manifested, for example, in the very common attitude of parents who enjoy "letting themselves dominate" by their small children), connected to the masochist component of Eros, but ethical justification is another thing. Can there be pleasure without a minimum sacrifice of dignity? The "going against oneself" of the voluntary slave is not the same as the "going against oneself" of the fundamental ethical articulation.

An erotic "deviation" (a perversion) is not of the same order of a "moral deviation". Being ethically bad is not the same as being erotically perverse, or vice-versa, even though this connection is made regularly. Of course perversions are "unworthy" from the moral point of view, but this is a sign it is absurd to apply

ethical-rational categories to forms of sexuality. It would be the same absurd as to condemn an ethic theory by not enriching our forms of eroticism: it is clear that all ethical theories drastically reduce our vitality by force of their imperatives, but this is just a sign it is an absurd to apply erotic categories to theories of ethics. And what is said about love should equally be said about hate. Hate drives us out from the sphere of morality, not by its content or its intentionality, but by its own instinctual mechanisms, as well as love does.

Thus, whoever has said to procreate for love, as others kill for hate, might have said a truth, but, no doubt, this person has not given any moral justification for procreation. Saying you have had a child “for love” is a manner of saying you have had him or her compulsively, according to the wild rhythms of life. In a similar way, we might intensely love our parents and, at the same time, consider fatherhood ethically-rationally problematic, and visualize we have been manipulated by them. I may continue to love after having detected immorality, there is nothing contradictory on that. Neither would morally justify a homicide saying we have done it for hate, nor a suicide saying we have done it “for hate against ourselves”. Something can continue to be ethically problematic even when guided by love (Setting aside the very complexity of those feelings themselves, so well studied by Freud: love turns easily into hate and vice-versa in a scaring fluid way).

Kamlah has written: “...we can only recognize those obligations we have freely and independently contracted ourselves or those ones that can be reconstructed afterwards as we had contracted them independently. For example, some obligations within the scope of family and State, which we have already born with, can be reconstructed that way...” (Kamlah, *Philosophic Anthropology*, p. 117; my translation from Spanish). Nevertheless, all that can be “recovered” that way is just intra-worldly, the *being* itself, *creatio ex nihilo* of our progenitors, is *unrecoverable* (On that line, it might be absurd the idea of Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, that, in a certain sense, “we have chosen to be born”). As we shall see further on, in the discussions with Habermas and Tugendhat, each one of us

maintains with our progenitors, in the ontological level, a relation of infinite dependence regardless how much we manage to “set us independent from them” in the ontic-intra-worldly level. Each one of us *is a newborn* forever, someone who is here in the world inevitably through manipulation (“loving” or not) of his or her own being.

Concerning manipulation, progenitors have searched, through the generation of another being, a kind of recognition of the similar order as the one Hegel describes in the fight against the enemy, in the famous servant/lord dialectic. *Humans seek to be recognized not only by the ones they defeat on a battle, but also by those they make appear in the world.* Notwithstanding, the son is already born as that who nobody can be, that means, as a thing; and throughout his whole life he will fight in order to get away from the scopes of the manipulation which defines him from the very manufacture of his being, and not in its mere ontical details. From that point, a struggle to death is waged between progenitors and their offspring, an ontological fight, in the sense the son does not have any space to develop himself or herself as a human being except, precisely, that space of opposition to his or her progenitors, in spite of the kind of affective character their intra-worldly relationship might have.

Thus, the progenitors’ attempt to be recognized through their children fails, because the fact the offsprings, in virtue of their own beings, can never accept to assume this being which, for being born, they already are. Yet, in spite of that internal refusal to be what they have to be and already are, they remain necessarily an infinite dependency on their own generator’s project. Their own humanization process is performed in permanent and inevitable conflict against the necessarily reifying forces of their birth, and the “being” the progenitors intended to obtain through the appearance of the son in the world turns out to escape through their fingers by the strength of the necessary ontological offspring’s demand, not less violent for being a priori failed (or, perhaps, more and more violent because of that). The son’s being, far from recovering some “lost” being (in reality, never

possessed) represents the returning of non-being tried to be postponed – according to the usual affirmative mechanisms – through birth, showing the systematic failure of concealment. In certain sense, the violence of the offspring's demand is an evidence of the enormous *quantum* of moral responsibility of his or her birth, or the extent of manipulation – “loving”, we may accept – which such birth has inevitably consisted of.

The negativity the son represents for his progenitors is like the ontological reflection of the abstention that was initially discarded, although this abstention seemed to represent the maximum of moral responsibility concerning the temptation of making-be. That is why the mere reproducing of life, without doing anything with it, is incapable of fostering the values of men, constituting a minimal and miserable way of life. *In order life becomes human, it is necessary to make with life something else than simply life.* The ontological sorrowing of a conscience will not be cured through the infinite generation of more and more consciences, because in this compulsive generating, the human being incessantly searches for something another human being neither has nor could provide. Every human being is the spot of an impossibility. There are pacts and negotiations a human being may establish with all persons except her progenitors, because her struggle is *internal*, and it is waged in the very heart of the constitution of her conscience, her language and her being human.

The son, who has been expected to be the life of his parents and their mediated self-recognition, turns to be the generation of their own death. As seen by Hegel, the son becomes the unexpected self-suppression of his parents. Within education, the parents' conscience is the matter whose expenses the son is raised and educated. The parents suppress the simple and undivided being-within-itself, of the son, and what they give him, they lose; they die on him; and parents contemplate, on the becoming of the son, their own dialectical suppression. Even when, from the point of view of a negative ethics, a human being admits afterwards moral principles of great ontological parsimony (as shall be seen on the chapter

about “Negative survival”) in the sense, for example, of the structural abstention and other negative attitudes concerning the others, in his condition of “newborn”, he will not have been able to avoid, notwithstanding, this self-constituting as the death of his progenitors. When he decides not to change the ontology of the world, he realizes he has already changed it simply by *being*. Of course he is totally innocent of the “destruction” of his parents. When we make someone else be, we radically impoverish him in an ontological sense, we put him at risk of moral disqualification and, from ever, we constitute him as the inevitable ontological vindication - on which he may not be personally interested - against those who have given him birth.

Thus, *in a strictly rational perspective*, a birth can be seen as a kind of ethical-ontological moral transgression of the most fundamental character (and, therefore, abstention could be seen, if structural, as an ethically-rationally justifiable act). This could show *ad absurdum*, so to speak, life cannot be *rationally* sustained, saying yes to life must be an act of emotional nature, as proclaimed by Nietzsche: in its internal fight, ethics condemns life, and the strength of life disentangles from all moral impositions (See Epilogue II). It is significant that it has never been presented, along all the history of philosophy, a truly *rational* prove (which means, without the introduction of affective or religious elements) of “the value of human life”. On the contrary, philosophers have been in general much cautious or definitely pessimist about it. Kant is very careful as he affirms morality is totally independent from the recognition of an intrinsic value of life, and contemporary moral philosophers, like R. M. Hare, also try to decouple both, on Utilitarian grounds (See Part IV, 3). Schopenhauer suggested something stronger: maybe the opposite evidence (a proof *of the disvalue* of human life) could be available.

That is what I am trying to outlining here, applying – and that is crucial - the usual affirmative categories themselves, but in a radical way. I do that not by an "existentialist" morbid attitude, but for *logical* purposes or with the intention to bring

those categories to a kind of quality test, a sort of *Experimentum Crucis* which can prove the effectiveness and, ultimately, the truth or falsity of the usual statement about philosophy as a radical enterprise that seeks truth unconditionally, and not the comfort or the consolidation of some state of affairs (political, religious, etc). So my intentions here are not only ethical and ontological, but also, ultimately, *meta-philosophical*.

If the radical application of the current affirmative categories leads - as Nietzsche saw in his criticism against "European Nihilism" – to the ethical condemnation of life or, at least, to its fundamental questioning, does it mean that, in order to recapture something as a "value of human life", we must introduce – paradoxically – "negative" categories, in the relative sense, in our moral considerations? This is what is to be clarified later (Part III).

Note 4: About Children and works of art.

There is something in common between the intention of creating a work and that of procreating a child: a deep conviction that what cannot be worth living (or what stopped, at some point, being worth living) may be worth being *contemplated* from outside, or somehow "re-produced." Thus, to the Nietzschean question "How much truth, can a man support?" the answer could be: "Lived truth, very little, but contemplated truth, much". Both children and works are, for their creator, "contemplated being" in the sense of being we are not obliged to be. Contemplation produces the strong impression the being is finally livable...by others, when you have not the hard job of living it. The being of the child and the being of the work are beings I can observe from a safe place, far from danger (although artists succeed in maintaining this position better than parents). A child and a work are delayed negativity, the renewed transfer of an impossible search. In both cases, however, life becomes livable, but only when it is no longer my own.

The moralism we find, for example, at the censoring of literary or movie works often stresses the moral responsibility of authors for everything they write or shoot, considering a work can exert a pernicious influence on its audience. On this line, one might raise the same question of abstention that was put in the case of the procreation of people, i.e., the possibility of not creating any work at all. This literary and movie "abstention" (subject-matter of Fellini's masterpiece *Otto e Mezzo*) could be considered "formal", in the above mentioned sense, since a person would refrain from writing a book or shooting a film not for intra-worldly motives (not finding a publisher, not having budget for filming, etc..) but because it might affect someone in his or her own human condition. However, this moral scruple of affirmative society over literary and cinema creations is odd, before the strange ease, lightness and automatism which the world is daily and constantly filled with children as if this kind of creation carried less responsibility than the making of books and films.

It is curious that the possibility, much more indirect and remote, any reader of our books commits suicide after reading it is considered more tangible than the possibility children suffer the structural pain and moral disqualification in which we have inevitably placed them. What is created by writing a book is the mere possibility of influencing a conscience, whereas what is created when generating a child *is a conscience*. The influence on conscience procreation exerts is located in the level of the very *being* of conscience, as no writer creates the being of the conscience of his readers. At most, he influences already formed consciences, without excluding the possibility such influence is beneficial, while we have no chance to save our children from the structural pain of being. Furthermore, if ethics is committed not to the mere maintenance of life, but to the morally decent life, the fact a reader should refrain from having children or commits suicide as a result of reading a book (if such things ever happen!), this still means nothing from the

ethical point of view, neither could be proclaimed, from that fact, the "bad moral influence" of the book.

I point out here the phenomenon of the "aesthetic of procreation" as one of the more regular and daily mechanisms for concealment of the moral responsibility towards birth. It consists of the frequent attempt to turn children into "works of art", because children *are beautiful* - even ugly ones - as, in general, are beautiful the miniatures and living beings with graceful movements. No one can resist a little hand clutching a toy or the wobbly walk or the mumbling and charming talk of a child. However what is evaluated in the question of the value *of being* is certainly not the beauty of the product, but the morality of the production. Ethically, it should not be possible *to have* children as we *have* pictures and vases. The ethical question is not on the beauty but on the *having*. It is unethical to turn a moral problem into a matter of aesthetics.

3

Suicide

In modern philosophy, only David Hume – among the more important European philosophers - tried to argue for the possible morality of suicide. Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein have qualified suicide, respectively, as an act driven by inadequate ideas, heteronomy and use of one's own person as a mean, product of moral disturb, self-delusion of will and fundamental sin. In a particularly extemporaneous and, as we have seen, scarcely justifiable way, Heidegger's ontology, despite its negative character, is closed, *ab initio*, to any ontological grounding of an ethics of the stop-being-the-own-being. To prove this, it will be necessary to show again the problematic character of an alleged ethical-evaluative "neutrality" of Heidegger's existential analysis.

As we know, according to that analysis, while Dasein lives, he is in the state of "unresolved" and his totality remains only as "a possibility". *"In Dasein, while he is, there is, in each case, a lack of something he may and will be. That is what the 'end' itself is regularly inherent to. The 'end' of the being-in-the-world' is death".* (*Being and time*, § 45; my translation from German). Here, death is removed from its vulgar punctual conception, as an event in the world, and put in the domain of "proper possibility", and as the most peculiar of all, as the one capable of "consummate" Dasein, or of "resolving" his totality, not as a being that merely "dies", but as a being that "is-towards-death". This concept is so distant from the ordinary, that Heidegger considers being-towards-death connected to care (*Sorge*). Following the line of "totality" and of the "yet unresolved," Heidegger says: *"However, as soon as Dasein exists so absolutely nothing is missing in him, he has turned into a being that is no more. If something in his being is no longer missing, that means his annihilation. While Dasein is a being who is, he never achieves his*

'totality'. But once he gains it, his greed converts into pure and simple loss of the 'being-in-the-world' (§46).

The much usual intra-worldly experience of the “being replaced by” or of “having a representative” (fundamental property of symbols, according to modern semiotics) is completely strange to death, if seen ontological-existentially. Part of the “property” of death consists of its being *mine*, in each case, in a not transferable way; but that *being mine* of death shall be obtained through the abandonment of the ordinary conception of death, according to which only unreflectively and automatically we may still speak of the death *of* a person, when, in reality, people die, all of them - within the non-property – the same death. Nevertheless, speaking about totality suggests there is something missing to Dasein. What would it be? Dasein can only miss something that structurally “belongs to him” (§48) and that may not consist of ontic characteristics or “belongings”, because death can always take them away, and instead of “completing” or “resolving” Dasein, they actually despoil him. It might be something death does not interrupt but “consummates”, whatever the moment that punctual death may happen.

To Dasein, evidently, absolutely nothing “lacks”, in intra-worldly terms, for being able to die: his being is, from ever, complete for carrying out this possibility “at any moment”, even when he may perhaps not have finished what he was ontically doing (he dies “without finishing his book”, without “meeting his son”, without “having traveled to Paris”, etc). In fact, what “lacks” to Dasein, in worldly-ontological terms, is precisely and only *dying*. The “not yet” is already included in his peculiar being, not as some ordinary determination, but as a constitutive ingredient. Similarly, Dasein also is, while he is, in each case, his own “not yet” (*Idem*). It does not matter he has already done “all he set out to do”: he is never “complete”, even when it seems he is only “waiting for death”. On the other hand, for the one who still has many things to finish, death will not “interrupt” anything,

because the forgotten being cannot “resolve itself” in ontic tasks. “*The ending in death does not mean Dasein ‘has come to the end’, but it is a ‘being-towards-the-end’ of this being*” (Idem). “*Thus, death presents itself as the most peculiar, unique and unsurpassable possibility*” (§50).

However, in the Heidegger’s text on being-towards-death, at least as I read him, there is a fundamental ambiguity: in a first moment, the possibility of willing death is simply ignored, because this same possibility is excluded from the very description made about death, as we shall see. In a second moment, Heidegger explicitly excludes it in what I consider a clear rupture of the alleged valor-neutral character of the existential analysis. Indeed, when we analyze the first moment, it seems the possibility of wanting to stop being the own being should stay a priori excluded from the existential analysis, since in this same analysis it seems the “indetermination of when” is crucial: “*To the certainty of death is joint the indetermination of when... The final exegesis of the one’s everyday speech about death and the way it gets into Dasein leads to the characters of certainty and indetermination. The full ontological-existential concept of death may be now defined in the following terms: death as the end of Dasein is the most peculiar, unique, guaranteed and, as such, undetermined and unsurpassable possibility of Dasein*” (§52, my italics).

Analyzing the second moment, Heidegger develops a subtle argument, not exempted from some existential humor, to decouple “wanting death” from the “appropriation (make it my own) of death”, with which, in any case, suicide would not be a way of dying in the sense of the being-towards-death. “*...death is not, as anything possible, something that is ‘at hand’ or ‘just there’, but a possibility of the being of Dasein. Nevertheless...the taking care (Sorge) of the realization of that possibility will necessarily mean an effective stop existing. But with that, Dasein would get deprived from the very basis of a ‘being-towards-death’. If, however, with*

the 'being-towards-death', one does not mean a 'fulfillment' of that, it cannot mean this either: stopping together with the end, taken in its possibility." (§53).

The text continues: *"A similar behavior would be 'thinking about death'. Such behavior thinks about when and how will this possibility take place. This musing over death does not take from it, no doubt, its character of possibility: death keeps being considered as something that will come; but death is weakened by the will of disposing of it in calculation. As being possible, death should present the less possible of its possibility. In the 'being-towards-death', on the contrary, if one has to open, by comprehending, the characterized possibility as such, the possibility has to be understood without any weakness as possibility; it shall be developed as possibility, and in conducting our relation to it, it must be endured as possibility"* (Idem).

As a negative philosopher, Heidegger presents the notion of "totality" of Dasein trying to show such totality is only achieved within non-being, being incompatible with being. But in the second moment mentioned before, *Heidegger surprisingly returns to the affirmative vein of thinking through a new concealment, this time "existential", of non-being.* This concealment occurs at the moment Heidegger transforms death into "my possibility", and demands, notwithstanding, in the way of "property", that death be "maintained in indetermination", that is, in the not fulfillment of the possibility. Furthermore, he said the being-towards-death has to *"foment the indetermination of uncertainty"* (Idem). This marks, I think, the great moment of "affirmative nihilism" in *"Being and Time"*; because the being-towards-death seems to be a possibility that *should not* consummate in a concrete fact. If Dasein effectively committed suicide, he would stop being-towards-death to turn into a dead, thus breaking his property, shifting out from it. The "property" is affirmatively defined as a "staying in the possibility without fulfilling it". From that "neutral and purely descriptive" ontological-existential analysis, it seems to arise a

clear existential advising in the sense of the behavior to be taken, in favor of a patient and arduous “wait for death”.

But willing death, or to voluntarily stop being the own being, if critically considered, seems perfectly compatible with all Heidegger said about “property”, “proper being” and “being-towards-death”. Leaving aside other characteristics of the suicidal act that could transform it into a simple and ontic interruption due to intra-worldly motives (for example, the refusal from a woman or the loss of a fortune), willing death seems connected to a strongly critical attitude over the usual collapse of personal death into the anonymous One of “one dies”, vividly criticized in Heidegger’s existential analysis. Suicide seems *ab initio* a conduct of extremely strong appropriation of death, as a possibility authentically *mine*, in each case. It breaks into pieces the irritating everyday category of the “not yet” and the mediocre and inauthentic “escaping from” death as something strange, that does not define anything. It highlights the non-substitutable character of my death, because it seems there is no death with more chances of being authentically *mine* than the one I voluntarily determine: *one does not commit suicide as people habitually and regularly do*. Suicide is difficult to impersonalize. A philosophy that highlights property, authenticity and the responsibility for the own dying as defining existence, and the struggle against concealment in the median “One dies”, such philosophy should exhibit better reflexive considerations concerning the voluntary stop being the own being; it does not seem there can be any way to philosophically justify the inclusion of the “maintaining indetermination” of death within “property”.

The affirmative character of this Heideggerian piece of thinking shows the determination of Dasein concerning death, once rejected or put aside the ordinary, punctual, notion of death as a mere event among others, is presented only as determination in order to *keep living* and not also *to stop* living; without seeing there is no clear barrier between life and death, as the traditional affirmative philosophy imposes and the whole existential analysis had put in question. Within

the pure neutrality of the ontological analysis, nothing – except a religious prejudice perhaps – allows saying Dasein's voluntary death harms property and the being-towards-death instead of precisely accomplishing them properly. In his argument, Heidegger emphasizes the character of possibility of the being-towards-death, and using a logical artifice, expresses the mere tautology that fulfilling a possibility is, certainly, to end it as a possibility. However, this is not the point. The non-tautological matter resides in that *the pure possibility of dying and its effective realization shall both belong, in a really neutral ontological analysis, to the structure of the being-towards-death* and, consequently, to the own possible "turning proper", within the perspective of an ontological re-appropriation of being by Dasein.

More recent authors, as the mentioned Patzig and Kamlah, among others, have argued on the direction of a morality of stop-being-the-own-being, however remaining in total "world structure blindness" when they consider as exceptional what is, in reality, completely regular and internally connected to the very form of being. Both authors talk about the most plausible ethical justification for suicide as being the suffering for terminal physical and/or mental illness, in which the human possibilities of a person are irreversibly withdrawn. But they talk as if falling, dying, depriving and gradual loss of physical and mental potentialities, were "exceptional" facts, as if this was not an inextirpable part of every human life. As a matter of fact, each one of us will inevitably face that progressive "structural helplessness". It is important, at this point, to remember that in the case of painful diseases, the strictly *moral* justification of taking your own life in those circumstances does not reside in the fact disease causes suffering, since this is only a sensible-empirical motive which, if universalized, could lead to the moral justification of any attitude that escapes from pain. The moral justification resides in that, as seen before, in cases of intense pain, the moral capability might completely be disqualified: *to avoid this*, the person commits suicide.

That kind of suicide I will call *formal suicide*, in order to distinguish it from ontical-intra-worldly suicides (professional fail, love suffering and the other statistical suicides). Formal suicide is exactly co-related to the formal abstention mentioned in preceding sections, in the sense they are forms of non-being (not-making-be and stop-being) internally connected to the ontological-natural structure of the world. World structure gives something like *permanent motives* of formal self-suppression and formal abstention. It is only those kinds of suicide and abstention that are defined, in the present work, as morally justified.

The moral disqualification motivated by our own intense physical pain is a constant and regular possibility of being-in-the-world, which could manifests at absolutely any moment, regardless official predictions based on age, physical conditions, social circumstances, etc. Since birth, this possibility is already constituted and intra-worldly events just make this possibility concrete. In this peculiar sense, formal suicide needs no “time” to constitute itself as an ethical reason for stop-being-the-own-being, because, from ever, there is available the ethical reason of removing from moral disqualification which is constantly ready to attack in the mere letting oneself living. *There is no* need for special intra-worldly reasons; *intra-world provides only concrete motives to make the permanent reason effective*. In the level of structural information, there is and there always had been a reason, equally structural, for not continue to be. Certainly, sensibility mediations connected to intra-worldly motives can intervene in the punctual moment of the suicidal act, not as the basic radical reason, but as sensible effectiveness to the realization of the act.

The impression of “lack of motives” of the suicidal act – that gets people speaking of suicide as an “enigma” and of suicidal as someone who “lost his mind” – precisely arises from the fact the last reason of suicide is formal and as such belongs to human condition in which we are since always and not precisely “just now” or “some moment ago”. When own intense physical pain puts us at risk of

taking away all space necessary for being a moral person, for doing what I want, to love and hate as I please, etc., the one who has “lost his mind” and makes something “enigmatic” seems to be the person who does not do anything, even when possible, in order to get out from this situation with some dignity. Far from “losing his mind”, the suicidal recovers the mind and exercises it in a moral way. Sometimes, from the rational and affective point of view, in some situations it may be madness to stay living.

My rupture with the conceptual framework of philosophy of existence consists in this: in my view, human condition has no temporal nature, even though, as for all things, it elapses on time. There is no such thing as an “experience of human condition”, in the sense of a progress by stages. The miserable pseudo-philosophy of “enjoy while you can”, “while you are still young”, should be overcome by one structural reflection on life. The non-being is neither theologically hypothecated nor transformed into a metaphysical prize: it belongs to our condition, constitutes a “negative patrimony” which we can use at any moment without requirement (and if we observe the background of our condition maybe it is our unique available patrimony, the only one we can *really always* use). As any other right, I may enjoy it whenever I need, or I may never use it, if so I wish. I do not have to do anything to deserve it nor am I destroying any moral law when I exercise it. (If Philosophy is conceived as a reflection about finitude, we may say that, if Minerva’s owl only starts flying at sunset, it is departing late. Academic philosophy may, no doubt, depend on the course of time to begin its fly, but philosophical amazement concerning being can perfectly occur very early in the morning, even when the better categorical mechanisms to put the amazement in golden letters are maybe not available at this time).

As Hume points out well, it is curious that, in the condemnations of suicide, it is always said it is not morally worthy “to dispose of one’s own person”, as if continuing to live was not “disposing of one’s person” as well. This seems to be a

typical asymmetry of affirmative thinking. Although committing suicide is considered an anti-natural decision and “disposing of one’s own life”, continuing to live indefinitely is not considered a decision, but a “natural” tendency. *“If disposing of human life was something reserved to the All mighty, and if it was an infraction against the divine right that people disposed of their own lives, it would be as much criminal that a man acted to maintain his life as to destroy it.”* (Hume, “On suicide”, p. 127; my translation from Spanish).

Formal suicide could be seen in the same perspective of humanization of nature, as a kind of humanization of death, like the praiseworthy humanization of sexuality and food. In a similar way, humans do not pretend simply to reproduce or have animal pleasures in their sexual intercourses, but to provide sexual relations a human dimension, as they do not intend only to feed themselves but to transcend the pure assimilative functions in order to transform feeding into something culturally meaningful, in the same way humans would refuse simple animal dying, a “natural death”, vindicating their right to introduce cultural meanings into their final departures. But this seems not viable without any kind of “intervention” from our part, without some “interest in the own death”, instead of waiting for it in calm.

In the sense of the humanization of nature, death is, perhaps, what we should “wait for” the less, precisely for its natural and unmovable certainty; because there will be absolutely nothing that can modify or change it, so the way towards its cultural elaboration is from ever open. In any other case, we could still “wait for news”, forcing us, until we had heard these news, to postpone our purposes of enculturation. The attempt of formal suicidal is to dispose of the natural process of decaying, giving to it a strong human meaning that keeps a profound connection with what had been lived, and that is not a simple “interruption” of possibilities. It acquires, therefore, the meaning of a free administration of indetermination, taking into account considerations brutally ignored by “natural death”. Nature decidedly has no good manners. If “continuing

to live” (or “giving life to somebody”) is visualized as a “natural impulse”, from an ethical point of view we should answer to this argument as it has always been: we should try to resist natural impulses on benefit of our humanity.

But what was presented above as being “suicide” was conceived in much too narrow sense. As a fact, what has habitually been called like this is only a way of understanding the *stop-being-the-own-being*, and this is the structure to be understood, and not only “suicide” in the ordinary sense. This enlargement of the concept will sensibly help understand the morality of the stop-being-the-own-being in general, and particularly the reasons for a morality of the stop-being of a being not effectively contracted by extreme concrete threats of moral disqualification, as disease or physical torture. In his *Lessons*, Kant has explicitly condemned suicide from the moral point of view, through arguments I will analyze elsewhere. Notwithstanding, he has made an important remark: “...*the one who faces death in order to protect his beloveds is not a suicidal, but someone magnificent and noble, since the highest esteem of life is based on being worthy to keep it...*” (Kant, *Lessons of ethics*, p. 190; my translation from Spanish). And: “*Living is not necessary, but it is necessary to live with dignity; he who cannot live with dignity is not worth-living*” (p. 192). And also: “... *it is not suicide risking the own life before the enemy and even sacrificing it in order to observe the duties to oneself... the intention of self-destruction is what constitutes suicide... there is a remarkable difference between lack of prevision or imprudence – in where it still remains a desire to live – and the purpose of killing oneself... the suicidal produces a kind of repulse, while the one who dies because of fate engender compassion*” (pp. 190-191).

But the difference between “*willing not to be*” and “*not-willing-to be*” is subtle. For example, the ascetic who fasts – who is, according to Schopenhauer, the ethical man *par excellence* – might suddenly die of starvation. Is he a suicidal? We would say not because he actually “did not want to die”. *But how do we know it?*

Does not the one who fasts on an extreme demanding manner for his own body flirts with death in such an inevitably dangerous way as the suicidal that plays with a loaded gun? How can we be sure that, within the ascetic's fasting, is not concealed a secret "willing to die this way", "in that manner", or at least in virtue of "no matter if dying this way, if it happens"? And in the case of the heroes and martyrs that put themselves "under the wolf's fangs", like Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Giordano Bruno or even Christ, how can we know they are not suicides in the sense "they do not have the intention of dying"? Is the distinction raised by Kant legitimate, or is it only about a subtle difference of degree? Kant pretends the distinction is clear to a point that, in his ethical theory, the suicidal is morally condemned but the hero and the martyr are praised. (This problem would not perhaps emerge out of an ethical theory different from the Kantian, which morally condemned the voluntary interruption of one's own life, both the suicide's and the hero's).

By dying as a hero, martyr or ascetic, a person prematurely avoids, as obvious, the usual morally disqualifying risks brought by aging and terminal diseases. But that is not the *direct* ethical motivation of this kind of dying. The motivation, in those cases, seems to consist of the following: the hero and the martyr, much possibly, die by the hands of someone, of another man, whereas the ascetic fades in solitude. However, in any case, *the death of the other is indefinitely postponed*, a death from ever programmed within the very "expansive" instauration of my own being. By *being*, I constitute myself necessarily and inevitably as a danger for the other, in an aggressive and destructive mechanism, and our relation is constituted as a conflict in which one of both must die; *so, in the moral perspective and in the situations depicted, I should die*. If I die, it means the life of the other has been spared, what is in agreement to the direction of the fundamental ethical articulation. My death, and not the other's death, inevitably alludes to a space that has been left vacant, to an expansion of my own interests that *has not occurred*. If I die, ending in asceticism or by a shot, I certainly have not changed the ontology of the world, nor have I offended the ethics based on it

consisting of the unlimited respect for the inviolability of the other's being. The negative person tries to practice in his life a first degree morality, according to which the life of the other is *absolutely inviolable*, regardless of any other consideration (See Part III).

The philosopher of conflict is certainly Hegel. What bothers the most in Hegel, Nietzsche, Jünger and others is that they make an apology – and give a “profound” meaning – to what, in the best of hypothesis, is an unavoidable natural fact: war. They transform this fact into a kind of “realization” and “process of self-consciousness”. Hegel considers the very being of man cannot be constituted but through war, in which is searched the recognition of the own being by another. It seems extremely beautiful, from the moral point of view, the idea that the very being of a human being can only be recognized in *risk*, in putting the own life *in danger*. But from this, it does not follow that this risk must end in the death of the others or in their slavery. In the inevitable conflict with the other, the negative man should, at the same time, maintain first degree morality and make himself be recognized by the other in the risk of his own life. Hegel starts from the idea it is only possible to obtain an ethical victory through death or slavery of the other and this belief is in the antipodes of a negative ethics; because, in spite of being Hegel a negative philosopher, his ethics is irremediably affirmative: it preserves as sacred the typical aggressiveness of affirmativeness. What is important in a negative ethics is, precisely, to obtain an ethical victory *that my own death* is able to perform. The idea is that the one who dies can ethically win the fight (even if he or she loses it politically or strategically). How can we conceive this kind of victory?

In reality, Hegel himself gives the proper indication, but he sees the question only from one of its angles. When Hegel says that, if an adversary kills the other he no longer can be recognized by him and, therefore, it is important to keep him alive so he recognizes me, he is clearly outlining what I call *the defeat of the survivor*, *the moral defeat of the one who kills*. It is not the case of falling into the rhetorical

sentimentalism of the “it is a shame to win a war”, but only of taking notice of something that seems to be literally true: that, in the level of effective human experiences, when he kills, as much as when he enslaves, the survivor – the so called “winner” of the fight – is disappointed (the typical disappointment of being) for not obtaining really what he wanted to obtain: in the first case, because a dead person cannot recognize anyone, and in the second, because a slave does not recognize spontaneously, but by obligation, considering that, as Hegel said, what would truly satisfy the “winner” would be being recognized by another master, not by a slave; being recognized by a slave contradicts the very definition of a master. If the one who has killed or enslaved has not obtained what he wanted, it is possible to think the other, the adversary, has won the fight in spite of having died, or perhaps because of it; certainly not the slave, but indeed the dead.

*If the dead cannot recognize the one who has won, the winner stays in life as an eternal recognition of the one he has killed. What the adversary wanted was to enslave the other, in order to, in Hegel’s terminology, determinately and dialectically deny him, having-the-other-over-there to deny him through enslavement. However the other has thrown on his backs a heavy burden, because he has withdrawn his body from slavery offering it directly to death. By killing the adversary, the winner is situated in the impossibility to deny him as he intended to do, dialectically and determinately, and he is forced to deny him as he did not want to do, that is, absolutely and indeterminately. Once the dialectical contradiction, the opposition, is the very movement of life, the dead leaves his “winner” without life and, therefore, “kills” him symbolically, which is the only way a negative human being (someone committed, until the end, to perform a first degree morality) can “kill” another. *This is the only form of ethical victory, in the primary sense, because it has been accomplished against the other without killing him, but on the contrary, leaving him alive and letting himself get killed by him, stuffed with his own affirmativeness (and this is the ethical victory of Christ, Gandhi, Bruno and so many others, a victory that can only be seen as absolute stupidity by the current affirmative and strategic prevailing ethics).**

Hegel has said the slave is the moment of negativity, the very place of death. However, he is not so in the absolute sense, since he stays alive. The one who dies in combat, or the martyr, manages *to be* what the slave only “represents”. The dead does not let himself be preserved, he makes himself be totally eliminated and, therefore, he does not leave the other any dialectical space, no possibility for the other to develop himself under his expenses, nothing the other can do to him except recognizing him infinitely. That shall be the victory of negativity, carried out by a kind of human being that has introduced negativity into his life until the ultimate consequences. The one who puts himself by the side of the negative can never lose, because it is the unique kind of life which wins with the own death, with what would be a defeat for any other form of life.

Thus, even admitting, with Hegel, each one of us resolves ourselves in conflict, in a struggle until death, there is no reason to accept this is a struggle until death where each one of us must *win*, in the sense of death or enslavement of the other. *Perhaps it is a struggle until death each one of us has the moral duty to lose.* Instead of each conscience seeking the death of the other, every conscience seeks, in reality, its own death through the conflict against the other. My own death is, thus, my only weapon, and that weapon consists in condemning the other to life after having killed me, certainly not speculating with occasional ontic “regrets” or “guilt”, but ontologically communicating with him through this “lack” which constitutes human being as such, the very lack that I, with my attitude, have succeeded *to be*. My ethical triumph consists of letting the other survive the lack, die the lack in life, whereas I constitute myself as the lack and in the lack I live forever. And all that, without having touched a single hair of the enemy, respecting the inviolability of his life and simply attacking him with the very affirmativeness in which he, mistakenly, has dared to believe, refusing morality. Through that act, I represent with my own body the very subversion of the negative.

Different from the slave, I turn into the non-being of being; I am the absolute master of all men (death). One could say to the adversary: *if you submit me, I am your slave, but if you kill me, you will be my slave forever*. By dying, I totally escape from the illusion of making myself be recognized by the other. Following the common language use, we can, thus, consider the hero, the martyr or the ascetic (following the current use of words), as being “suicides” in the formal sense, not only because they radically run away, through their actions, from a situation of moral disqualification, but also because they die according to the structure of the world, admitting from the root their own finitude. That outlines a kind of ontological ethics of the stop-being-the-own-being against the usual “policy of beings”, basically homicidal and self-preservative.

It is necessary to see the convenience of extending the ontological form we call “stop-being-the-own-being” beyond the stingy and narrow scope of the ordinary notion of “suicide”. In that sense, it has been interesting to include in that ontological form the “risky” lives, and not only deaths of those who put a gun on their heads. But going further in that experiment of enlarging the notion of suicide, we can visualize signs that indicate the very structural self-destructiveness of humans, and also of the world and perhaps of the entire universe. Actually, the kind of life we “have chosen” to live, the types of food we prefer, the style of our relationships with others, of our sexuality, of the administration of our mind and body, of the particular susceptibility of our nerve system, of the resonance we accept the events of the world to have on our decisions, and so on, prepare, throughout our lives, a determinate and very well chosen way of dying. We keep choosing, as any suicidal does, our own death, and we keep killing ourselves in the ways of our actions and passions in the world, incubating in our bodies precisely the kind of diseases our system of life accepted to include. If we see human lives inside the framework of natural ontology, we may visualize them as natures destructing themselves in a determinate way, self-preserving always within a fundamental self-destructing.

And what is thought about human beings may be thought about the whole world. It could be the case the world – after the fall of theological points of reference – was not a “harmony” or a “system” at all, but a “suicidal” mechanism that must necessarily suppress itself. This is already outlined, for example, in the serious ecological issues the planet currently faces. We have come to them through an exploitation of nature that was considered (rightly or wrongly) as necessary for survival, even when different policies of beings talk about the “irrationality” of this or that exploitation. Perhaps cutting trees might lead to the death of the planet and not cutting them too. We may try policies of “rationalization” in nature exploitation, but how long? No rational idea can assure the planet *has* to achieve a balance that supports life on its surface. This myth of “balance” is the same that guides the feeding practices of vegetarians, who think they can avoid diseases through a diet; but there is no diet that can change the structure of their being-in-the-world: the only thing vegetarians may reach is to pick the diseases transmitted by vegetables, avoiding the diseases of meat: to die a green death. Each diet chooses the color of its death. Those considerations might make us think the structure of the stop-being-the-own-being is much wider and more complex than what its identification with what ordinarily is called “suicide” may suggest. Maybe, structurally seen, there is nothing that can be called “natural death” in the usual sense.

Note 5. *Esquisse for a theory of radical non-communication*

In a naturalized ontology, *there are others* (or: *there is the other*).

They “are” not by simply “being there”, but as a part of world structure. They have to do with the original limitation of being and with the open possibility of moral disqualification by the simple fact of being; because the others are a fundamental

part of the limitation and narrowness of my birth, to the extent I am already born without place and in the places I want to live “there are already others”. In big cities as much as in open country, the places I want to inhabit are already taken, there are no more vacancies. The others are the ones before whom I get disqualified by *being*. Since ethics is fundamentally a matter of otherness, what should I do with the other people’s life? is the main ethical question. By assuming a first degree morality, I accept that, facing the other, I in principle can (and maybe ought to) disappear, desisting of the space we both incompatibly intend to occupy. My departure from the world is, therefore, marked by the presence of the other. In any moral, affirmative or negative, the ethical approach to the world will inevitably have to do with the structure of otherness.

In some texts from the twenties, collected in the second of the three volumes of *Husserliana*, dedicated to the “Philosophy of Inter-subjectivity”, Husserl has offered a “solution” to the problem of otherness in his transcendental phenomenology, and he has approached the subject again in his famous “Fifth Cartesian Meditation”, as well as in *Formal and transcendental logic*. The basis of the solution is “egological” (from ego) or solipsistic; he talks on “transcendental monadic science”, recovering Leibniz’s doctrine according to which the world is constituted by incommunicable monads (“without windows”), that only can know each other through divine intervention, the famous “pre-established harmony”. Husserl tries to construct Leibniz’s idealism without metaphysics, as a pure logical-epistemological idealism. It means monads will continue without windows and now also without divine intervention. How will they communicate?

The theory of transcendental constitution shows the way: the ego constitutes the other as another ego through a technical device Husserl calls “double reduction”. I can never *be* the other, or have his life experiences, his past, anticipations, desires or projects; the other is definitely opaque to me; and notwithstanding I can constitute him within his absolute transcendence in my own

conscience, due to its intentional character. The “egoical” constitution of the other would be impossible if it was not mediated by the construction of a “common world” to me and to the other, to which we always refer together and that co-constitute an “inter-subjective objectivity”. The transcendental inter-subjectivity itself pre-establishes harmony, even when the monads continue radically without windows, and transcendent to one another.

But the others are “original”, not in the sense of “originally given” (the only originally given, according to Husserl, is my own conscience), but in the sense every conscience cannot refrain from constituting the consciences of the others. Husserl knows that, sustaining this conception, he takes risks of provoking the rage of philosophers – in my terms, affirmative philosophers, although Husserl is one of them – because of this “solipsistic” explanation; as it is already known, according to current affirmative philosophy, solipsism – together with relativism, skepticism, etc. – are the villains of philosophical reflection, in the sense of positions that *must* be eliminated on behalf of some kind of logical-moral imperative; they are forbidden to constitute genuine and fruitful philosophical positions. But Husserl does not succeed in understanding any other way of encounter with the other except by this ego constitution, as a copy of myself within my own conscience.

If the monad does not have windows but it communicates, what does it have? The answer is somehow surprising: the monads have *mirrors* on which the other is reflected. The mirror metaphor transmits the characteristic of opacity as inevitable medium for communication between monads. Different from the idea of windows, transmitting transparency, opening and “passing through”, the mirrors do not offer to the other the possibility of “entering into”, but of “reiterating” indefinitely: communication is not an “access”, but a repetition. (Precisely, the spell of Lewis Carroll’s descriptions reside in the wonderful fact protagonists are able to “pass through the mirror”, modifying the opacity structure, something impossible for real humans). Nevertheless, the mirror metaphor has its limits. The mirror of the

monads is not like our empirical mirrors, on which I reflect, in a certain way, as I want to (if I move an arm, so does my reflex, if I make a gesture my image reproduces it), but it is a transcendental mirror *on which I reflect as the other establishes and stipulates*; I reflect myself in the other's terms, and the same obviously happens to the other when reflected on my own mirror. "My" image is not mine, but only to the strict extent it attends to the conditions in which the other can reflect me, keeping "my" image on "his" or "her" mirror. Overusing Frege's terminology, we could say the other is never only reference (*Bedeutung*) but also meaning (*Sinn*), "way of presentation": the transcendental inter-subjectivity is an opaque context in which the other may not be freely replaced, and where I may never visualize the others in themselves, "regardless their presentations".

Husserl considers mathematical logics as the domain in which inter-subjectivity typically occurs, to the extent a common world is constituted there and may be shared by all, allowing communication by performing the same operations. Does not logical-mathematical communication prove, after all, monads have windows and transparency exists? Husserl thinks this is not true. In the case of logic, consciences have managed to constitute a common world of manipulative operations and objects, through a so clear and systematic language that, far from situating them in a field of communication, consciences drastically lose all need to communicate. What logics grants is to dispense, by higher abstraction, all elements that, in the common contexts of speech, make communication opaque: *logic does not resolve communication, but makes it dismissible*, because in mathematics the other is absolutely "anyone", he is not qualified in any way. And the question of communication arises precisely when the other is not *anyone*, but *this one*. In the logic-mathematical level, the opaque mirrors get lined up in a perfect way, producing a kind of formal compatibility between opacities, something very different from transparency. To the extent we distance ourselves from the privileged pole of logic and walk towards the psychological-social domains, the mirrors lose their alignment, we are not capable of defining inter-subjective operations, and the others disappear in the field of "specular" conjecture.

It is important to see Husserl's transcendental "solution" of inter-subjectivity employs instruments connected to *action*, provided by the theory of intentional constitution. Also in analytic contemporary philosophy, especially since Wittgenstein's intermediary period, the solution of the issue was to appeal to "pragmatic" elements as language games, contexts of use, application of rules, etc. But Husserl's conception of conscience is an open one. This might surprise those who consider the "solipsistic" and "egoical" solution as connected to closed structures, but the fundamental piece of Husserlian solution of inter-subjectivity is "intentionality", which can be seen as a dynamic and "pragmatic" notion. In transcendental phenomenology, the other does not need to be "reached" by making a great effort, as in a kind of "trip", but intentional conscience "puts" the otherness of the other by constituting a community. In the pragmatic vein, community is constituted through the communal usage of rules of a language that cannot avoid being "public". We can understand, therefore, both solutions as affected by the "*pragmatic turn*". The important step has been taken not from the "philosophies of conscience" to the "philosophies of language", but from substantialistic and static philosophies of conscience or language to interactive and dynamic conceptions of both.

Thus, both analytical and phenomenological philosophies easily "solve" the basic problem of *inter-subjectivity*, and they do it easily because this *is not* the real problem at all. What is truly serious is *communication* and *inter-subjectivity is only a minimal condition for communication*, what we may consider as its last transcendental condition. (In that sense, I believe Apel and others systematically confuse these two levels when they speak, for example, about a priori *communication* and the unlimited *communication* community. It seems to me what they call by those terms could at most be defended as the most basic and last a priori of *inter-subjectivity* (or, as I say, of *interaction*), providing only the necessary but not sufficient conditions *for communication*). I do not accept here the well

known objection of “all depends on what you understand by communication”, because I think this notion has some basic and not dispensable characteristics.

Inter-subjectivity is, purely and simply, a two-way actions field, going from some subjects to others and vice-versa. It is mere interaction, or reciprocal action. It is the interaction, for example, occurring in a boxing fight, a tennis match, or the relation between the person buying tickets for the theater and the girl who sells them, or the work of two or more workers who set floor tiles one over another in a building construction. In all these interactions, there is the recognition of a “common world” of reference, shared by participants: it is the domain of the rules of a game or sport, or of small commercial transactions or of the work relations, including the language spoken, gestures, etc, which are, within certain limits, “shared”. All this is very clear and out of question, but it is an extreme fragile strategy, intending to define with that, in a necessary and sufficient manner, *communication*. The reference to a “common world” or to a “public language”, as observed before in the case of logic, far from granting communication, points to a kind of socialization that makes the effort for communication dispensable.

Communication is not that, and it is not that in a completely minimal sense, not in some sophisticated conception; because the constitution of communication is presented, in the first place, when someone, called A, possesses some informational content, articulated in different manners, more or less specific, which she wants to transmit to B, and – in the second place – such content is stressed by A in some way, or reinforced by some specific “strength”. In order to have communication, it is necessary that B receives *this* informational content with the same meaning that A has given to it, and with the same stressing or “strength”. B has to understand what A means, and she must capture also the particular stressing A had put on it; or, saying it in another way, she has to figure what A is presenting, and what is the importance or relevance for A to put it this way.

This is not a heavy or very sophisticated demand. For example, in a discussion among logicians who talk about Gödel's theorem, one of them, A, might say the sentence: "Gödel's results have a vast influence on philosophical issues". In order to accept the others have captured what A wanted to say and, in that sense, they have *communicated* with him, it seems there must be at least the following minimal conditions: (1) The others have to understand the sentence in the same meaning B understands it, for example, they have to understand which is the notion of philosophy A is employing, and they have to understand when, according to A, something can have a "vast influence" on something, and they have to be using the same version of Gödel's theorem, and so on; (2) The others have to understand the emphasis in the sentence the same way as A: for example, they have to understand this influence is something completely crucial, to the extent A intended to establish close relations among mathematical and philosophical results with all its implications; and the others have to understand A is not joking or being ironic, etc. It is useless if the others say: "Yes, yes, we understand", but they shrug with indifference or laugh.

These two conditions express, the first one, the connection *to the understanding*, and the second, the connection *to will*. I do not believe this last condition is excessive, as suggested by some. If A comes shouting: "There is a bomb in the building!" and B replies phlegmatically: "Yes, it has been pretty frequent lately" (assuming, for example, this occurs in some region attacked by terrorism), it would not be strange affirming there was no *communication* between A and B (although there certainly was interaction), or B has not understood what A said, to the extent the other has only kept the meaning of the content without its specific emphasis. *There is an intellectualist tendency to define communication exclusively in terms of understanding*, but even in every day and not sophisticated situations, *we also include a condition of will*: it is not only about understanding the meaning of the information given, but also of capturing the will emphasis on it, the role our interlocutor wants the information to play in the situation.

To demand only interaction or inter-subjectivity (the “sharing of a common world”, in Husserl’s terminology, or the mastery of a “public” language, in Wittgenstein’s terms) is not enough. If depending only on this concept, the notion of communication will be systematically hypo-determined: it is not enough that all the logicians of the example spend all afternoon talking about Gödel’s theorem to convince us they have actually communicated. From the “common world shared by all”, each one of the talkers could be giving emphasis to different aspects, or using different parts of the same “public language”. Among the logicians, one could understand “philosophy” as “a device of clarifying language” and other as “a foundation for sciences”, so they will not be communicating to each other when talking about the “philosophical influence of Gödel’s theorem”, *even when they are certainly “interacting” (and cannot stop interacting)*. Even mistake and nonsense require something so minimum like a “common world inter-subjectively shared”, or a “public language subjected to rules”, as masterly shown in the plays of Ionesco, Pinter, Tchekov and Beckett. I do not believe these requirements are excessive, and the mere inter-subjective demand is clearly not enough.

(There is usually, in current intercoursés, a “recreation” of the information and of the stressing of what the other has said, by the part of the one who listens. That could be interpreted as a positive feature because this is what differentiates machines from human beings, precisely the possibility of not receiving information inertly, but of processing it in an intelligent way. However – as seen in the examples of Gödel’s theorems and of the bomb – this wonderful “recreation” ability may lead to dramatic mistakes and misunderstandings).

My theory of radical non-communication presupposes the question of inter-subjectivity as already resolved (analytically or phenomenologically or in any other way), and it is an important part of my radical analysis of structural human condition, in the sense *the communication to which I refer is not intra-worldly, but connected to the very otherness of the other, independent from the content of concrete situations of intended communication* (Certainly, the issue of structural-

worldly non-communication constitutes an important element for the evaluation of formal self-suppressions and abstentions from the ethical point of view; for example, in the sense part of the “structural information” we have about possible people consists of knowing that, when someone is born, he or she will radically non-communicate with the otherness of the other). The thesis affirms that, *for structural reasons*, our relation with the other (whoever and wherever he or she is) faces systematic problems to accomplish the minimum conditions for communication and that, in reality, the world only works, to all effects, under the guarantee of mere minimal “interaction”. So, there is not non-problematic communication in the radical level, but at most, a kind of “policy of intra-worldly interaction”.

I will call here “semantic” the pure requirements of understanding, in the level of sending and capturing signs referred to codes, interpretation of signs, the domain of message transmission techniques, and so on. I mean with this that *I do not have any kind of communicational skepticism in that level*. Moreover, I would be in agreement with a full optimism in the level of message understanding, given the sophisticated devices of construction of sign systems we may use today. If a person “does not understand” a message or some aspect of a code, or has suffered the effects of a distortion or a defect in reception, or knows another version of the code and not the one that is being used, etc, it is just a matter of time, money and diligence to solve these kinds of problems. *The level in which communication begins basically to be problematic is the level of will, not the level of understanding*. Therefore it seems so myopic a theory of communication conceived as “directed to understanding”, to the extent understanding is defined in a restricted sense without including volitional and pragmatic aspects. The level of will I also call “wanting to understand” and a theory of communication that deserves some interest should be a theory directed to the “wanting to understand” and not merely to the understanding.

Those two levels are usually distinguished - it is not absolutely a sophisticated or academic distinction - as when someone says: "It is pointless to continue discussing, she simply does not want to understand", and it is completely current talking about "bad will", which might perfectly go together with "good understanding" (moreover, one of the requirements to detect "bad will" can be being perfectly aware of good semantic understanding). Everyone knows that, when there is an obstacle of will, even if the level of sign understanding works perfectly well, communication stops. "... *even the rules of logic, which are considered as a paradigmatic example of scientific knowledge that 'imposes itself', appeal to the open spirit of an interlocutor that must be 'neither unwilling nor imbecile'. Who voluntarily and independently does not understand two plus two equals four cannot be compelled to understand the truth of this proposition.*" (Kamlah, *Philosophic anthropology and ethics*, p. 100).

Now I am going to surprise my reader by manifesting I am not skeptic concerning communication in this volitional level either; because, even if someone demonstrates notorious "bad will" towards the understanding of some information, such obstacles *may* even be taken out from the way, even when difficult. We can talk to the person, convince her to put out her negative and misleading attitude, make her see she will have more advantages if she decides to understand what she declares not to understand, and so on. But we stop trying to develop with her *strategies of understanding*; we try to make her see we found out her game, we know she really understands us perfectly well, she cannot fool us anymore, and we will not keep wasting our time explaining once more the content of the same information. Now we are attacking her *in the very level of will*, and we try to disturb her laziness or to touch the willing basis of her intransigence. We make her see she will not be in danger by accepting what she refuses to accept, she does not need to continue concealing a wanting under a cognitive disguise. We get her in the moral level, not anymore in the epistemic one.

I do not fear to appear too much optimistic by accepting we might succeed also in this kind of attempt, to the extent the intra-world provides elements to overcome these kinds of *impasses*; because this moral level is still, to a certain point, rational and free. The person, at least deep inside, *knows* she is acting “unfaithfully” and she knows what we are talking about when we try to make up her mind so she changes her attitudes concerning the matter in question; because her “unfaithfulness” is connected to elements the person has been constituting in the intra-world through her actions, that is, in connection to the particular kind of person she has become along the time. Anything constituted in the intra-world, even “unfaithfulness”, can be, the way I see it, modified or improved.

The most serious problem is not *there*, but in a third level I suggest to call “to be able to want to understand”, a will of deeper level (“meta-volitional”) than the mere “wanting to understand”. *A radical theory of communication should be one that studies actions directed to the “being able to want to understand” and not only to understanding or even to wanting to understand.* And this is precisely the theory that shall fail. It is in this level radical non-communication arises. Not all we would like to understand is within our reach; but also not all we would like to want to understand is within our grasp. We just have to remember the ontological basis of the analysis developed in this chapter and in the previous one. In effect, by simply *being*, two fundamental things have occurred: (a) we have self-limited ourselves in comparison to the level of pure possibilities, (b) we have radically exposed ourselves to the risk of moral disqualification by constructing ourselves as necessarily in conflict against-the-others in favor to ourselves. But also a third thing occurs: (c) by simply being, we are, inevitably, *someone*. To be is always to be someone, to be a non-other, the negation of the other *in our own being*, not by being this or that, but simply because the others are someone who is not me and who I could never be (certainly, this *is* a triviality, one of the important trivialities that characterize human condition (see further on Part III, [a]).

However, “being someone” consists, among other things, of having a certain *sui generis* willing structure, not only in the sense of wanting certain things instead of others, but also in the more radical sense of *not being allowed to want certain things and being allowed to want some other things without taking the risk to deny yourself as this particular being-someone who you are*; not by someone’s “fault”, mine or someone else’s, nor by “the circumstances”, nor for what I have done to myself throughout my life, etc, but due to the very constitution of my being-someone, of my-being-this-one-and-not-another. We find here a kind of “unfaithfulness which does not know itself” for which there cannot be any way out, because it is an “unfaithfulness” that does not even deserve this name, a not chosen instituting and constitutive feature of human condition, so the person is not even conscious about it as a modifiable property. This is simply *himself* or *herself*, without further considerations. There is no space where the person could say: “Well, they are right, I will change my attitude”, since this change, even if possible, would *ipso facto* make the very being of that person come to an end (The ordinary statement: “We all have our shortcomings”, is just an intra-worldly statement, since no one is able to visualize her own “deficiency of being”, her own “bad making”). Those trivialities – as they should absolutely be from the empirical-representational view – are parts of any naturalized ontology that could have ever been proposed, like the present one, in order to understand the logical structure of the world. The logic of the world is composed of these pure not analytical trivialities.

In fact, the structural-worldly non-communication could be seen as a previous state in a *continuum* that ends in conflict against the others, because the “enemy”, who we try to eliminate in affirmative societies, is, from this perspective, the same with who I keep the greatest *radical non-communication*. The “enemy” is a kind of exacerbated “someone-else” and war is the very apotheosis of radical non-communication in the third level. But while strong conflict can be postponed, or one might have the luck to never get involved in it, the radical non-communication is daily and we cannot get out of our house without suffering it regularly and immediately. The enemy in a war is only the strangeness of the other or the

alienation of the “fellow humans” taken to its more extreme manifestation. Therefore, there is no war monstrosity that presents material difference relatively to the usual and daily communication misunderstandings, but only differences of degree, intensity and consequences.

Within usual radical non-communication, I can make agreements with the others without losing too much or without suffering expressive damage; I can tolerate the insolence of the other consisting of not-being-me, because, among other motives, the other two levels we have examined – the understanding and the will to understand – work well or can be improved in any moment of the process, and also because the founding inter-subjectivity was, some way, as we saw before, phenomenologically or analytically solved. I simply cannot avoid getting in conflict against the others because I cannot stop radically non-communicating with them, and this occurs in our own beings and not by occasional decisions. We could never find a “responsible” for not-being-allowed-to-want-to understand, as much as it is indeed possible to find a responsible for not-wanting-to-understand and for not-understanding. It is useless to put the other or yourself in the place of “guilty” of radical non-communication.

In addition to not being able to understand everything we want to, neither can we want all we are willing to want, and that is the radical point. While the impossibility to understand all we want is intra-worldly, *the impossibility to want all we want to want is worldly*. Here the demand is not something as much as “being like the other”, by a kind of identification (that would result in a mythical “communion”, more than communication). Actually, radical non-communication is the impossibility of communicating with my own self as the impossibility of being the other’s being as well, and both things are correlated. In his “egological” solution of inter-subjectivity, Husserl supposes we have a direct and immediate access to our own self, whereas our access to others is always mediated and problematic. But this is an intellectualist prejudice that sees the whole problem only in terms of understanding. In an exceeding optimism, we can maybe concede the self has an

immediate access to everything it knows, but it has undoubtedly no immediate access to all it wants, since what someone wants is not reducible to an objective and a given set of contents (this is a naiveté in Schopenhauer's philosophy of will, the idea that will is something "immediate" to itself). However, to the strict extent I cannot control what I can or not want to understand, I am as separated from my self as from the others'. That is why the egological basis can only solve inter-subjectivity, but not communication. In fact, in a non-intellectualist approach, there is absolutely nobody like me in the entire world... not even "myself". It is not the impossible demand of being-the-other, but the equally impossible demand of "being myself" (the so called "authenticity").

Heidegger and others have insisted in an ontological-existential structure they call *Mit-sein*, to be-with. If the thesis of radical non-communication is true, in the light of it, humans can be seen as *Ohne-sein*, as *beings-without*, each one of us structurally *without-the-others*, even when we can never be *empirically* without them, not even when we are alone in a desert island. *We are structurally alone, because, together with being, we have also received a determinate someone – "our" being – whom, whether we want it or not, we are obliged to be deeply interested on and involved in.* In the direction of being "involved-in-ourselves", the others are fundamentally "not interesting", they decidedly do not interest *me*; they cannot interest me beyond empirical assistances and compromises. *My lack of interest on the others is ontological.* I listen to them absentmindedly, I postpone them, I misuse them, I disguise a yawn when they talk, and the same occurs to them concerning me, I am not interesting for them, they are compelled to feign some interest with their better talents.

In limit situations, such as wars, shipwrecks, etc, there is a strong tendency towards communication as reaching its greatest succeeding pole, because these are situations in which humans try (successfully or not) to make efforts to understand the content and the emphasis of the other's messages due to the dramatic urgency of decisions, aiming salvation; in these situations, the concealing

mechanisms are drastically suspended and the relationships among humans are set in the level where, rationally, it should always and in every moment be situated, in the very level of the constitutive non-being, in the profound interest in the other's speeches. In everyday life, we only get from the others an "absentminded attention" and some yawning. *Inter-subjectivity allows someone to constantly withdraw, from the other's speeches, only some parts or aspects for benefiting his own "being involved in", as in the mode of convenient "suggestions"*. Thus, the others simply wait until I am finished my talking, so they start their own one, in which I might recognize some words, aspects or features of my own speech, but situated in a new framework where I cannot recognize them any more, because they belong to the "being involved in" of the others.

I believe it is an unacceptable abuse to call this process "communication", because when we do so, as concluded for example by the authors of *Pragmatics of human communication*, "it is impossible not to communicate", since it is impossible not interacting some way, not suggesting *something* to the others when we talk. *"...behavior has no opposite. In other words, there is no non-behavior... if we accept all behavior, in an interacting situation, has the value of a message, which means, it is communication, it turns out that for the most individuals make efforts, it is impossible for them not communicate"* (Watzlawick, Jackson and Beavin, *Pragmatic of human communication*, cap. 2.2.2, p. 44-45; my translation from Portuguese). I believe, in general, any notion X that allows everything to be X, loses its explicative power, because, in the case of communication, it does not let chances to differentiate two small dialogues as these: A: "There is fire there". B: "I'm going to call the firemen"; and A: "There is fire there". B: "In Joseph Conrad's novels there is also fire". To this kind of communication theory, there is "communication" both in one case and in the other, and the term loses, this way, all discriminative and conceptual value. The authors are calling "communication" the mere transmission – partial, fragmented and suggesting – of information.

The belief in communication is a typically “affirmative” tendency of thinking. The “fact” of communication is accepted and it is only its effective development what is to be explained, or *how* it is possible that communication occurs (just as Kant considered freedom, in the second *Critique*, as a fact that shall be investigated only in its manifestation, not in its undeniable reality). It is part of the concealing mechanisms, typical of affirmative organization of society, to conceal the highly problematic character of communication among human beings. Adopting a negative posture, by contrast, communication can be saved in two levels, the intellectual and the volitional, but it gets stuck in the third level. It is interesting that while communication is identified with mere instigating of information, every intercourse in the world can be seen as communication; but when minimal requirements are added (for example, that the transmitted content must be intellectually-volitionally, at least approximately, the same), it is difficult to find one unique situation *that is* really communicative.

I believe, therefore, otherness is a part of “negativity”, in the relative sense which interests in this book, something connected to human condition and a part of the logical structure of the world. As such, as in the case of other theories referring to that structure, *the theory of radical non-communication should be completely trivial as any other radical truth*. (The present note formulates only an *esquisse* of a theory that shall be better developed).

Note 6. Leibniz and the innocence of the Father

Leibniz was admitted in the Faculty of Law in Leipzig around 1664, when he was 18, and graduated two years later in Altdorf. In 1667, at the age of 21, he published a project of reform of the juridical studies and, together with Lasser, a project of review of the *Corpus iuris: Ratio corporis iuris reconcinandi* (1668). This early vocation to Law and jurisprudence will have a strange metaphysical

application in Leibniz's life, when in his work *Essay of theodicy, about the goodness of God, the freedom of man and the origin of evil*, after realizing God's or Goddess's uncomfortable situation under the responsibility of having created such a problematic world as ours, he takes His or Her defense in the juridical sense of the term, trying to show definitely *the innocence of the Creator*. I will try to demonstrate here, on the contrary, that it is impossible to prove the total innocence of God concerning these responsibilities, and that they should be, in any case, distributed between the Father and the creatures.

In spite of his frequent warnings against anthropomorphism in dealing with divine issues, Leibniz starts from some fundamental anthropomorphic presupposition that will never be overcome in his argumentation: the idea God and men share the same logic. This logic is objective; its laws cannot be mastered at will, neither by God nor by men, since they are developed in an autonomous and independent level concerning essentially conceptual *possibilities*. The creation of the world by God is conceived as a work of engineering, guided by mechanics, logics and mathematics, sciences frequently mentioned throughout the argumentation (the world as manufacture or artifact).

The prosecution claims God has created a world where there is *evil*, and being Him (or Her) infinitely powerful, intelligent and good, He could have created a world without evil; and since He had not done this, it was because He has left exercising some of His divine qualities. That God has such qualities, we know by definition. That there is evil in the world, we know by the existence in it of natural disasters (diseases, death, sufferings) and "cultural" disturbances (injustice, murders, wars). The argumentative line of the defense is approximately the following: since the creation of the world is a work of engineering that must be guided by the laws of logics, God does not want to create a world in an absolute manner, through a totally arbitrary *Fiat* (Let there be...), but He wants to build it carefully so it "fits" in the rational possibilities available. On the contrary of what philosophers of will could think, divine glory would not be increased in anything by

the creation of a world in an arbitrary way, that is, by transgressing the laws of logic, something God could do, but He does not want to. The world without evil would be, in absolute terms, a good world, but this is the world God does not want to create, not because He does not want the world to be good, but because He wants a world that has all the goodness compatible with the laws of logics, with the functioning of its objective structures, the “eternal truths”, and so on. If creation was absolute and arbitrary, the result could be a *good* world, but God wants to create according to the laws, so, the only world He can create is a world which is not good in absolute terms, but *the best possible*.

The best possible world is not necessarily good, but it follows a logical-rational approach on goodness within the general economy of world construction. Thus, “the best possible world” might still have evil, much evil, and also might be a world full of evilness, without contradicting the divine plans of world creation. All evil that finally comes to the world constitute just the “holes” of the construction, the empty spaces without proper entity, an inevitable byproduct of a creation guided by rationality and not by pure will. An arbitrary creation of the world – aiming to establish goodness in an absolute manner – would demand a much too deep intervention of God on creation and a strangulation of the mobility of things and humans inside it. In order to avoid this, God has allowed – with what the Defense has called His “consequent will” – evil (the “holes”) to exist, although He did not “previously” want this (because in this case He would be a bad God).

God gets afterwards to a kind of agreement with human creatures: since the presence of evil in the world has been a consequence of God’s desire of not stealing human’s freedom, now humans have to deal with the holes of evil in order to reduce them the most, through ways of behavior that should honor the freedom conceded by God to humans. From that agreement between God and His rational creatures, a beloved daughter is born: *ethics*. Ethics may only exist in a world hollowed by the spaces open for the exercising of freedom. Those spaces are, precisely, evil. That is because Leibniz says it is understanding that gives the

principle of evil, “... *it represents all natures as they are in eternal truths, which have within themselves the reason why evil is allowed, although will wants nothing but goodness*” (Leibniz, *Essays of Theodicy*, Part II, p. 200. The translation from French is mine).

This fascinating moral novel is, in its own way, irreproachable, and it comes to us from the past, wrapped in different versions, sometimes with emanation paintings and other in creationist colors. It is a scheme according to which the being has “appeared” (sometimes from the non-being, sometimes from the supra-being), but when it appears, it has already been “corrupted” or “perverted” or “ruined” and, therefore, someone has to do something, an effort to a certain direction – a kind of corrective “journey” – to return things to their right places. In general, all versions of the scheme accept it was good that the being comes to be, that the being itself is beautiful and good. Evil has appeared in the entity – “originally” or through something human beings have freely done or abstained from doing – and so they have now to strive for a reconciliation. Ethics is an attempt to fill the existing spaces between the emergence of being – accepted, in spite of everything, as good – and the need to guide it back to a final conciliation. Thus, man “travels” through the scales of an ontological hierarchy, trying to complete an uncompleted world. This scheme, in their strongly creationist versions, has a decisive influence on the argumentation of the defense lawyer Leibniz.

The notion of evil emerges from the comparison between the effective world and the world that should be morally the case, and in this comparison our world always is diminished, deprived of something, degraded, etc. “... *evil is a deprivation of being, as much as the action of God is always towards the positive...*” (Part I, p. 120). One of the “engineering problems” God has to solve to create the best of worlds has to do with the very limitation of what He creates: “... *every purely positive or absolute reality is perfection; imperfection comes from limitation, which means, from the privative... now, God is the cause of all perfections and, as a consequence, of all realities, to the extent we consider them*

as purely positive. However, limitations or deprivations arise from the imperfection of creatures, which limits their receptivity." (p.369-70). Within this scheme, it is crucial to see evil coming from the vision that the world has emerged from something and goes to another thing: evil is connected to characteristics of the very "making" of the world, or with its own manufacture.

In Leibniz's defense of God, man is responsible for evil, by not dealing in an adequate manner with the inevitable "holes" of a world created for humans could be free. God could have said to humans something like this: "I would like to have given you a completed world, but with it you would not be free. I preferred to create one world so you complete it with your own freedom. And I will help you with this". The most recent "help" God has given to human beings, in his endless task of "morally completing" the world, was sending His own son to Earth, in such way he represents, in his painful person, an exemplar form of ethical life.

I believe this defense is impeccable and, once accepted its very basic principles, God would be absolved in any court. Certainly, I believe any affirmative argument would fail if the accusation intended to use it. *The prosecutor has to be a negative philosopher* if he expects God to assume His responsibility over creation (and be submitted to the correspondent punishment, which could be atheism or the indifference of humans). One of the first useful elements for the prosecutor's allegation is Leibniz's tri-partition of evil in species. Leibniz has distinguished among metaphysical evil, moral evil and physical evil. What should specially interest the prosecutor is the first one, the metaphysical evil. This evil is "original", and inevitably arises from the same divine decision of creating a world according to the laws of logic and protecting human freedom: metaphysical evil is identified with the "holes" of a creation thus conceived, as its byproduct inevitably present, whatever can be the world that has been created, *for the mere fact of having been created*. It connects anyway to the very "original limitation" of creatures which imposes receptivity conditions to the divine creative act, so that "...*deprivation*

constitutes the form of imperfections and inconvenient which are found in substance, as well as in the actions” (p. 121).

Leibniz appeals, at this point of the allegation, to the example of the boat that carries a certain charge and is impelled by the stream on the sea. Creatures are like these boats, they always have a certain “ontological heaviness”, a burden that might retard the stream action, or accommodate the impelling force of stream to the difficulties of human constitution. However, as well as the stream is not the cause of the boat’s delay, but only of its advance (that is, only of the positive), in the same way, neither is God the cause of metaphysical evil, but only the cause of the moral advance of humans, who, with their “heaviness”, constitute the formal cause of evil. But as in the creation of any world, there will always be a relation creator/creature, and in any of those, the action of the creator will be limited by the constitution of the creature, *there will always be in the created an original imperfection*, in the sense God – as His creation was conceived – does not want (and cannot want) to create an absolutely good world, that is, without the original evil, which means, a not metaphysically bad world (pp. 126-127).

Having the world already been created – metaphysically bad, as inevitable -, *within the world* appear the other two types of evil, the moral and the physical. Humans were considered as guilty of metaphysical evil in a receptive and passive way, through the very limitation which defines them (by their “heaviness”); now they are considered as active guilty – according to Leibniz’s argumentation – of moral evil also, which means sin, consisting of the inadequacy with which they face the task of “completing” the world that was created uncompleted by God on their benefit (in order they could be free and give themselves their own dignity, happiness, etc.). God does not ignore this task of humans and tries to give them the conditions for salvation. Moral evil, which consists of getting apart from the divine plan for the world, has frequently received the intuitive assistance of a mythical representation within which some crucial fact is produced (original sin, the fall, etc.), symbolizing that “getting apart”. The world has the metaphysical evil by

the fact of *being*, but moral evil appears because humans *have done* certain things. Moral evil emerges directly from human freedom, with no intervention from God.

Finally, physical evil – suffering -, which has so much importance in some modern philosophies (as Schopenhauer's) and in contemporary bioethics, gets from Leibniz a tenuous and indifferent approach, as if it was difficult for him to visualize physical evil with independence from moral evil, of which he sometimes considers physical evil as a simple consequence. Thus, humans – as if their faults and sins were still little – appear also as indirectly guilty of physical evil as well, of their own suffering in the world, to the extent physical suffering follows from moral evil committed by human freedom. This difficulty of Leibniz to think on physical evil is seen at the moment he declares the greatest physical pain is, no doubt, condemnation (Part III, p. 276), as if it was easier for him to think on the pains of hell than on the pains of torture, injustice and diseases in the world. With surprising phlegm, Leibniz refers to the natives of America and other exemplar men who have enormous control over physical pain, suggesting we should, no doubt, learn from them.

Leibniz's defense seems particularly sound in what refers to the justification of moral and physical evil through the argument of harmony of the Whole, the famous universal optimism; since *if God has to create a world*, and has to do it not arbitrarily (which means, respecting the laws of logic, etc), He is completely innocent of the world's moral and physical evils, however horrible. *The problem resides in the metaphysical evil, which means, the evil inevitably produced when a world is created (any world, even the best possible)*. Leibniz admits in many moments of his text – without ever developing the idea – God faces the option of whether creating a certain world – which would always be metaphysically bad, regardless its content – *or not creating anything*. Metaphysical evil should be faced *because God decided to dismiss, without analysis, the possibility of not creating any world at all*, avoiding, this way, metaphysical evil, moral evil, physical evil and

any kind of evil we could think of; that is, God started from the clearly affirmative presupposition that *being (anything) is always better than not being, or, saying it in another way, being bad is better than not being anything at all.*

This is a crucial point where Leibniz must be quoted at length. Let us read: “*Some will say it is impossible to produce the best because there is no perfect creature and it is always possible to produce a better one. I answer that what one can say about a creature or about a particular substance, that it can always be overcome by any other, should not apply to the universe as a whole, which, having to extend itself to all future eternity, is infinite... therefore, we do not talk about a creature, but about the universe, and an adversary will be compelled to sustain that a possible universe might be better than other in the infinite... if this opinion was true, it would turn out that God would not have produced anyone, because He is incapable of acting against reason, and that would be actually acting against reason*” (Part II, p. 234-35).

Another crucial text is the following: “*... I admit that if God was compelled by a metaphysical necessity to produce what He has done, He would produce all that is possible or nothing... but as all possible are not compatible to each other (...), that is why all possible could not be produced, and therefore we shall say God is not compelled at all, metaphysically speaking, to the creation of this world. We could say that, as God decided to create something, there appears a struggle among all possible candidates to existence...*” (Part II, pp. 237-8).

The last text in which Leibniz contemplates *the possibility of not creating anything* is the most interesting one, because it clearly presents the issue which interests me here the most, for it seems to show a serious expositive error: “*... this supreme wisdom, united with a goodness which is not less infinite, could not avoid electing the best... as in mathematics, when there is no maximum nor minimum, nothing to be distinguished, everything is done in an equal manner, and when that cannot be done, nothing is absolutely done; we may say the same when we talk*

about perfect wisdom, it is not less regulated than mathematics: if there was not the best (optimum) among all possible worlds, then God would not have produced anyone” (Part I, p. 108).

The most curious thing is that those texts, in 300 pages, are the only ones in which Leibniz remembers the possibility God could have *to create absolutely no world at all*, and each time he mentions that, he does not consider this possibility deserves a particularly important comment from the moral point of view. At the moment of creating the world, God has to decide, absolutely alone, the alternative of creating something necessarily (metaphysically) bad *or not creating anything at all*. God cannot decide *this* in agreement with His creatures. It is fundamental to note that nothing in Leibniz’s argumentation about moral evil and physical evil can be applied to metaphysical evil, because we can accept as sound the argumentation which proves that, *once it is decided to create the world*, God has acted rationally and kindly by choosing the best of all possible, but this does not justify however, that He has decided to create *one* world (the best or the worst possible, it does not matter), knowing that, in any case, it would be imperfect and metaphysically bad.

Thus, the optimistic story about the parts and the Whole (that parts shall be bad so the Whole may be good etc., all the stuff that irritated so much Voltaire and Schopenhauer) is all perfectly fine, but it does not provide any explanation about *why the entire Whole must be created* even knowing it would be metaphysically bad *to create it*, and even when it could be later turned into the best of all possible, through a skilled manipulation of its parts. Choosing the best of worlds is no doubt a moral choice that should be exalted in God; however it does not exempt Him from having yet to explain why it is better to create a (metaphysically bad) world *than not creating anything at all*. This needs an independent argumentation we shall not find in any part of the *Theodicy*. In creating the world, God seems to have some affirmative prejudices, difficult to justify.

The last text mentioned is particularly intricate, or completely tautological: given a group A, B, C... *n* of objects whatever, and given any criterion of excellence between them, it is logically impossible that no one of the elements of the group is the best of all according to the given criterion; at least one of them must be excellent in those terms. The non-tautological claim should be saying: "If there was not, among all possible worlds, *one that was good*, then God would not have made anyone". In this case, according to the definition of metaphysical evil, each and every created world would be metaphysically bad, and therefore, the logical God of Leibniz should have opted for not creating anyone. Once He decided to create (for necessity? for goodness? for vanity? for irony?), of course it is moral for Him to create the best of possible, but this is a clear case of what we call morality of second degree, or morality inside a more radical undecided moral situation: *the very morality of the choice between creating something imperfect and bad or not creating anything.*

Leibniz has explained how God has resolved rationally and morally the conflict among the different worlds that claim for existence, but he has not resolved anything about the conflict between some world and *no world at all*. God's rationality and morality were clear in His free and responsible choice of *this world, our world*, but nothing has been clarified about the rationality and morality of God in His free and responsible choice for *one world* in general, by force metaphysically bad. *The morality of abstention is never considered by the defense lawyer of God.*

Could one formulate rational and moral motives for refraining from creating a world (any world)? Let us first ask if there are motives *for creating it*. It is supposed that Leibniz's Christian God does not create by compulsive necessity or by emanation, but freely and responsibly. Neither could He, by His very definition, have created the world by pure will, as we have seen, because that would break the laws of logic and the very nature of the divine "engineer" Leibniz has conceived. Leaving aside the ironic motive (God could be an stylist, a frustrated baroque), we only have goodness left, goodness not totally exempted of vanity:

“Actually, God, having planned to create the world, has intended only to manifest and communicate His perfections in the manner most effective and most worthy of His greatness, wisdom and goodness... He is like a great architect that aims the satisfaction and glory of having built a great palace...” (I, 146). Now leaving vanity aside, the “goodness” of that creation is enormously problematic. Goodness is not presented only in the level of moral evil, but still in the metaphysical level: to consider as “good” the act of creating a world (any world), *one has to start from the presupposition that “being is good” (to be is better than not to be)*. But God knows perfectly well that, giving up to the temptation of creating, the creature will inevitably be affected by metaphysical evil: can we call “good” a person (even a divine Person) who gives other people something He knows to be inevitably bad *when he could refrain?*

On the contrary, it seems there would be good arguments to say that, to the extent He abstained from creating, in this case He would indeed be doing something “good”: protecting possible creatures from inevitable metaphysical evil. On the contrary, God cannot declare He is innocent of metaphysical evil (escaping this way from His moral responsibilities) by saying this is only the price of creating and claiming – through the fallacious example of the boat and the stream – that He does only the positive, and original (metaphysical) evil should be imputed to the creature for being “heavy”, “receptively imperfect” and so on; because God knows perfectly well (and one does not need to be God to know it!) that a boat *always* has a weigh, that the creature will *always* have receptive limitations (that the pigeon will always fly against air resistance, in the famous Kantian metaphor); which means, God knows the obstacle is not the exception, but the rule. This is not an “original defect” of the creature; this is what the creature simply *is*. The world (any world) is not about a natural deviation, but something that, for structural reasons, could never work. Can it be called “good” the act of creating a world one perfectly knows will not work, not for being like this or like that, but simply by *being*? From the rational point of view, from the idea that “a world with evil can be better than a

world without evil”, we cannot conclude that “a world with evil can be better than no world at all”.

In the strictly moral level, God does not compel human beings to act like this or like that – and, in this sense, “let them free” -, but in the metaphysical level, God compels humans *to having to act* (some way). In this sense, metaphysical evil is a formal condition of possibility of moral evil (and of physical evil, as a consequence of moral evil, as presented by Leibniz). God did not succeed in refraining Himself and finally created the world, although, as we see, it is difficult to understand the rational and moral reasons of that sort of rushed decision. After seeing what He had done (or, better said, after seeing *He had done*), He charges man with a “moral task”. But this is an impossible task to perform: of course now the free decisions of humans lead to moral evil, but its formal possibility is given by the total impossibility of not acting or acting “in vacuum” without “receptive heaviness”. Those impossibilities are given by metaphysical evil in the world – that is, by the evil of *having created* – which, as it seems up to now, is the Creator’s full moral responsibility, not the creatures’. There is, moreover, the aggravating that very frequently moral evil – effectively carried out by humans – is used as a shield to conceal original metaphysical evil, which does not seem imputable to humans except by fallacy: the creature is curiously guilty of simply being a creature, of having been created, as a body could be guilty of having a weigh and an extension, and as the air could be guilty of offering resistance to the breast of the pigeon.

In the terms of the present book, metaphysical evil shall clearly be situated in the worldly-structural level and moral and physical evil in intra-worldly one. In the light of those concepts, moral evil can be visualized as an intra-worldly specification of original metaphysical evil and, at the same time, as its fundamental concealment... for benefit of the imprudent Creator whose original sin is dissimulated by the sins – much more “visible” – of His creatures. Now God is concerned – having His morality already been redefined in the intra-world – in

assisting humans in order to “save” them from their moral sins. The fact all humans can be considered as morally bad (or, as Kant would say, the fact there has never been in the world a single moral action) shows moral evil is simply the intra-worldly *mise en scene* of metaphysical evil, an evil only effectively produced by humans but formally made possible by God, not for having created the world like this or like that, but just for having created a world.

It seems reasonable therefore that the responsibility for evil in the world is shared between God and the creatures: those might understand the vanity of their divine Father or simply respect His decision – undoubtedly dramatic – of creating a bad world instead of not creating any. However, God is eternally responsible for that choice. On the other hand, humans take their responsibility in what refers to the effectiveness of moral evil and physical evil. Leibniz has started from the presupposition that God and humans share the same logic. I am therefore allowed to suppose they also share the same ethics, the same theory of responsible freedom. Thus, God may and should be considered responsible through the same mechanisms of moral valorization we apply for judging men. If not, we will need two theories of freedom, one for God and another for humans, something undoubtedly sustainable but about which there is no suggestion throughout Leibniz’s text.

The belief that “being bad is better than not to be” is a dramatic moral *option* and not some “natural” or “self evident” datum. We can understand God and, no doubt, love Him intensively; but to absolve Him, never.

Note 7. Kant and the antinomy of suicide

1. In front of antinomies in general, the Kantian transcendental analysis, as we know, leads to the discovery of a “topical” confusion: both thesis and antithesis

are true, if we distinguish two levels of analysis, the intelligible “noumenic” level and the purely phenomenal one. That is why Kant said Transcendental Idealism (whose core is the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon) is the key to what he calls *skeptical solution* for antinomies. In the particular case of the third antinomy, on determinism and freedom, Kant states that if phenomena are things in themselves, freedom is not possible, and nature becomes the complete and sufficiently determinant cause of all knowledge. But there is in “Transcendental Idealism” a fundamental ambiguity in the understanding of the very nature of freedom’s antinomy and in the use of the “skeptical method” for its solution, as we shall see.

An antinomy is a structure that does not allow *any* “dogmatic” solution in the theoretical level: in the case of freedom, *we do not really know* if there is only natural causality or if there can also be some “causality by freedom”. The “skeptical method”, by definition, could not provide *any* solution for this antinomy, in the sense of breaking their balance in favor of antithesis or thesis. The task of the skeptical method is limited to showing *antinomy has no theoretical solution*, because the thesis and the antithesis are put in different levels. In this sense, the skeptic method applies (or should apply) a *purely formal* procedure to resolve the problem. Notwithstanding, I hold that, in Kant’s case, the application of this allegedly “formal” method turns out, inevitably, favoring the thesis and prejudicing the antithesis (finally configuring a “material” decision of the question), because what the very distinction between phenomenon and noumenon achieves is to show that freedom, in the long run, *is possible* in spite of the world’s natural determinism, against what was explicitly affirmed by the antithesis. The distinction between intelligible and sensible, which seemed just a philosophical-logical piece of a purely formal solution, transports subreptitiously within itself a material element favoring the content of the thesis.

This ambiguity between formal and material in the “skeptical” approach of antinomies – and that, if I am right, is not as skeptical as it seems – could be seen

as a fallacious move to the extent that, at the moment of confronting the thesis and the antithesis, the greatest embarrassment and the most clear need to justify itself were certainly on the side of the thesis, of freedom and not of natural necessity. This last, according to Kant himself, was never really in embarrass: *“The force of the principle which affirms the complete interdependency of all events of the sensible world according to immutable natural laws has already been established as a principle of transcendental analytics and does not admit any infraction”* (Id). What has always been embarrassed is freedom: *“The question is thus reduced to whether (...) there may be freedom or if on the contrary, freedom is completely excluded by this inviolable rule”* (KRV 564. See also the *Grundlegung*, BA 114, 115). The “skeptical” solution, by declaring both thesis and antithesis to be true in different levels, inevitably favors the thesis, *which had no chance to be true alone*, whereas the previous texts seem to show antithesis would have this possibility; but being the antithesis true alone, we are in conditions to declare the thesis as plainly false. The “skeptical method” saves the thesis from this danger.

When Kant claims, in the same place, that the transcendental idea of freedom serves as a fundament to the practical concept of it and its suppression would mean the destruction of all practical freedom, he is saying it is not acceptable that the antithesis could be true alone; or that, in any case, the truth of the antithesis should be maintained within the limits of the merely phenomenal, so it cannot spread its bad influence out of that scope, harming all possibility of freedom. This approach shows a clear *partis pris* and not a purely methodic-logical approach to the issue of freedom.

But this means the very step from theory into praxis is, in Transcendental Idealism, “hypothecated”; because freedom is, from the theoretical point of view, problematic and, notwithstanding, Transcendental Idealism succeeds in passing from theory into praxis with that problem already resolved: freedom *can* exist (and it will be, in the second *Critique*, as we know, admitted as a fact of reason, not discussable and not questioned in its effective existence). Freedom passes to the

practical domain strongly connected to the intelligible level – which is the domain where the defense of the thesis is developed – and, therefore, *with an explicit refusal that there can be a defensible ethic in the antithesis level* (to the extent freedom is accepted as a condition for the very opening of the domain of morality). The content of the antithesis is, *ab initio*, eradicated in the pure domain of the natural, sensible, heteronomous, anthropomorphic, etc.

In order to make ethics possible, in Kant's perspective, the theory had to break the analytic symmetry that should characterize it as a genuine theory: the only thing a theory could do was to give the entire *antinomy* to the practical use, and not to the thesis (nor the antithesis). What this inconsequence of theory produces is passing from the theoretical to the practical level already favoring certain *type* of ethical theory (characterized by an intelligible conception of freedom), instead of simply inaugurating the practical domain in such way free human actions could choose to imbalance antinomy in favor of one side or another under their entire responsibility (certainly, if some Humean philosopher, for instance, had done any "skeptical" distinction that, in the passage from theory to practice, systematically favored antithesis, my criticism would be exactly the same).

In the first *Critique*, the theoretical reason has done enough to put in safety the concept of noumena, that is, the possibility, and even the necessity, to think freedom. However, the empiricist who sustains antithesis has arguments to attest that the concept of freedom *cannot even be thought* (that, for example, what we call "freedom" is a certain handling of the natural necessity to which we are always submitted). Kant seems to think – in a curious overestimation of the strength of the antithesis – that this kind of move would definitely condemn the concept of freedom and of ethics in general. But what he should remember is that the only thing the empiricist has for defending the merits of the antithesis is exactly the same Kantians have for defending the thesis: *arguments*.

The “skeptical” solution used by Kant allows defining, already in the theoretical level, the very notion of freedom as an action “*free from empirical elements*”, and this seems to forbid, *ab initio*, the very possibility of an empiricist ethics in the sense of an empiricist theory of freedom. In the light of the game of transcendental analysis definitions, this expression, “empiricist ethics”, appears as clearly contradictory, as a non-concept. All the structural is connected to the rational domain and the sensible-empirical level have no structures, being only the domain of the arbitrary and particular. However, the defender of antithesis does not represent the destruction of morality, but other conception of it, which the transcendental analysis ignores without careful consideration.

As it seems evident that antithesis has the best logical arguments on its side or at least good arguments, the way Kant finds to strengthen the thesis is trying to show it as having the most powerful *practical interests* on its favor. On the very well-known section named “The interest of reason on the conflict it sustains”, Kant admits *ab initio* that, since the theory does not allow deciding anything, in the pure logical level, between thesis and antithesis, the question of the choice of one or another should refer to the level of *interests*. Kant seems kindly “unconscious” about the fact that in the theory, as we have seen, there has already been taken decisions about the issue, and what the doctrine of the “interests of reason” will do afterwards is only confirming a choice already carried out. Seeing the issue critically, *it should appear as completely irrational the idea that there cannot be a practical interest for antithesis*, that is, the position that believes in a world without beginning, in a complex and corruptible self, in a freedom as mere controlled necessity and in the non-necessity of postulating an Absolute God. Kant said antithesis takes off those pillars “of moral and religion”, but he could possibly shorten his sentence: it is religion what seems to be affected, more than strictly ethics.

In these texts, Kant considers there is something as *one* practical interest and not diverse “practical interests” in plural. He has on his favor, to sustain that, the

argument that the practical interest is shared by the educated as by the common people, in what Kant calls the “advantage of popularity”, that would be on the thesis side. This approach to the “popular” is strongly connected to the very strange Kantian idea (on which I will insist later on) of what is good and wrong does not represent any problem but something every human knows perfectly well (*GR*, BA, 21, 22, 23). Of course Kant does not present the argument of “popularity” as the only one, not even as the most decisive, but it seems to be an inexcusable task of a critical philosopher *trying to understand what could consist a possible morality of the antithesis, even if this morality might take away the peace and the support of the “common man”* (if such entity really exists).

It is evident that, to the extent the moral philosopher advances on his reflections, he acquires an evaluative complexity and an acute conscience of the problematic character of ethical matters, and of the determination of good and wrong, which may achieve high levels of sophistication. Regardless what is said about the moral philosophies of Spinoza, Hume and Nietzsche – to mention three thinkers who questioned freedom - those are reflections that honor the philosophical activity. The capability of managing unexpected ethical possibilities, even shocking for the average sensibility, does not turn the philosopher into a mere “*expert* in moral issues”, before whom the “common man” should feel humiliated, submitted or excluded.

2. Is not there any inconsistency, in Kantian exposition, between, on the one hand, the conviction freedom and moral law are previous to the determination of good and wrong (*KPV*, A 113) and, on the other hand, the conviction good and wrong are something “any man of good will already knows”? We could say there is not contradiction if we accept the famous Kantian ethical “formalism” is a formalism of the motive, not a formalism of the object. The moral law has the scheme “I must do X, with total independence from the content of motives”, because the motive has to be formal, the sole reference to the pure moral law. However, the “I must do X” itself is not considered in the discussion: for example, that lying, prostitution and

suicide are abominable immoralities seems to be something already determined and they do not need, at first, any proof of their badness, or at least Kant never opens the slightest possibility to ethically justify those activities. The only thing “formalism” will control is whether those abominable sins are rejected simply for empirical motives or for authentic a priori moral ones. It is clearly a partial “formalism”. Assuming those immoralities are *absolutely wrong*, it is impossible that they may be saved by any argument a priori, intending to support their legitimacy. From the point of view of motivation, suicide shall be rejected not for causing fear or repugnancy, but by arguments based on considerations about the human person, the ultimate aim of humanity, the fulfillment of reason, and so on.

In order to better clarify this problem, I will analyze here the texts Kant dedicated to the issue of suicide in *Grundlegung*, in the second *Critique* and in the *Lessons of ethics*, considering that, in some way, the issue of freedom is the main moral problem and the asymmetry of its determination should have large consequences on other moral issues as suicide. Thus, I take the moral problem of suicide as *Experimentum Crucis* for the methodic functioning of the above mentioned asymmetry. It is useful to consider the issue of suicide in antinomical terms (even when this antinomy is not, of course, in the Kantian text), to situate this matter in the context of the present discussion.

ANTINOMY OF SUICIDE

<i>THESIS</i>	<i>ANTITHESIS</i>
In the world, there cannot be any motive, based on free causality that leads to the self-annihilation of a human being.	In the world, there can be motives, based on free causality, that lead to the self-annihilation of a human being.

The three Kantian arguments against suicide may be seen as a defense of the thesis of this imaginary antinomy. They present rational reasons a priori for the rejection of suicide, as an abominable act common man usually rejects only for empirical motives. It is sometimes difficult to maintain completely separate the three arguments, but they can be formulated approximately in the following terms:

Argument A: The motivation for suicide is always and inevitably empirical and, therefore, a posteriori.

Argument B: Suicide is an action which does not succeed in the test of universalization of the maxim, inevitably contradicting itself.

Argument C: Suicide harms the dignity of human beings by taking them as a simple mean, instead of considering them also as an end.

Concerning **Argument A**, Kant thinks that the one who commits suicide can only do it for “unhappiness” or “fastidiousness” or, better expressed, to escape from these unpleasant experiences. The connection between suicide and unhappiness is current in Kant’s texts (*GR*, BA 53, 54, *KPV*, A 122, 123, *Lessons of ethics*, p. 192 and 195 of the Spanish edition). But, on the other hand, Kant kindly grants, in the *Grundlegung*, and in the second *Critique*, life itself does not have a “value” which could ground the decision of continuing to live. Coherently to the principles of his moral theory, he considers such lack of value irrelevant when someone tries to present a motive for *not* continuing to live. According to Kant, to keep living or maintaining life is a duty, an imperative of pure practical reason (and, in my opinion, the categorical super-imperative of all Kantian morals and perhaps of all Western ethics in general). “...*maintaining your own life is a duty, and, moreover, we all have a tendency to do so...; when adversities and an inconsolable suffering have taken from a man all taste for life, if this poor man, with strong heart and feeling more indignation than lessening or discouragement, and*

yet desiring death, maintains his life without loving it, just for duty and not for inclination or fear, then his maxim has indeed a moral content” (GR, BA 9, 10). And more: “It is the effect of a respect to something totally other than life, in comparison to which, life, with all its pleasure, has no value at all. He lives only for duty and not because he finds in life the least joy” (KPV, A 157, 158). And: “Suicide is not something disturbing because life is a good, since in this case everything would depend on the value each one gives to that good...” (Lessons of ethics, p. 192).

Moreover, Kant places human dignity above the pure conservation of life, in such way it shall be conserved until the moment when continuing to live puts dignity at risk. While such extreme circumstance does not appear, life is maintained only for duty, in virtue of a completely a priori motive. *“It is not necessary to be happy during your whole life, but it is necessary indeed to live with dignity. Misery does not authorize man to get rid of life, because in this case, every light diminution of pleasure would give us the right to do so, and all our duties to ourselves would remain polarized by la joie de vivre, when in reality the accomplishment of such duties might also demand the sacrifice of life” (pp. 192-3). And: “... the one who protects his beloved ones facing death is not a suicidal but someone magnanimous and noble, since the highest appraisal of life is based on being worthy of keeping it...” (p. 190). “To live is not something necessary, but living with dignity is; the one who cannot live with dignity is not worthy of life” (p. 192).*

Concerning **Argument B**, Kant tries to employ categories of *logical* type, especially the notion of self-contradiction. As we know, Kant considers all motivations not genuinely moral contradict themselves when they try to get universalized according to the first formulation of the categorical imperative. He submits the suicidal to the test of universality: *“Try to see if the maxim of your action can be converted into universal law of nature. Your maxim is: I apply to myself, for selfishness, the principle of abbreviating my own life when it eventually offers me more pain than pleasure. It is now about knowing if such selfish principle*

can become a universal law of nature. We can promptly see that a nature whose law would be destroying life through the same impulse charged of keeping it, would, no doubt, be a contradictory nature that could not subsist. Therefore, that maxim cannot be performed as a universal natural law and, as a consequence it contradicts completely the supreme principle of all duty" (GR, BA 53, 54. Also: KPV, A 75, 76 (82)). And in the *Lessons of ethics*: "... the one who destroys his body, taking life away, uses his free will to destroy this same will, what suggests a contradiction. As freedom is a condition of life, this so called freedom cannot be used to finish life and, finally, to finish itself. In sum, life is used to provoke the absence of life, which results in a contradiction". (p. 188).

As for **Argument C**, Kant tries to connect now the issue of suicide to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, as we can see, for example, in the *Grundlegung*: "Behave yourself in such way that you relate to humanity, both in your own person as in any other's, always as an end and never only as a mean." (GR, BA 67 (104) and in KPV, A 156 (171/2). In the *Lessons of ethics*, Kant starts using this criteria of morality to condemn, for example, prostitution, that "... always depreciate the value of humanity, when a person let herself be used as a mere instrument... Nobody is hurt in this, but one depreciates the dignity of mankind in her own person" (p. 159). "Suicide constitutes the supreme violation of the duties towards oneself. What does the disturbing character of that act consist of? ...Humans can dispose of all that forms part of their person, but not of their very person... Humans can dispose, no doubt, of their situation, but not of their persons, since they are themselves an end and not a mean; it is completely absurd that a rational being which is an end to which everything else is supposed to be a mean, uses herself as a mean..." (pp. 159-60). "...according to the morality rule, suicide is not licit in any way, since it represents the destruction of humanity and places humankind bellow animality" (pp. 191-2).

I want to show the content of the antithesis, in the antinomy of suicide, can be defended by using a priori transcendental arguments, that is, with Kantian tools;

and if Kant does not present the issue this way, it is due to the unjustified asymmetry mentioned above. The conceptual elements for the restitution of rational symmetry can be really found in Kant's texts and some of them are unexpectedly present in the same Kantian argumentation against a morality of suicide.

3. Indeed, in **Argument A**, Kant shows the possibility of keeping two things separate: conservation of life and estimation of its "value", two attitudes that usually go together: it is always supposed we do maintain that we attribute a value to. Kant shows, at least within the scope of a transcendental philosophy, it is possible to consider ethical the conservation of life without having to recognize a value to it, to the extent life is kept only for duty. However, if we accept this conceptual separation, it should be accepted both ways: it is also possible to separate *interruption* of life and *not estimation* for its value. In the same way that, from the act of maintaining life, it cannot be deduced it is valuable, *one can also affirm that, from the act of interrupting life, it cannot be deduced it has no value*. In other words, the issue of an alleged "value" of life should get totally independent from the attitude of keeping life or of interrupting it. Kant affirms life should be maintained even when it causes displeasure. Symmetrically, we should conceive life could be suppressed even when it causes pleasure. But this would be like starting to admit that, as there may be structural reasons a priori to maintain life despite its empirical displeasure, there may be structural reasons a priori to interrupt it despite its empirical pleasure.

Kant presupposes that, while motives *to maintain life* can be rational (although sometimes they are not), the motives to *interrupt* life can never be rational, or grounded on a priori structures; they must be inevitably empirical. In the same way as one can maintain life for duty, *is it never possible to interrupt it for duty? We have seen Kant condemning interruption of life through direct suicide, but not all kind of interruption*. He praises the one who puts his own life at risk in defense of some moral value. Let us insist on the same quotation: "... *it is not*

suicide to risk your own life before the enemy, coming even to sacrifice it in order to observe the duties towards someone...The intention of self-destruction is what constitutes suicide...There is a remarkable difference between lack of prevision and imprudence – where yet underlies a desire to live... Suicide causes a kind of repulse on us, while the one who dies because of fate produces compassion” (Lessons of ethics, pp. 190-1).

However, as it was said before, the “intention of dying” seems to be the relevant point in the Kantian attempt to express the difference between the “willing to die” of the suicide and the “not willing to live (in this or that way)” of the hero or the martyr; but this intention might exist at some degree in all these cases, and it is very difficult, facing a concrete act, to differentiate those two types of attitudes neatly, the intentional and the non-intentional. The simultaneous sustaining, by Kant, of the acceptance of risking life in benefit of moral dignity, and the absolute repulse for suicide, makes the ethical Kantian valuation of interrupting life a valorization of a *gradual* and not absolute type (as it would be if *each and every interruption of life, both of the suicidal and of the hero, were condemned*).

Thus, Kant himself seems to provide the rational elements necessary to defend the antithesis of the antinomy of suicide: the possibility of disconnecting the issue of “value” of life from the decision of keeping or interrupting it, on one side; and, on the other, the defense of a certain type of interruption of life for rational reasons that only differs from the suicidal attitude in degree, not in absolute terms. It is necessary to prove that, on the side of the antithesis, there can also be the support of rational motives of structural character, and not only empirical motives. In the particular case of the issue of the value of life, suicide, etc., there may be possible to show we can develop a not merely empirical argumentation in this sense. Such argumentation would be presented within what we could call a “metaphysics of life”, which should be added to the metaphysics of nature and the metaphysics of morals presented by Kant. The fundamental premise of this “metaphysics of life” is, as we have seen, that it is possible to differentiate – and it

is necessary to make such difference – between the value and disvalue of the things we find *in* life, and the value or disvalue *of life itself*, of its pure structure, independent of its concrete and contingent contents. The strongest arguments for the content of antithesis – for example, in the case of the antinomy of suicide – are those which are developed in the level of the structure of the world, not in the intra-worldly domain.

It is very important to note that, although the difference worldly/intra-worldly is present in Kant's philosophy, the same is never applied to the issue of the value of life. Indeed, in the first *Critique*, during the proof of the antithesis in the first antinomy, we can read: "... *several things may begin in the world, but the world itself cannot have a beginning...*" (KRV, A 455). And in the observation of the antithesis, in the third antinomy, Kant states: "*Even when it is granted a transcendental faculty of freedom, able to initiate the changes of the world, such faculty should, in any case, be found only out of the world... But those faculties should never be attributed to the substances in the world...*" (KRV, A 478). And also: "*Every beginning is found in time, as every limit of extension is found in space. However, space and time are only found in the sensible world. Consequently, while the phenomena in the world are limited in a conditioned way, the world itself is neither limited in a conditioned way nor unconditioned*" (KRV, A 551).

Statements referring to the world as such may not be considered "empirical", at least in the same sense in which ordinary intra-worldly statements are, for example, the ones about physical or social facts, contingent and accidental. Statements of the type "There are high percentages of indigents in developing countries" are not in the same level as, for example, "Humans are indigent beings". If the statements about the structural helplessness of human beings are empirical, they are not so in the same sense as those which say something about accidental and contingent helplessness. The blindness towards this difference results, in Kant's moral philosophy, in the inflation of the term "sensible determination" or

“determination of the inferior faculty of desire”. Statements about the structure of the world, if they are not synthetic a priori, they are not synthetic a posteriori in the sense common empirical statements are.

Kant seems averse to apply this important difference to the domain of human pleasure and pain, because he is neither interested on a reflection about human condition nor, as a consequence, on the responsibility to recognize the existence of structural pleasures and pains, not merely empirical, in the level of this condition. It is a basic conviction of Kant’s moral philosophy that each and every pain or pleasure is determinable only a posteriori, through experience (*KPV*, A 102, 103). The concept of a “pain a priori” or of an “intelligible pain” may be absurd in Kantian conceptual building. Notwithstanding, the idea is not absurd at all. We are, as we have seen before, in conditions to predict information about the unborn, precisely all that is connected to their structural condition, and independence from the vital specific contents of which this condition will be filled out in the future, after birth. And we can, based on this “structural information”, define something like a “a priori pain”, a pain connected to the very structure of the world and not to the intra-world of beings, that is to say, to the very fact of being human and not to the fact of being a human of this or that kind.

In the specific case of **Argument B**, we have the impression that Kant’s moralistic devotion would want the categorical imperative to be an analytical statement of formal logic, in such way that denying it would automatically produce a contradiction (it reminds the desire of Saint Anselmus and other medieval philosophers of showing that God’s existence could be presented with the same mathematical precision as the properties of triangle). However, the alleged “contradiction” makes suppose a reference point: With what exactly does the maxim “contradicts”? The answer is: with the maxim itself. But, why is self-contradiction brought about? Simply because maxims are generated within the asymmetry criticized before. Freedom is already born with a certain unjustified affirmative content: it is a *freedom to maintain life*. Therefore, making the option for

the antithesis of the antinomy of suicide implies in self-contradiction! A nature that is fundamentally conceived for self-preservation obviously cannot destroy itself without contradiction. Kant has finally managed to transform ethical imperative in an analytical statement....through a definition.

On the other hand, Kant inevitably passes from this allegedly “logic” level (which we should better call “definitional”) to a frankly empirical one, confusing logical (or definitional) contradiction with what would be better called empirical “self-invalidation” or “self-cancellation”, as in the famous example of money deposit (*KPV*, A 49, 50). It is obvious that, if everybody denied to have made a deposit of which there is no evidence, this would come to a point where there would be no more deposits at all and, therefore, no opportunity to apply the maxim. This would equally apply to lie and suicide: if everybody thought they had the right to lie at their convenience, after certain time no one would believe anybody and there would be no more occasions to apply the maxim. And, certainly, if the whole world committed suicide, no one would obviously remain in the face of the Earth to apply the maxim I may dispose of my life if “misfortune” or “dislike” occur. However, these consequences are totally empirical! Even the disappearing of the entire human race is still, despite its morbid relevance, an empirical reason in the very sense of Kant’s theory. Following Kant’s ethics faithfully, *moral theory as such cannot have any kind of commitment to the survival of the species*, but only to the instauration of morality in the world and with the fulfillment of reason, whatever the empirical consequences could be (*pereat mundus*).

Yet nothing assures this instauration will preserve life instead of suppressing it, as it is shown by the fact that, in many occasions, life has been put at risk in defense of moral values. In the famous opusculum on lie, Kant admits that, in the empirical level, someone could send another to death in the strict accomplishment of the moral law, and the same could occur, following Kant’s principles, with the totality of the human species, if that occurred in defense of rationality and morality. Certainly, if there were empirically no more human beings, there would be no

exercise of morality and rationality in the world, but it is perfectly possible that the disappearing of human species had been due to a rational-ethical reason of greater elevation. An ethics of aprioristic kind should not condemn suicide under the basis that “it contradicts itself” because, if universalized, this ethics would let the world unpopulated, without having beforehand analyzed the possibility the suicidal act may have been performed in defense of the rational-practical values connected to the instauration of the intelligible moral order in the world.

In what refers to **Argument C**, the last Kantian argument against suicide, there is no doubt the manipulation of a human being as an instrument and as a thing seems to be an excellent criterion for determination of immorality, and I am absolutely not going to contest this criterion. The manipulation of other in one’s own benefit could possibly be considered, fair and square, as the apotheosis of immorality. But we cannot ignore that, in the birth of a human being, it is also possible to detect (if we see the issue without prejudices) structures of manipulative character. However, if manipulation *in the generation* of people is not denounced - as usually it is not – at least with the same vehemence and critical sense as *manipulation in the annihilation* of people, this makes us think it is not really *manipulation* what is being criticized in the case of suicide, but something that appears in the case of suicide and does not in procreation and birth. But if we can accept as immoral that a man uses *his own life* as a mean and kills himself to run away from the misfortunes and dislikes of life, in a similar way, we can accept as immoral that a man uses *the life of his son* as a mean, giving him birth in order to run away from the misfortunes and dislikes of his own life. Many people explicitly manifest they have had their children so they could run away from the nonsense of their lives, the same justification which is habitually given to suicides. Why, in one case, the motive is recognized as immoral while in the other it is not? (Additionally, in Kant’s text, there is an indirect allusion to fatherhood when he mentions divine will and His obligation to consider His creatures not using them only as means for, say, exhibiting His greatness, wisdom, and so on).

If there is manipulation in birth, we should demonstrate to the Kantian that he cannot morally condemn suicide *only* by using the criterion of manipulation, unless he is also presupposing some hidden moral (or religious?) super-imperative which is capable to unbalance the argumentation, saving procreation and condemning suicide. If we think on suicide in a structural way, it does not seem mandatory that the suicidal takes himself as a mean without carefully studying beforehand the content of his self-annihilation; and, in contraposition, *nothing allows to assure that the one who decides to keep living is not taking himself as a mean and not as an end*, except, as I have insinuated before, if additional premises are being presupposed.

Let us resume the three points. *In the first place*, the motivation to suicide is not always fatally empirical, if we separate world from intra-world, the accidental content of life from the very structure of living. A suicide connected to this last one will not necessarily have been motivated by “empirical reasons” in the usual sense, and in the sense used by Kant. In this case, committing suicide could absolutely not be motivated by “displeasure for life” or “dislike” or “unhappiness” (in a similar way that, for Kant, preserving life does not necessarily manifest “satisfaction” with it), but that suicide could be related to the defense of the person’s own dignity as an end in itself, seeing suicide on a continuity line with lives that risk themselves in behalf of moral values. *Secondly*, the defender of the antithesis could put in evidence suicidal does not get in any “contradiction” when suppressing himself, since what the universalization of his maxim puts at risk is the mere empirical survival of humankind, and not some a priori moral principle. *Third*, he must show that, in the radical level of the manipulation the suicidal would practice on his own body, we can also put the manipulation we do on the ones who are born, so the argument of manipulation cannot condemn only suicide without additional premises. All these lines are *argumentative and rational* and, moreover, fully coherent to the very formal principles of Kantian moral philosophy, leaving aside illegitimate asymmetries based on material prejudices.

4. Passing from the theoretical level to the practical one, we do not obtain now what we could not obtain before. In the practical domain, we do not get what we want, but only the possibility of wanting. Whoever saw the issue of God's existence falling into antinomy in the theoretical level, starting two argumentative lines perfectly balanced, should not expect to encounter euphorically with his good Lord in the "practical" level: what he will find there will be much less than that: just a domain where he may unbalance the antinomy using the objective arguments his practical interests prefer and select, under his exclusive responsibility. In the same vein, whoever saw the issue of life and the possibility of suicide argumentatively falling in antinomy, should not expect, in the "practical" level, to encounter the meaning of life and definitive reasons to preserve it, but only a domain where it will be possible for him to responsibly build a value for life and some reason to preserve living, if this is the particular "practical interest" this person has on the subject. This is all the practical level can, at most, provide.

It seems strange to conceive a moral theory as a domain where we may turn false or senseless the theoretical truths. It seems more plausible to think that, passing to the level of action, we have only the advantage of getting "disinterested" – in the sense of the Kantian theory of "interests" of reason – on the true or false arguments that harm us in our free action, and also the advantage of getting "interested" on the true or false arguments that benefit us, but without having any power to change the truth-value of statements as they were determined in the theoretical level. Actually, there are arguments for and against, for example, a morality of suicide, in such way it is so rational, in the practical sense, to choose one alternative as much as the other. However, when choosing, say, the affirmative alternative, one has no right to affirm that arguments for the negative alternative are false, even when we have the full practical right of "disinteresting" on the content of the antithesis.

With that, I try to show *the “interests” on the affirmative alternative, as it appears in Kantian ethics and in most modern moral theories, cannot be defended as purely philosophical rational interests*. The absolutization of the affirmative alternative can only be sustained through the introduction, more or less surreptitious, of religious structures of thinking, since *religion* (as seen by theologians like Hans Küng) *has indeed a non-renounceable compromise with affirmation*; but philosophy does not, if conceived, as usual, as rational enterprise. If “practical reason” also manifests a non-dispensable compromise with affirmation, a philosophy that seeks to preserve such kind of “practical reason” will not lead the project for secularization of thinking to its end, as proposed by Illuminism.

In the basis of all “practical interest”, there is always a desire, a wanting-it-to-be-this-way. The rational guarantee this desire would not be something completely wild consists of the person being able to ground this desire in the profit of arguments the theory provides, so he can legitimately desire on that direction. What the theoretical reason cannot say to the person (or should not be able to say, because it is precisely what I believe Kant and affirmative ethics in general have done) is *which rational direction he should be “interested” on*. Ethics should make a difference, obviously, between completely irrational directions of desire and rational ones, but it cannot determine which one of two *equally rational* directions human will should desire. In this rational sense (and not in the sense of Schopenhauer’s crude voluntarism, for example), one cannot put bridles on will: the most one can do is, through arguments, to make it “unbridle” on a certain direction chosen by will. Ethics should be formulated in such level that all directions of desire had the opportunity to be rationally justified, successfully or not, instead of *ab initio* inhibiting some of them based on doubtful “universal” indications. The moral agent must certainly make efforts to fit in moral objectivity, but he has the right to choose, in completely secularized terms, objective moral orders on which he is able to “go against himself” or “against his own interests”, as required by the fundamental ethical articulation.

One of the most expressive signs of the liberation of ethical theory from affirmative asymmetry would undoubtedly be the deactivation of the *absolutely* condemnatory mechanisms against suicide, although keeping, as obvious, the critical resources to contest or discuss the morality of particular suicides, as they are put in activity in relation to any other particular human action.

PART III

Return to a morality of being (of how-to live) after the negative reflection

The main points for a critique of affirmative morality

Before outlining what could be conceived as a non-affirmative moral, I will try to summarize now the main thesis I had to sustain to guide my critical reflections on affirmativeness in ethics.

1. There is a basic first thesis *of methodological character* concerning the type of “approach” here assumed: when one asks about the value of human life, or about being a human being or about what is it “to be human” (or assuming being from the human view), what this work intends is to ask about the value of *this very being* as such in its own emerging, in its coming-to-be, in its situating into time, in its “staging”, in its effective appearing. It is *not* the intention to make an evaluation of what occurs or should occur inside this type of being when it has already come, been staged, put into effect. It is not about asking whether it is possible to develop a valuable life – a valuable being – once it is already here, but of asking if it is or not valuable *to be here* as such. That implies it is not accepted that something that can occur or not occur within the already established being in the intra-world could ethically justify the being itself: the levels of evaluative consideration are different.

The valuing of being could be affirmative or negative independent of the affirmative or negative valuing of what occurs inside being. It is necessary to conceive as perfectly possible and not inconsistent that a person considers better never to have been born, in spite of his present gratifying intra-worldly life; and also, on the other hand, that a person approves his simply having come to being in spite of his intra-worldly life being deeply unpleasant. (The present work will establish, in more advanced stages of the reflection, an important asymmetry between those attitudes, but by now, any of both leads to the methodological distinction I intend to design here).

I denominate “radical” or “structural” a moral-evaluative reflection which is placed in this level of the very being, and I sustain this is the proper level of philosophical reflection concerning the value of life. Aristotle introduces this difference when, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, he asks about the very function of being-a-man, regardless the specific functions (“intra-worldly”) that people can later assume (as philosophers, carpenters, politicians); also Descartes, when he formulates his method of universal doubt, he presents it as doubting about the very being of the world, distinguishing it from concrete and specific doubts; and, certainly, Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, and above all, in the *Conference of ethics* (IV, 3) proposes the same distinction. Not I only believe this distinction is clear (I have tried to defend it on Note 2), but it is also indispensable if one intends to assume a philosophical attitude before the world. Certainly, the scientific-technical-manipulative attitude in the world will only recognize the existence of the intra-worldly dimension of things, without even being able to conceive what would be a “worldly-structural” approach. However, such attitude seems unintelligible in a philosopher (even a scientific philosopher like Frege was interested not on merely manipulating numbers but in knowing what is number as such). This here is my attitude before being, human being and life. The structural radical attitude, in this sense, seems to be implicit in the very philosophical viewing of the world.

2. One of the most employed terms in the previous reflection has been “affirmative” and its derivatives. What has been understood as such? I understand by “affirmative”: (a) The non-critical acceptance of fundamental theses of the type “the being is good”, “to be is better than not to be”, “the more being, the better”, etc, as well as the conviction that the ethical theory should ask directly about how-to be, how-to live, how to conduct an “ethical life”, and never ask if life itself is ethical, if there is not an ethical cost in simply staying alive, in “living a life” as if the being was, so to speak, “granted” and immunized against criticism. The ethicity of being, of living, of emerging to life, of being born, is given, in affirmative thinking – in my

sense - as a granted and never thematically exposed conviction, as something already positively valued. (b) In the second place, affirmative means assuming the task of thinking as “insuring” or “supportive” (and, maybe, as a solace, as a certain type of “conceptual edification”), in the sense that the conceptualization of the world shall protect us, for example, against relativism, nihilism, solipsism, skepticism and, in general, against all that may threaten the continuity of the life of thinking.

For affirmative thinking, it is not the case of pure and simple “looking for truth”, but of looking for all truth compatible with the continuity of life, with the enterprise of not allowing that thinking get blocked so it could keep developing itself indefinitely (I have used the word “affirmative” because it has, in Spanish, precisely these two meanings: “affirmative” as opposed to negative [in the sense of “positive”, of “saying yes”, of “assenting”], and “affirmative” as “affirming”, “supporting”, “finding something firm, or firming” [as in expressions of the kind: “It is necessary to firm on something, on some belief”, etc.]).

In this sense, Kantian ethical theories as much as Utilitarian, Eudemonists or Skeptical (and combinations of those), independent of their specific tendencies, principles and contents, have been, without exception, *affirmative* ethics. My criticism to ethics in this work is, therefore, of fundamental character, and does not get into discussions about details in which I would have to put myself on the side of Deontological or of Utilitarian ethics. From the optic of the present book, what is interesting in those theories is they all are “affirmative” theories, in the explained sense (contemporary north-American Pragmatism is perhaps the philosophy which has most openly assumed the “affirmative” character – in the dual sense mentioned – of ethical reflection, through a pragmatist theory of truth [vide, for example, the attempt of reconstruction of moral theory proposed by John Dewey]: true is what protects us from danger, what can be used as an adequate instrument for successful survival. What pragmatism has openly exposed remains implicit, I think, in the rest of moral philosophies in general, including Kantian ethics).

“Affirmative” are theories in which the movement of the quest for truth is conceived as a vital process (even when this “Nietzschean” interpretation might seem offensive to many of the authors of these theories), in which the hypothesis that the quest for truth may lead us to an anti-vital result is rejected beforehand and not critically. The basic affirmative meta-thesis would be the following: life and truth go (or should go) on the same path, they never get in conflict; discovering truth is (or should be), at the same time, to discover the continuity of life, the uninterrupted process – however arduous – of vitality. There are not (or there should not be) anti-vital truths. (The difference between Nietzsche and the Kantian and Utilitarian affirmative ethics is that this meta-thesis is openly assumed by the first one, while, in the case of others, it is systematically concealed through intellectualist strategies (See my *Project of Negative Ethics*, chapter IV, and see further on, the Epilogue II of this book).

3. In order to consider the radical character of asking about the value of human being, of human life as such, it is not necessary to formulate an ethical theory able to generate judgments and concepts, among other things because any ethical theory that could be chosen would already be affected by the questioning open by radical reflection. It is necessary to formulate just what I have called a ***fundamental ethical articulation*** that, as I sustain, would be common to ethical theories regardless their contents and tendencies, ethics of principles or consequentialist. This fundamental ethical articulation (from now on FEA) is the following: *behaving in such way that it is not the case that only the defense without restrictions of the own interests matters, being disposed – in case the consideration of other’s interests so demands – to go against our own interests.*

My defense of this formulation of FEA is supported by the following: (a) As a methodological strategy to formulate the radical reflection which I intend to make here, it is important to adopt a FEA formulation *that respects the usual way of morally valuing of current affirmative ethics*, instead of producing – through some

kind of *Umwertung* – new kinds of values and mechanisms of valuations. It is about showing that the moral questioning presented – in relation, for example, to self-suppression and procreation – emerges from the exercise of values currently performed in the intra-world by affirmative ethics, and not by special “negative” values introduced *ad hoc*. (b) Second, I believe that, even in Greek ethics (Stoics, Epicurean, Platonic, Aristotelian), this FEA is in vigor, although in a restricted way, given the composition of Greek society at that time. Throughout the whole *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle explains behavior schemes that suppose a self-controlling, an attenuating of one’s own uncontrolled desires in benefit of something more general and public, a contention of the excessive satisfaction of one’s own interests, etc., and that’s the general sense of FEA (being irrelevant that in ancient Greece this exercise was not generalized to embrace all people). (c) In what refers to a possible objection to FEA coming from Nietzschean genealogical questioning, I will discuss it on the Epilogue II of this book. To the extent descriptive dimensions of ethics can have the primacy over the normative domain through a certain type of naturalization, I think such positions point to a possible limit of moral reflection as such, more than to an alternative moral theory.

4. I hold that affirmative ethical thinking currently offends FEA and that, because of it, it has to constantly and regularly develop itself as what I have called a *secondary* ethics; after a fundamental ethical transgression, the only possible ethics is one of secondary character, or second degree ethics.

Indeed, through the analysis of the manipulation on procreation, and the possible recovery of authenticity in suicide, there has been presented moral arguments which *basically* put in question the being, both under the form of giving-the-being-to-another and unconditioned keep-living-the-own-being. This has been done, as I have indicated in the previous point, using the same current moral affirmative categories: the criticism of manipulation and the quest for authenticity are two ethical directions which perfectly fit in FEA, to the extent both of them

accept, ultimately, a certain “going against the own interests” in benefit of something more general and public. So, when affirmative thinking - as indicated on topic 2 – passes directly to the issue of *how-to-live* without ever posing the subject-matter of *what-to-live*, it has passed over this fundamental ethical questioning. Affirmative ethics have already accepted a certain manipulating people and some inauthentic sort of life, inevitably hetero-aggressive and systematically self-defensive, attitudes which are taken together in any decision to keep living or to procreate.

The manipulation of the other – both on birth and on death – will become basically necessary for the continuity of ethical affirmative thinking. Affirmative thinking considers this as “unavoidable” (since what lacks to the affirmative ethics in general is a component of abstention, of ontological economy. Affirmative ethics are maximal and expansionist). However, since manipulation is condemned by FEA, the only ethics affirmative thinking can now develop is a secondary ethics. So I call an ethics that develops moral norms within a transgression, of a more basic character, of moral norms (maybe the same norms that are developed afterwards to face ethical problems within the world). For example, the “well treatment of prisoners” is typically a secondary moral piece, since taking someone as a prisoner breaks FEA in a basic way (taking prisoners attacks the interests of the other), so “treating prisoners well” can only constitute a norm of a second degree morality. Or “killing someone without pain”, since killing someone breaks FEA, so “avoiding the pain of killing” is pure secondary morality; and so on.

Secondary moral cannot avoid, on this formulation, the dangers of paradox and cynicism. In a more general sense, if affirmative thinking has never even considered, for example, the issue of the morality of procreation, the application of moral norms in children and the concerns for an accurate and respectful education for them, will be, despite their enormous *quantum* of morality, only pieces of a second degree morality. That is why a “first degree” morality cannot be affirmative; it must necessarily, in strictly contraposition to affirmative, be a “negative” ethics. A

“first degree ethics” considers the issue of *what* before the issue of *how*, and it is disposed to generate moral actions from this radical fulfillment of FEA (See further on).

5. The fifth thesis refers to *concealment*. Precisely for being constituted as a basic transgression of FEA, affirmative ethics are not only and inevitably “secondary”, but they are also compelled to develop themselves within the phenomenon of concealment. Affirmative ethics are inevitably “concealing” in the sense they must keep hidden all moral questioning radically affecting *being*, and, at the same time, they should hide also the ethical basic transgression they commit by omitting radical reflection. The *secondary character of ethics is, itself, concealing*: the concern for “being a good father” conceals the fact of never having asked whether it is good or not *to be a father*. To develop a “good life” conceals the fact of never having asked whether it is good to live, and so on. Since affirmative (positive-supportive) thinking considers those basic pondering as nonsense, in the concrete development of human conduct, all moral questioning emerging day by day from this fundamental reflexive omission must be concealed, which means, all transgressions of FEA that now allow to rigorously apply FEA within the world, in current intra-worldly situations, should be concealed. So a fundamental critical principle of a non-affirmative ethics is: not asking only about the raw morality of an action but also about the level in which the morality of the action is evaluated (This must prevent to morally praise, for example, a killer for the fact he uses a procedure through which her victims do not suffer, or a master who lashes her slaves only when necessary, and so on).

6. Secondary character and concealment generate together, in ethical affirmative thinking, two moral faults directly derived from the secondary character of its norms, which we can name with their usual denominations of *hypocrisy and pride*; two faults which, if the issue is studied from the empirical view, are scarcely

criticized in modern societies, maybe because these are edified on the cultivation and regular exercise of these two attitudes. Hypocrisy and pride may be considered the two main affirmative faults. The main difficulty of affirmative ethics is its structural inability of capturing the previous moral problems of basic character, connected to the very constitution of the being of the world and of humans, in such way that a great part of the moral incapacity (or, in traditional terms, immorality) which invades our world stays out of their critical scope, *an incapacity which is not based on the non application of moral law, but on its secondary application*. In affirmative ethics, it is always possible to judge and condemn immorality in the intra-worldly level, making lose sight of the basic structural breaking or transgression in which those justifications can be formulated. In this sense, the lack of radical reflection of affirmative ethics allows the almost free development of those fundamental faults, condemned, paradoxically, by affirmative ethics in the intra-worldly level.

Hypocrisy is the fault which is most connected to the component of concealment in affirmative thinking, as much as pride is the fault which is most connected to the component of hetero-aggressiveness and unconditional self-defense. It is impossible to carry out, for example, what is coldly called a “fair war” without admitting a high *quantum* of moral hypocrisy, since killing other humans basically transgresses FEA; the human I kill in a war is not just “my enemy” but many other things (a son, a father, a member of a club, a student in a university and so on). The “fairness” of a war is not feasible without the hypocrisy connected to concealment. Hypocrisy and cynicism are two closely connected attitudes. On the other hand, pride is transmitted through values as “legitimate self-defense”, constant incentive to “self-respect”, to “not letting oneself being oppressed”, “to courageously confront the enemy”, “to never be afraid”, “not being taken as a fool”, etc., attitudes strongly fed by the strong competitive organization of affirmative societies.

Through the exercise of hypocrisy, affirmative ethics is false; though pride, it is belligerent. If we take a close look, those two faults are little criticized in affirmative societies, and to a certain point they are encouraged in the normal processes of socialization and education of young people. Hypocrisy and pride are two attitudes intimately connected to the mechanisms of constitution of affirmative ethics. We live in societies in which simulation, lie, fatuity, frivolity, consumerism, struggle, “effort”, the destruction of the other in the arena of competence, the undefined self-defense, the destruction of “elements pernicious to society”, etc., are not criticized as much as, for example, defeatism, shyness, suicide, indifference, littleness, lack of initiative, individualism, lack of practical sense, utopianism, etc.

7. One of the main ethical consequences of the secondary character of affirmative ethics is certainly *the break of the principle of inviolability of the other's person and the full assumption of a political administration of violence*. Indeed, if we consider also the moral issues connected to *what* to live (and not only to *how* to live), we would see that *being* itself can be considered as ethically problematical, that in order *to be* (anything), it is necessary to transgress FEA, in the sense of expansion and aggression of the other, due to the basic “lack of space”, etc., which could lead to question the current policies of births and deaths, the affirmative ontological administration. The fundamental aggression of *being* shows that “cohabitation among freedoms” is, in the radical level, impossible. Affirmative ethics are constituted on the basic transgression of FEA, so they are inevitably compelled to use hypocrisy to hide transgression (and so they can edify secondary morality without basic disturbances) and also the systematically assumed aggressiveness (pride), by not accepting abstention or letting be killed as ethically advisable attitudes. (I insist on this point: it is typical of ethical affirmativeness the lack of a morality of abstention, of letting vacant, of withdrawing, of giving up, of setting free, attitudes which are systematically interpreted in terms of “defeatism” and “failure”).

The affirmative concern on how-to-live (or the overwhelming concern of *living*, of finding, in any way and against any one, a way *to be*, to plant your own “right to live” in the middle of the world) drastically assumes that, in order to say yes to life, it is necessary *not* to consider the other’s life as absolutely inviolable. Considering the other’s life as inviolable is something that, given the conflictive structure of the world – as elucidated by naturalized ontology -, can only be done if we are willing to put our own lives at disposal, an attitude strongly contested in current affirmative thinking based on pride and hetero-aggressiveness. At most, affirmative ethics encourages dying in the full exercise of killing (in war, for example). This way, the how-to-live assumes total primacy over the what-to-live, and the how-to-live can only develop at the expenses of breaking the principle of inviolability of the other’s life, to the extent ethics of how-to-live only conceives the respect for the other through strict qualifications; these qualifications allow some human beings to be drastically withdrawn from the domain where they should be considered only as *human beings*, to start being considered as human beings *having the properties A, B, C, etc*; and in the terms of these mediations, they are considered from the point of view of their possibilities of being or of stop being, of their inviolability or violability. In affirmative ethics, human life is “sacred” only through qualifications.

From there on, aggressiveness is admitted and administrated intra-worldly by the organized affirmative societies, creating a “politicized ethics”, in the sense of a *fair distribution of violence*, typical piece of secondary morality since violence has been accepted in the radical level. Affirmative societies accept as morally correct, for example, the implantation of capital punishment and, in general, the extermination of people who are considered pernicious to society, struggling against all forms of what is narrow-mindedly seen as “self-destructive” (suicide, drinking, drugs and excessive exuberant hedonist forms of life in general), admitting the existence of “fair wars” undertaken by nations against “dangerous enemies”, and accepting competence and struggle as forms of social interactions *par excellence*, propitiating the struggle for “gaining favors”, where the less

malicious are massacred by the more “intelligent”, quick and opportunist in a commerce where one should not allow “to be taken as a fool”. Institutionalized violence is, at the same time, concealed in legislation, public morality, institutions and public freedoms, apparently “at everyone’s reach”.

Kantian and Christian ethics in general tend to stress the affirmative hypocrisy component, whereas Utilitarian, Pragmatic and other empirical ethics tend to stress aggressiveness and pride (in reality, Kantian ethics are, in their very constitution – as I have tried to show on Note 7 – “negative ethics”, only illegitimately turned “affirmative” in the middle of the way. Utilitarian ethics are assumedly “politicized ethics”).

One of the most basic manifestations of moral hypocrisy in affirmative moral consists of attributing to eventual contents, strategically and politically selected, the moral evil formally present always and in every moment due to the transgressions of FEA connected to the being itself. It is a kind of systematic concealment of the formality of evil, through the adduction of contents that apply to specific cases one wants to morally condemn but not to others, strategically breaking the formality of evil (moral disqualification, as transgression of FEA, by structural pain). This way, FEA receives a new formulation in the secondary level; the articulation good/evil turns now into this one: determined (pointed out, emphasized, highlighted, stressed, etc) evil versus undetermined (not pointed out, not stressed, etc) evil. The formality of evil makes the normative space saturated. It is inevitable to permanently fall into situations of immorality, not due to some “radical evil of human nature” or to a “perverse nature”, but because of our own structural factual condition – as elucidated by naturalized ontology – which does not leave us space, as we have seen, to be moral. The affirmative maneuver consists of denouncing, in a particular case, what could (and, morally – in the sense of primary moral – *should*) have been denounced in all other cases of the normative space, but it was not because there were not strategic motives for that (though there has always been *moral motives* available).

The strategic selection of a “corrupt”, and the highlighting of certain allusive contents, is an extraordinary form of concealment of the formality of transgression (the so called “evil”) and of the fact that what is being denounced is not an exception (what fallaciously suggests there is no corruption in the rest of the cases, or that evil is of exceptional character, something accidental and depending on contents). *The evident immorality of what is denounced conceals, in a systematic way, the secondary strategy of the very denunciation*, consisting of the purely strategic selection of people to be denounced; what is actually *here and now* denounced should have been also denounced in other cases – affected by the same normative saturation -, but that were however strategically “dispensed”. It is a kind of “unfair play” within the very heart of the formality of evil (what is vulgarly denominated “scapegoat” results precisely from the fallacious procedure of hiding the formality of evil behind the selection of an evil only emphasized for strategic reasons, but which had always been there).

Affirmative societies, through strategic and political criteria, select some cases and leave others in shadows; they make a selection within the saturated normative space: where all is morally problematic, a non-moral selection will be done of who will be punished and of who will be dispensed. This way, a series of strategic and arbitrary manipulations are done – secondarily – in the name of the law, of the obedience of social rules, of the well-being of everyone and so on. The conduct - no doubt wrong and inadequate in most of the cases – of the condemned, serves to conceal the questionable character of the procedure through which these faults are emphatically pointed out, as if, out of that specific case, there were no other objects of criticism disguised by what was effectively denounced and exposed to punishment and shame.

Thus, what affirmative societies do is a kind of *politicization of the formality of evil*, in the sense of its strategic manipulation. It is an administration of normative saturation. If transgression is formal, however not recognized – because it is

precisely what affirmative ethics left aside in order to be established - the choice between the transgression that will be denounced and the one that will be concealed, forgiven or dissimulated will be whether political or strategic but not moral; or, better said, only of secondary moral. The immorality which is concealed or buried in the affirmative administration of faults is *the injustice of omission*, never denounced by affirmative theories of justice, the injustice of what is omitted in the very application of the law, and committed by what we abstain from doing when we judge and punish what have been effectively done.

8. In the field of philosophy, we can consider as the masterpiece of affirmative concealment the systematic struggle against “nihilism” (understood in a very large and not technical sense including strong skepticism, relativism, solipsism and all theoretical attitudes that undermine the possibilities of knowing, living, developing something, etc.). In the critique against “nihilism” in this large sense, the basic moral questionings of being, systematically left aside by affirmative ethics already in its very constitution, are now interpreted as “adventitious and accidental negativity”, as constituting the phenomenon of “evil”, as a set of evitable questions which could be bypassed through intra-worldly managements, and as though someone – some people or groups – were “guilty” of them, and should be adverted and punished by having introduced negativity into the world. The otherness of the negative, or the problematical character of being itself – when this radical pondering is not assumed by affirmative ethics – adopts the historical form of a struggle against the forces of Nothing, of Death, against disaggregate, destructive, “negative forces”, forces “that oppose to life”, etc, without ever visualizing the possible structural character of the anomalies attempted, in this way, to be intra-worldly redistributed, in a kind of *kermesse* of imputations, accusations and punishments. This is the only relation affirmative thinking accepts to establish in relation to nothingness, in its regular interpretation in terms of destructive and adventitious “nihilism”.

However, as we have seen, since affirmative thinking is not radical and ignores the fundamental ethical questioning connected to the basic transgression of FEA, it connects to the almost unrestricted exercise of concealing hypocrisy, violent pride and expansive hetero-aggressiveness typical of affirmative organization of life; this makes us think the critique against “nihilism” is basically dictated by a bad conscience about the unresolved relations of affirmative thinking with the issue of nothingness, whose nature is known only through the information provided by routine and non-critical condemnations of “nihilism”. In this sense, I have dared to talk, sometimes, about an “affirmative nihilism”, which is a paradoxical expression indicating the path opened by affirmative thinking towards the faults above mentioned, in behalf of a “struggle against nothingness”; affirmative nihilism grounded on the basic breaking of the principle of inviolability of the other’s life, as explained before.

9. Due to the ethical difficulties of the affirmative, it is legitimate to suspect that maybe a kind of moral theory that accepts to make a radical pondering about the fundamental ethical transgression, connected to the basic issues of human condition, *may be capable of recovering the moral motives connected to a first degree morality*, without manipulation policies and with full responsibility in the level of being itself, beyond intra-worldly justifications. This new kind of morality, in strict contraposition to prevailing affirmative moral, may be called, in the first approach, “negative ethics”. It is to say: *if affirmative ethics is captured and analyzed as secondary ethics, concealment, hypocrisy, pride, systematic hetero-aggressiveness, administrated violence and non-authenticity, a “negative ethics”, stigmatized by the affirmative as being “nihilist”, might be able to maintain the moral reserves that were forgotten in affirmativeness.*

That is the first intuition about the internal bonds between morality and negativism. However it would be desirable that this kind of new ethics had a denomination not merely relative to the current affirmative; it could be, for example, called *hyper-critical ethics, first degree ethics, ethics of what, ethics of being, or*

something similar. This would be an attempt of withdrawing the negative from the context of purely relative or “opposing” attitude to current affirmative approach, trying to formulate what would be a negative ethics in the sense of a radical ethics of *what*, which would consider the questioning of being as such and not only of the strategies of how-to-be.

All previous theses up to now have referred to the *critical* dimension of negative ethics. The next ones show the substantive thesis about the relation between morality and negativity.

10. The fundamental pondering that “negative” ethics (in the strict sense of “non-affirmative”, and in the dual sense of affirming and firming or supporting) accepts to carry out, refers to the matter of whether it is possible a valuation of the world as such, which may relate to the being-in-the-world peculiar to human beings. This thesis means: there is no *rational* manner to do this valuation in a direct way under the form of a statement such as “The world is good”, “The world is bad”. Precisely, within the large scope of concealment, affirmative ethics commits itself – without justification – to a positive valuation of this kind. A “negative” ethics refuses to perform this same philosophical “excess”, declaring, for example, “the world is bad”. In this level of analysis, Wittgenstein’s point of view in the *Tractatus* may be applied: all sentences have the same value, *in* the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it happens; there is no value *in it* (See *Tractatus*, 6.4, 6.41).

Precisely, this kind of valuation is characteristic of the intra-world (as Wittgenstein himself sees the matter by underlining the words *in it* in his text). But a valuation of the world as such is possible in an indirect way, by doing a consideration through the question of pain. My tenth thesis states it is possible to prove – following Schopenhauer’s footsteps – that pain does not belong to the intra-world *but to the world itself*; pain is structural in the sense of being connected

to human condition in such way that pain may be rationally detected in the life of a human being before his or her effective existence in the world. This is the first step. The second is showing pain can morally disqualify, in the sense of FEA transgression. To the extent pain is presented as being structural, that is, as inextirpable component of *any* human life regardless its content, the possibility of moral disqualification will also be seen as regular and permanent, or structural. This is certainly a much weaker thesis than stating something like: "The world is bad", but it is soundly based on rational arguments of the same type affirmative rationalism recommends making use of, when thinking philosophically.

A naturalized ontology shows the being is connected, in its own instauration, to limitation, constraining, lack of space, inhibition of expansion: the step from non-being to being is marked by those limitative and constrictive phenomena. In the case of the living being called man, this limitation is lived as pain, in a specially expressive sense, if compared to other forms of life that can also feel it, but without the specific human components of the experience (*vivencia*) of pain. It is crucial to understand that the emergence of being - and not something connected to the characteristics of this or that being - is systematically and regularly accompanied by the pain of limitation and lack of space. Thus, it is not legitimate to allege that, in the same way pain is structural, pleasure or happiness could be considered structural as well. Here we have a fundamental asymmetry.

This distinction between pleasure and pain, and the sea-saw from one to another (as in the current sayings "there should be laughter after pain", "tomorrow will be another day", etc.) is completely intra-worldly and bonded to psychological experiences, but does not apply to the world as such. Certainly, in the psychological level, as seen on thesis 1, it is possible that someone lives the experience of "feeling happy simply by being", regardless intra-worldly misfortunes and, symmetrically, it is possible that someone lives the experience of feeling unhappy simply by being, regardless intra-worldly happiness. *However, this*

psychological symmetry is not sustained in the logical level, which is where I intend to formulate the thesis of structural pain and moral disqualification.

Structural pain is not just a feeling, since it has objective proofs in its behalf based on the fragility of the body, disease and the inevitable conflict among natural beings (like humans). Since those are facts and not just feelings, the feeling of intense happiness by simply being is logically unsustainable, though it could have some psychological reality; by contrast, the recognition of the structural pain, independent of intra-worldly happiness, has empirical support and can be scientifically shown (through the information provided by Physics, Mathematics, Medicine, Sociology and many other sciences). There are no logical motives to feel happiness concerning the being itself, even when there are plenty to feel intra-worldly happy; on the other hand, there are always motives to recognize the structural pain of being itself, even when such recognition is not accompanied by a psychological experience of pain. A “structural happiness” has no scientific support even when it could be felt by somebody, while structural pain has empirical support even though not psychologically lived in an experience. (This is a deep rupture of negative thought relative to Phenomenology and Philosophy of Existence).

Pain is organized in degrees, from the mere logical recognition of it as structural pain to the extreme pole of lived pain which I have called one's own extreme physical pain. I mean “own” to the extent the pain must be *my* (in each case) pain, and not someone else's pain, however “close” the other person might be. I call it “physical” in order to differ from any kind of “moral pain” or “spiritual pain”, and the word “extreme” pretends to refer to a pain which, in the climax, is extremely unbearable to the one who suffers it (what is compatible with the objection that not everyone suffers pain in the same way, with the same resistance, etc. “Extreme” is a relative term which refers to the pain that is extreme-to-some-person, and not to people in general). Each one of those degrees of pain corresponds to a degree of possible moral disqualifications until - in the extreme pole of pain - moral disqualification gets maximally and concretely effective.

However, since birth, it is always present this possibility of moral disqualification, because pain is structural and therefore it does not appear *during* life, but together with it.

If this is so, then even when the world cannot be proved to be “bad” in a direct way, it can be proved that: (a) the world itself is painful; and (b) pain morally disqualifies; therefore, the world itself morally disqualifies; *being* (to have emerged, to have been born) have placed me, since always, in the realm of permanent and inevitable possibility of moral disqualification, with all its consequences. (In this sense, we may question the mentioned aphorism of the *Tractatus*, so even when *in the world* all sentences have the same value, sentences about *the world* itself do not have all the same value: the simple statements about intra-worldly helplessness [such as poverty, lack of education, orphanage and so on] and statements – of another logical level – about structural helplessness [of all human beings as such, poor and rich, educated or ignorant, orphans or not] have not the same value. *In the world*, everything is as it is and all happens as it happens, but the *world* itself is so and so and the world itself happens so and so, and not in any other way.

11. The axioms about fundamental pain of being are, in a way, trivial; they are very simple truths, accessible to anyone. Notwithstanding, they are not tautologies in the analytical sense, since they are synthetic truths that refer to the world, not empirically but structurally, or better said, not to the empirical intra-world but to the experience of world itself. Some (trivial) axioms about pain could be the following:

D1) Human beings are born as sufferers, by being thrown from the mother’s inward to the limitation of being in its instauration.

D2) Human beings are regularly affected, already in mother’s inward and during their whole existence, by the threat of countless diseases. Health condition can be seen as a highly unstable balance.

D3) Human beings are affected, in general, by a fundamental fragility, which concerns the constitution of their organs, their brains, etc.

D4) Human beings are affected, in general, by the conflict among natural beings, threatened by other natural beings and obliged to threaten other natural beings (which constitutes a kind of anti-Spinozian geometrical ontology).

All these statements and others that could be made are synthetic trivialities which do not help in anything to increase the “interest” for the world; they are just limited to announce basic truths about our condition, that have a wide influence on moral life. The synthetic triviality of these truths is regularly hidden through the concealment of the affirmative. Precisely, these axioms about pain of the very establishing of being are systematically concealed in order the affirmative intra-worldly organization of life is possible, since there is no affirmative pondering about these items (and this is precisely, by contrast to monotonous negative thinking, what makes affirmative reflection so “interesting”).

12. Finally, the previous ponderings on affirmative moral seem to have deep consequences of *meta-philosophical* character. The study of these basic ethical-ontological issues seems to show that, in philosophy as usually conceived, its affirmative exercise is clearly and evidently beyond all doubts. As a matter of fact, philosophy seems to follow the same rhythms of life and of all things in the world, only in a higher level of sophistication and refinement. *Philosophy, as well as life, seeks to give life interest, it seeks the interesting, the enriching and the complex, and not truth as it appears.* Only apparently philosophical activity seeks to simplify or clarify issues. Actually, philosophy only wants to clarify issues in half, so they remain obscure in order philosophy can continue reflecting indefinitely or at least without ever visualizing some end. As well as life wants to keep living, philosophy fundamentally wants to keep thinking (and that’s why radical thinking is so criticized – as the ones of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, etc. – by what they have of “end of thinking”).

The flirting with truth is, that way, similar to the flirting with death; a maximum proximity without being grabbed, always leaving some remain that allow to keep fantasizing, complicating, getting lost, making it more complex, finding problems we did not have seen before. *But human condition, as exposed in a series of fundamental axioms, is not complex at all, however complex might be the particular intra-worldly problems emerging at every moment.* From philosophy – in particular the philosophy academically produced – it is demanded to be “interesting” in the sense of *inter-esse*, of introducing-it-in-the-being, and not in the sense of being true (or better said, truth matters to the strict extent it is interesting). Affirmative intellectual societies hate and fear thinkers who tend to finish reflection and reflective issues. On the other hand, these societies love and stimulate those capable of renewing issues incessantly.

The possibility philosophical thinking could have another structure is not even considered, that philosophy may seek another thing that is not survival, continuation, incessant reproduction; it is never faced the possibility that truth, the search for truth, can be different, and maybe incompatible with the attempts to survive, to continue living. Maybe thinking leads to stopping, to refraining, to dying, to stop living, to getting quiet, to despair, to madness: why should thinking – assumed as a brave and really unconditioned searching for truth – be at service of the “interesting”, and not of the least interesting? Death can be seen as the uninteresting *par excellence*, so affirmative philosophy would be an attempt, through concepts, of taking distance from the uninteresting, from what introduced us in being (*inter-esse*), from what disconnects, unlinks, seeking, on the contrary, all that “re-connects”, the “re-ligious”, what is able to link. (The theologian Hans Küng has said God is not connected to deities or divine beings, but to a fundamental affirmation of reality. God is the absolute Yes, admissible in religion, problematic in philosophy. But truth, seen as pure accordance to facts, could be the unlinking *par excellence*, the unreligious).

The Argentinean writer Eduardo Mallea has admirably expressed his fatigue before the endless process of self-renewal of philosophical reflection (and so did Emil Cioran, in another sense). *“After having filled my head with the most different books, with the most audacious conceptions and with the most subtle theories, abstract and apparently harmonic, the process of philosophy theory seemed to me more and more the pure game of constant dialectic rectification... Hume’s intelligence is as exact, precise and universal as Descartes’ intelligence, and Descartes’ intelligence is as exact, precise and universal as Kant’s; notwithstanding, the three theories are opposed to each other. All this coming and going in the same fountain, so many improbable and rational dialectics, that cyclically have, throughout time, their defenders with the same passion and sincerity, seemed definitely candid to me in their eager to elevate man, this ‘thinking rush’, to be arbiter of phenomena and essences when everything escapes, instant after instant, from his vulnerable reason (...) this deception brought me closer and closer to art, which, without ever contradicting itself, is never alike and is reborn in new forms that differ from each other without contradicting themselves by revealing the contradictions of men”* (Mallea, Eduardo, *Story of an Argentinean passion*, chapter II, p. 59-60).

Before the arguments of the radical and skeptical moralist on Part 1, his possible critics should *not* demonstrate his thoughts as “damaging”, “nihilistic”, “dangerous”, “neurotic”, “lunatic”, “decadent”, “inadvisable”, “anarchical”, “reactionary”, “anti-revolutionary”, “monstrous”, “conservative”, “fascist”, “relativist” or “solipsist”, but simply as *false; and they must say why they are false*. Because they could be dangerous and true, lunatic and true, relativistic and true, inadvisable and true, pernicious and true, nihilistic and true, etc., but certainly not false and true. To the extent my adversary does not know how to demonstrate those thoughts as being false, I expect him or her to accept *a redefinition of philosophical investigation (a meta-philosophy)*, in which substantial restrictions are made to the secular notion of philosophical activity as supposed “disinterested search for truth”.

Is non-affirmative morality even possible? (A short Survival Handbook)

In the present section, I propose to return to the usual non-radical ethical issue of *how* we should live. However, only apparently the issue is now “the same”. Because, based on the previous analysis, we now know all the ethical-ontological problematic character of being; we are now fully conscious about the possibility to ethically justify formal self-suppression and abstention; it is the person who knows all that who puts the question of *how-to-live*. But this question can never be the same as the traditional one, which systematically ignores radical questioning. To highlight this difference in “asking the same question over again”, I herein use the expression *survival*, to indicate that, assuming negativity, it is no longer possible to choose simply *living*, in the sense of affirmatively experiencing the world (this is a definitively sealed attitude to whom has made the previous ethical reflection), but only *surviving*, or to sustain oneself assuming negativity in a form of life. We ask now to which extent and if it is possible to develop a form of life in those circumstances, *if there is a possible form of life capable of incorporating the ethical-ontological questioning of the world in its own structure*. This should prove negativity, as it is conceived here, not as finalization or interruption of morality, but as its consummation through other forms of life, hardly to be conceived from the affirmative viewpoint.

Their internal connection to negativity does not mean they are “pessimistic” or “skeptical” forms of life, but *ontologically minimal, radically responsible and therefore tragic lives, risky and fragile. Sobriety, responsibility and danger will so define these kinds of life*. However, it is a sort of minimalism that does not “diminish” anything, does not “remove” anything, does not (“stoically”) “renounce” to anything; this living will be minimal just in relation to the maximal character of affirmative organization of life, in which humans give themselves unjustified ethical-ontological “rights” concerning their lives. Negative minimalism simply puts us on

the level of our constitution in the world, and that could only be interpreted as a “loss” from the perspective of usual affirmative “inflation” of human life. Our finitude does not “steal” anything from us; our condition does not let us “incomplete”.

The “survivor” sees himself basically as someone who has systematically refused himself to non-being, from ever structurally viable. He is not simply someone who lives more or less “naturally”, but someone who has not taken risks and survives within this refusing, with all its logical and ethical significance. Therefore, his living is not like most lives, inert and automatic, *but a continuing full of sense and questioning. His continuing is something explicit and self-defining, a refusing that fills and characterizes all his effective existence.* The “memory”, so to speak, of his non self-suppression is a fundamental feature of the way he lives his temporality. It is something that was not accomplished, and constitutes as the permanent “memory” of this “not having done, *being able to do it*”.

How can be the life of a person who stays in the world with the full conscience and the strong sensibility about the ethically problematical character of human life *per se*? How can be the life of a person who has already dismantled all concealing mechanisms of not-being, regularly employed by affirmative ethics? Somehow, those who die in battle, faint in asceticism, commit suicide escaping from moral disqualification of structural pain, the martyr, etc., take the not-being away with them, providing negativity with a concrete body, giving a face to the structure of the world. But while we are not martyrs, ascetics, heroes or suicides, our body is committed to the intra-world and to some sector of the affirmative: whoever stays in the world finds himself or herself compelled to design some sort of *cohabitation with the negative* under the impossibility (or the refusal) *to be the negative*, and this cohabitation will demand the omission or concealment of some of the basic and radical incoherencies and moral infractions that go together with every continuing to live. How can be the life of a person conscious about the ethical potentialities of not-being who refuses the most adequate fulfillment of these potentialities? How can the negative be lived? Is it possible to pose, in a non

affirmative way, the question about *how-to-live*? Is it possible only to survive, or is survival, after all, just a way, among others, of living? *What are the ethical costs of any project of survival?*

The global answer to those questions may be something as the following: a negative survival is characterized, in general, by *an explicit assuming of the pure formality of human life*, avoiding defining, characterizing or interpreting it only in reference to eventual contents. This recognition of the formality of life is a fundamental piece to operate a kind of access to other levels of vitality, in which the negotiations with being are carried out in ways profoundly different from the usual ones. Such recognition influences on the five following specific features of a negative survival: 1. Assuming the pure responsibility *of being*, recognizing that being provokes a basic moral transgression. 2. The systematic inclusion of the negative into a form of life, with special attention to the consideration of self-suppression as a regulative idea. 3. The substantial modification of self-defense mechanisms, assuming life as a risk and not as some form of “care”. 4. The systematic refusal to put the other on the place of non-being. 5. The dramatization of illusion as “agonic repetition”.

Indeed, whoever lives affirmatively, assumes, at most, the responsibility of being *this or that*, in the sense of what she is and does *intra-worldly*; however, because of the non-radical nature of her thinking, she has absolutely no conscience about the ethical-ontological disturbing caused by her pure *being-in-the-world* as such. The affirmative human being inaugurates morality *inside* life, but never asks herself about the morality *of life itself*, of being, of living (any life). She constitutes her second degree morality as if it was completely natural and the only one possible, as if it was a primary and spontaneous morality. The survivor might certainly constitute for herself a moral of secondary kind as well, inevitable in every continuing to live, but this moral will be mediated by two important attenuations: first, the complete awareness that it is a secondary morality; and second, that *it is*

secondary morality which can, at any moment, become primary, something totally excluded from the considerations of the affirmative approach.

The negative survivor knows nothing she may do in the intra-world will relieve her of the responsibility of being, in the sense her secondary morality will only and forever be justified only within the world. Therein, she fully accepts the fact of being obliged to go against her within one fundamental and inevitable “going in favor of oneself”. The recognition of this tragic responsibility in the formal level of being exempts her from all kinds of excuses based on what may be done in the usual ethical intra-worldly games.

The currently not assumed responsibility of simply *being* usually aggravates ordinary and concrete human relations. The negative survivor knows very well that, whatever is her relation with person X, and whoever X would be, it will be necessarily to assume a relation of aggressiveness and self-affirmation (in the sense of a positive assuring), and of “inter-specular” relation marked by radical non-communication (See Note 5). The ethical game may begin, from this awareness, to develop without recriminations or “pressures” (so oppressively present in interpersonal affirmative relations), as the tragically responsible relation between two people who know they attack each other and defend themselves for structural determinations which intrinsically have directly nothing to do *with any of them*.

In the current affirmative organization of life, there is a maximal option for being, and a kind of “accumulation” of non-being, forever “dislocated”, until the empirical end of life, without realizing this structural end has always come, and is already available. In our societies, the relation with the negative is always *external*, without recognition of its *constitutive* character. However, in the short and long run, the dislocated and concealed non-being ends up – to use a metaphor of my *Project of negative ethics* – “revenging” for its regular postponement. Negative survival suggests new forms of relations with non-being, trying to define a eudemonia that

contains non-being within itself, a kind of “negative eudemonia”. The sober distribution of the negative in every moment of life, even at those of most apparent affirmation, is completely contemporary to a minimalist option for being.

Therein – to say it in the style of the Argentinean writer Macedonio Fernández – the negative survivor is an “almost-man” (*el hombre del casi*), always falling into the many “holes” of life, into silences, absences and missing, in what is not there, in pure possibility, in utopia, unfulfilled dreams, lacks, gaps, omission, abstention and distances. The one who lives according to a principle of priority of possible over real is able to enjoy all advantages of what is not, of what does not establish itself, of the richness of pure possible, the perfection of utopia, the truth of omission, the magic of distance, the feeling of absences, the interest of the never fulfilled, the love inspired by distance and the admiration caused by the never written works.

This form of life questions the common belief that the best and most intense way of experiencing things is to be filled with them, following the usual maximal principle of “the more, the better”. The very presence of the survivor follows the regime of almost, of some almost-presence; his relations with people are also minimalist. The intensity of feeling is for him a clear sign the time to leave is come, and nothing scares him as much and promptly as an excessive cohabitation or neighborhood. He knows he will always get the best of others through cracks and crevices, always scarcely and as with the tail of the eye. He knows the other needs space to develop, so the survivor establishes a kind of “negative neighborhood” mediated by absence, lack and distance. Far from having something to do with “renounce”, such kind of attitude promotes a systematic use of negative to one’s own benefit, to abandon for gaining, to abstain for obtaining, to leave for staying, to die for living. He knows the worst that may happen to a dream is becoming true, because for something to have value it is necessary to maintain part of it in shadows, as a sort of “value by contrast”.

This “never being completely” makes the negative survivor extremely sober before the disappearance and emergence of human beings in the world, because he knows death steals nothing that birth seemed to have promised. Actually, he knows that a being whose formal structure consists of ending has never been completely present. In a certain sense, he has never been totally “alive”, which suggests, on the contrary of what has been speculated at the beginning of this reflection, that *all living is maybe, in its essence, a survival; the fully affirmative does not let itself be lived*. Therefore, in the *Project of negative ethics*, its author has offered maybe the best images of a negative survivor, the Kafka’s traveler, or the Antonioni’s passenger. As Kafka’s traveler, the negative survivor does not care about where he goes; he only wants to “get out of here” (wherever “here” may be). Abandoning, vacating, leaving empty, this is precisely his destiny, as well as the protagonist of Antonioni’s movie, David Locke, who is only interested in getting out, stopping being himself, traveling, leaving.

Death is certainly the inoccupation *par excellence*, the consummated vacancy, the masterpiece of leaving. That is the reason why the negative survivor acquires, by the way he lives, the tremendous force of death. Far from renouncing to anything, he actually puts himself on the very direction of nature and contributes so nature fulfills its “purposes”. The always possible – structural – self-suppression is herein a kind of extreme regulative pole. Even when the very act of suppression is not performed – and even though the survivor is defined as the one who has *not* done it -, he operates absolutely no concealment of this always present possibility, as one of the empty spaces into which falls his everlasting and insecure wandering. The pure idea that it is possible to do so at any moment, to turn radically proper what we only partially appropriate while we survive, is one of the fundamental components of a negative form of life, and one of its conditions of possibility.

It is a kind of ideal that provides a conducting wire regulative of human life, an idea to which life is always approaching without maybe ever performing it. So there

is no incoherence from the part of the negative human being between having defined himself as not suicide and maintaining, at the same time, self-suppression as a kind of regulative idea. This particular situation of suicide within a negative existence is the extreme case – the possibility of turning your own life into something that is always missing – of including the negative in a way of life where everything lacks except us. In a negative survival, there is undoubtedly no compromise with what is usually called “a long life”, neither there could be a compromise with the effective suicidal act, but only with its regulative idea that can, in any moment, be performed. Living-with-the-negative indicates the coexistence with this *formal* element.

To be alive inevitably consists of “defending” oneself. Notwithstanding, within a negative survival, the self-defensive mechanisms may change in such way that they keep a connection to a kind of risk or danger. Indeed, the negative survival does not accept defending himself *indefinitely and unconditionally*, since he is permanently and always disposed to die under the very intensity of his actions and ideas, disposed to fall in every ambush they conduce them to, to enter into all dead-ends following ethical plenitude.

In current affirmative ethics, life and death are disconnected, where death is regularly seen as “interruption” and “defeat”, where death have no content; as Wittgenstein said, “one cannot live death”; when the deaths of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Giordano Bruno or Christ are “mourned”, their *consummative* character is misunderstood, and people persist on setting them in a dimension of “fracture”, as if those people could, with a little more care, “have lived longer”. They cannot visualize these ethical deaths as *accomplishments and instauration of values* in the sense of first grade morality, giving the own life in exchange.

Far from manifesting a morbid “self-destructiveness” - as an ordinary affirmative interpretation regularly consider - all these people made efforts to set their lives in consonance to the world structure. Strictly speaking, the hero and the

martyr do not seek their own deaths, but they end up naturally finding it during the process of their negative lives, careless and risky. When disconnecting the habitual self-defense mechanisms, they get radically “exposed” and unsafe.

To interpret negative survival as “desperate” or “nihilistic” is just an effect of the affirmative distortion of the world. Within a life program consisting of phobic repelling of not-being as “bad” each appearing of the negative must necessarily “depress”. Living-with-the-negative is not incompatible with joy, euphoria and dance, elements that have always regularly accompanied the life of any hero. On the contrary, in a deeper sense, perhaps human beings can only find their *own* joy, the joy of a finite being (and not the immaculate jubilation of angels), if they are able to include the negative into a human form of life. Before that, we have just the frightened and fragile “joy” of concealment, which seems more guided by a desperate “desire for joy” (as in parties and commemorations) than by genuine satisfaction. The negative must, therefore, be disconnected from suffering, anguish and desperation, the figures of negativity when seen from affirmative viewpoint. The living-with-the-negative is certainly incompatible to any kind of abstract joy based on anxious discarding the constitutive not-being.

In affirmative ethics, for having repelled negative as “alienation” and “strangeness”, when this negative inevitably reappears it is common to blame the others, other people, of having brought the negative into the world. In its adventitious alienation, ignoring its internal and constitutive source, negative is systematically visualized as “evil” and the other as “guilty” for it. To adjudicate “guilt of the negative” – interpreted as evil – to the other who confronts us, is the core of the affirmative procedure for constitution of what I call “affirmative neighborhood”. It is the idea that, *without* some people (those who challenge and threaten us, those who appear to us as obstacles, the “enemies”), or *together with* others (our sons, our friends, our beloved ones), the being will finally be reached and something will at last be affirmatively lived.

Because of structural pain, elucidated in naturalized ontology, this bet is certainly lost beforehand. All being and all pleasure may only be lived in opposition and the others cannot remediate this neither with their presence nor with their absence. By posing (and disposing of) others, we just redistribute not-being, but we neither increase nor decrease the ontology of the world (That is why Sartre's thesis is problematic or at least ambiguous, according to which human being brings nothingness into the world and the others reify me, that is, finally give me a nature. If the other must *necessarily* give me a nature, ultimately he is not really the one who gives this nature to me. The other would give me a nature if he or she could choose to do it or not, being able not to do it. Actually, if simply in order *to be* the other already reifies me, it means it is not really *him* or her who reifies me).

Being aware of that, of the formality of this ontological irrelevance of the other, raises other aspects of a negative morality. The usual affirmative mechanism consists of blaming the other for the fact of the being cannot be lived affirmatively, without visualizing the formal character of this "fault" and the radical innocence of the other. In attempting to recover a being they never had and on which they never obtained any right, human beings kill each other and compulsively give birth to other humans within an expansive policy characterized by aggressiveness and occupation. An ethical outcome of the recognition of the formal character of the other's fault and innocence will be the systematical refusal to put the other in the place of not-being, consolidating him as a "negative neighbor", as a partner in absence, as an over-imposed colleague of lacking and missing.

It is an interesting magical mechanism that humans put in work when they connect the total disposing of the other's life (the newborn baby or the prisoner of war) to the attempt of establishing something affirmative in the world, as if the other's own body, in his defenselessness, was a kind of guarantee, a sort of "hostage" or "sponsor". When somebody have another person as a prisoner of whom he may dispose of his feeding, sleeping, sexuality, etc, he creates a strong feeling of *domain over being*; as if by total disposal of the other his own being was

achievable at last, as though the other's body was a kind of bridge to something he could never reach by himself. The connection is certainly magical: one could take thousands of prisoners or kill millions of people or get plenty of children and descendents without one single trace of being having appeared on the face of the Earth, in order to be affirmatively lived. We must realize *that the other is not the place of not-being (although all circumstances incriminate him), but just his accidental and passing face.*

The elimination of "enemies" is one of the most typical forms affirmative societies use to deal with this ignored and displaced negativity. Through a conflictive commerce with my enemies, I can always postpone the structural negative for the time after their death. In this sense, there is no better "entertainment" than the game of war, a deviation affirmative society has used and abused throughout its whole bloody history. The empirical "enemies" forged in the intra-world make us forget about the Great Enemy, which is certainly not nature, but its visualization as strange and evil. The construction of the enemy is an important part of that transformation of negativity into evil. Therefore, in the *Project of negative ethics* it was said that humans, under the impossibility of constructing a paradise, decided to construct a manageable hell. The manipulation of the others is a strange way of dealing with the negative, since the others are at the same impossible situation we are, and they are certainly not guilty of being my compulsive neighbors of not-being. The "creation" of the enemy is, thus, the apotheosis of concealment.

As we have seen before, procreating is also to dispose of the other in his own person and to operate the magical mechanism of a pretense instauration of being, now through the presence of the son. In a minimalist ethics such as negative survival, procreation must certainly appear as an ontologically and morally problematic luxury. The living-with-the-negative seems to make clear sense as normative option for an already existing being; but it seems unjustifiable to give birth to anyone in order to live-with-the-negative. On the other hand, it is impossible

to educate people negatively. *Education is a fatally affirmative enterprise, although this conceived as "critical"*. It seems inevitable education should be based on the construction of the world, on the presentation of being as if it existed; this is certainly what the sons demand and what they need for living; and it is also what we ethically owe them to the strict extent we were not able to refrain ourselves from procreating.

Since they are already here, we owe our sons the world. In this sense, an education cannot be "critical" until the last consequences because if it were, it would inevitably end up in the de-construction of the world, or in reducing the world to its minimal layout, something the sons are certainly not prepared to face. Once the sons are there, looking at us, we are forced to drastically decrease the critical levels of analysis about the world, since, if we intended to be really critical, we better should not have given them birth. Therefore, the presence of a son inevitably implies the unquestioning of some sector of the world; we "clean up" some spaces of intra-world in order to put there, momentarily "safe", our unprotected offspring.

In a certain way, the fatally affirmative character of any education process is a kind of "moral expense" for having given birth to the son. (Therefore, a philosopher, to the strict extent he understands himself as radically critical, should never take over the task of educating a son without risking, *ipso facto*, to deny himself as a philosopher; that gives an argumentative content to what is commonly seen as a frivolous joke about the incompatibility between philosophy and fatherhood). Paradoxically, the endless asking of children about matters of life is usually of a radical, philosophical kind. However, *in the questioning of children, we find, at the same time, the greatest radical character in the questioning and the most intense demand for affirmativeness*. Each one of us has been born with the absolute and inalienable right of having a world. Therefore, the usual intra-worldly discourse pretending to transmit a kind of "ethics of minimal procreating" (birth-rate control) is superficial, as if having "only" two kids or rather fourteen had any relevant ethical-ontological difference. Between one and a thousand, there are only intra-worldly

differences. From the ethical-radical point of view, the only possible “birth-rate control” is total abstention.

Faced the allegation that, if this was universalized mankind would be extinguished, we shall answer that what we are trying to elucidate here is the ultimate ground of an *ethical responsible life*, not the conditions of indefinite keeping alive, not even in terms of the species as a whole. So perhaps survival at any cost may be incompatible – why not? – to the exercising of morality. Thus, we should understand the difference between humanity and humankind. Perhaps moral could demand humankind to be extinguished in order to morally safe humanity. If we are not disposed to take it to the end, then we should accept our ethics of second degree, in which case it has to be formally transformed into a kind of administration of human life, not free from all dangers of cynicism in its political appraisal about continuing or not, according to powerful institutions. Of course, the extinction of humankind is not, by force, part of a program of negative survival; but certainly, survival at any cost could never be either.

Could abstention – as self-suppression – remain as a mere “regulative idea”, expressed as the initial purpose of not procreating but in such way that procreation can eventually occur? It would be wrong to suppose that the attitude of different social classes about negativity is the same. A negative ethics will undoubtedly appreciate the fact of restituting to human beings all brightness, variety and fascination of an intense life defined by risk. But on the other hand, it would be desirable that this vital intensity, with its constant putting its own value to test, was not dangerous to anyone else except their users, producing no disturbances in the ontology in any sense. The explosions of uncontrolled vitality should be dimensioned again within a reflective appropriation of life exuberance. By maintaining the merely regulative character of the idea of my self-suppression, I do not disturb the other in the way I would have if I kept abstention also as a mere regulative idea. Therefore, it seems that, in a negative survival, abstention must be demanded in a rigorously literal sense, as in the case of *not* killing. My own life

should be subjected to the comings and goings that might demand sacrifice, but not the life of the others: in a first degree morality, the life of the others is absolutely inviolable. Therefore, not taking life and not giving life cannot be merely regulative ideas. Negative survival is ruled by a rigorous principle of *ontological parsimony*.

The structural “declining”, the vacating, the decaying, may also be expressed in terms of *agony*. In strictly ethical reflection, it is hard to conceive a human being who has become aware of illusion and keeps living after that; but in esthetics, this is not difficult to frame. A comedian is at the same time inside and outside her comedy. This domain in which comedy is known as comedy and, notwithstanding, suffered and endured, is the level where the negative survivor tries to live ethically, and not only in the sense of an “acting out”. The very agony in which we have always lived (if we do not let ourselves be disturbed by the current ontologization of “time elapsing”) is deeply transformed through action; and it is not gratuitous, therefore, that we call “agonists” the actors – protagonists, deuteron-agonists – in the sense of being sufferers, patients, beings who support themselves on illusion and maintain the illusion in their own agonic bodies.

Agonism supposes repetition. The basic idea is that nothing can be lived for the first time, but only, at least, for the second. The negative survivor, as an *ethical agonist*, has to come for the first time to things through repetition, even when the same gestures and figures are reproduced. It is as if repetition exorcizes things from their impossibility, re-posing them. Thus, reposition reposes the illusion now unmasked and, in its own reposition, makes it at last livable in a negative life. However, the comedian always keeps one foot on the negative that compelled her to re-present what could not be presented, that was somehow “not presentable”. The validity of the presented or reposed is so strong that even the greatest of the ethical skeptics can understand (and be lively touched by) an esthetic work which presents exactly “the same” that produced his skepticism. On the stage we may, at last, take advantage of a powerful control of the situation which we would never have if we tried to live the world in its mere position, as affirmative ethics tries in

vain. The comedian appropriates the world through the extraordinary power of form.

Perhaps this “esthetic” model is one of the most valuable indications about what would a negative survival be like, and helps also see how the other four features could be fulfilled. Maybe the ethical values can never be satisfied in the world, but only repeated and “agonized”. The repetition of aggressiveness – which is inevitable in the instauration of being – is already a way to possess it. Perhaps what ethics needs the most is not a militant or a fanatic, but an agonist, in the sense of a moral actor. *Repetition is clearly not moving to a world where being is finally possible, but reposition, in the only existing world, of the inexorable impossibility of being.* Dramatization absolutely does not get out from the trails of the not presentable. On the contrary, through the monotonous repetition of representations, negative human beings put their bodies without concealments into the very core of impossibility. If something has been “gained”, it was certainly not something new, but only the possibility of presenting what has always been lost.

In the Spanish preface to this book, Fernando Savater considers "ethics" as “...some sort of symbolic articulation of human self-affirmation (...) it is in itself nothing but a vital manifestation: ethics, well understood, is a philosophical consequence of self-preservation instinct. That's why I cannot ask whether it is 'better' to be alive or not: the word 'better' has no meaning except from life and to celebrate what is convenient to it in one way or another. (...) The principal merit of this book of Julio Cabrera is to reveal and to prove that, a contrario, there can be no ethics but the affirmative”. The previous reflections could serve as a minute answer to Savater's statements; they may be true only on secondary ethics, about an already politicized ethics. The primary ethics may be incompatible to the interests of life, so it is not necessarily “a symbolic articulation of human self-affirmation”. The acceptance of “life”, on the contrary, is also the acceptance of aggressiveness, unconditional self-defense and transgression of FEA. Unless the notions of “life”, self-affirmation” and “self-preservation” are enlarged in an unusual manner, they cannot be regularly compatible to morality. If Savater includes abstaining, dying, self-suppression as a regulative idea, minimalism, exposing to danger, etc., into

“self-affirmation”, then there are surely not non-affirmative ethics. However, in this case, the notion of “life” (and of “affirmative”) gets empty, and we cannot capture important differences among forms of life.

This is so, of course, in case we want to maintain the reflection in the argumentative level. Another thing is the acceptance of life in a Nietzschean sense, clearly not argumentative (see Epilogue II). On this case, it is not that ethics is “at the service of life”, but that life – in its irresponsible exuberance – eliminates each and every moral attempt, affirmative or negative. This kind of move is worth-respecting. But we should also remember that, because we are dying creatures since we are born, an absolute notion of “life” is not philosophically conceivable. This was the meaning of saying that, essentially, every living is a survival; every living is a not total dying. This way, we can start thinking that, on the contrary of what Savater said, maybe there cannot be any other ethics than the negative, because extreme affirmativeness leaves to the Nietzschean position, which represents the total primacy of life over any kind of ethics).

Note 8. On the impossible conciliation between ethics and politics, based on an analysis of their relations with death

In virtue of the basic ethical articulation of “going against the own interests”, it seems absolutely typical of morality, radically thought, that, in case of serious conflict, morality can lead us to death. Death seems to be the maximum of the “going against the own interests” in the sense of the fundamental ethical articulation. Therein, ethics neither preserves me nor takes care of me, but on the contrary, it exposes me, puts me at risk.

On the other hand, politics is a domain of human rationality much more flexible, which allows me, in case of frontal conflict with the other, the use of

indefinite negotiation (in diplomacy) and, if necessary, of violence (in war). Politics, therefore, does not expose me, but on the contrary, it protects me the most, gives me the right to defend myself indefinitely. On this regard, ethics and politics seem reconcilable only in the non-radical level, that is, while it does not come to the extreme conflict: coming to that point, it seems impossible to be ethical and political at one time, because it is impossible to act towards indefinite self-defense and, at the same time, acting towards self-exposing. The ethical values are not negotiable and politics is the scope of endless negotiation. This is the starting point. However, although it is clear that politically maintaining life may lead us to kill (and, therein, getting us out of morality in the radical sense), it is not so clear that ethically accepting the disposal of my life does not equally leads us to the same point. Let us think in parts.

It is useful here, and perhaps indispensable, to remember again the distinction between first degree and second degree morality. I have called first degree morality the domain of actions in which the life of the other is *absolutely preserved as inviolable*, without *any* consideration about the person beyond the pure and simple fact of being a human. Any morality that presents exceptions to this principle of absolute inviolability, that is, which accepts that sometimes it is morally acceptable to kill human beings X – where X is some kind of qualification – is already a second degree morality which requires, to be constituted and sustained, the transgression of the first degree morality. In affirmative philosophical societies people like saying the great “moral progress” from ancient to modern times has been the demand for universality, that is, the idea humans have some rights (among which the most important is the “right to life”) not for being Athenian, or free citizens or kings or workers, but, purely and simply *for being humans*. However this progress sounds fictitious if we see that, for example, in “fair wars” as much as in capital punishment, the affirmative well-thinkers consider as morally right to kill *certain* human beings for having some qualification, for example, for “having undertaken expansion wars”, or “threatening the harmony among nations”, or “constituting themselves in dangers for the pillars of society”, and so on. The

inviolability “of human life” is understood, in those affirmative contexts, as inviolability of the lives *of the own allies, of the protectors of democracy, of the progressive forces of society, of those who do not want to see their homeland humiliated*, and so on.

From the disregard of human life for not being Athenian to the disregard of human life for not being pro-democracy, there are certainly differences, *however not in the radical level of respect for human life simply for being human*: from this point of view, Greeks, as much as Moderns, got out of the scope of a first degree morality; because, in spite of expressive changes from ancient to modern ethics, the affirmative characteristic of these theories has always been maintained. The justification of “self-defense” is fragile in the radical level: the “barbarians” threatened the Athenians as the Muslims threaten Western world nowadays. In both cases, we grant the right of killing “those who threaten us” (free citizens or occidentals). Modern affirmative societies, that allege to have overcome the partial (not universal) morality of the Greeks, are the same that totally agree with bombing the military bases of Sadam Hussein where many people *die*. There may be, I do not deny it, rational arguments to make important differences between ancient and modern ethics in this problematic context, but one cannot say we have overcome the Greeks by introducing the requirement of universality regarding the issue of respect for human life *simply for being human*. This is basically impossible for an affirmative ethics.

Leaving aside for the moment whether there may or not be a *moral* justification to kill human beings with some characteristic X, some attempts of *rational* justification of those actions clearly appear. A partial disconnection between morality and rationality seems plausible: though every moral action is rational, maybe the opposite does not occur in the sense morality does not have the monopole of rationality. For example, the two following arguments may be presented, and they usually are, to kill other people: 1. We could kill human beings who, through their action and behavior, have already got out of morality and, in a

certain sense, have denied themselves as human beings. Hitler, by programming the Final Solution, has got out of the scope of humanity and, consequently, it would be rational to kill him. 2. As a consequence of the previous argument, we would kill not only to punish or in virtue of a rigid moral decision, but because the human beings of this kind threaten, with their actions, the rest of human beings, so killing them is a matter of self-defense. These reasons lead to distinguish between expansion or invasion wars and wars for reestablishing order, and these last ones are considered “fair wars”, at least in the sense of being rational. The progress from the Greeks to Modernity would then consist of, while the characteristic X of those “killable humans” was a requirement of birth and blood lineage, the characteristic X, which is nowadays considered as legitimating of killing, is produced by human beings themselves, who can become X through their actions and put their lives and the lives of others at risk.

The problem, when getting out of the calm and simplicity of first degree morality, is that, suddenly, humans are in the possession of mortal weapons of difficult handling: *the possibility of determining certain humans have stopped being humans and are, therefore, eliminable, and also the always open possibility of killing in “legitimate self-defense”*. Both things are diffuse, even though Hitler and other treacherous homicides are easy and rhetorical examples always at hand. The majority of cases, the common aggressions of everyday life, are not as easy to decide as the so-called “great crimes of humanity”. What should we do in order “to stop being human” and become, therefore, “eliminable”? Kill? Which way? How many? How often? Which attitude? And, on the other hand, what does “self-defense” really mean? What are the limits between self-defense and aggression (and, therefore, between “expansive wars” and “merely defensive wars”)? When they are asked about, all nations at war declare they are only “defending themselves” (not too different from the men involved in a bar quarrel). Is there not the saying, in war and in joke, “the best defense is attack”? Offensive and defensive actions are intermixed in an inseparable way. In referring to “being Athenian”, there is indeed a rational difference in favor of “being for the democratic

forces”, but the qualification of some human beings as “enemies” and, therefore, eliminable, is identical in the Peloponnesian war and in the Golf War. *Affirmative societies, in a clear way, rationally justify the qualification of certain humans as being “eliminable”, and this should be fully assumed. Human life as such is not inviolable in affirmative societies and this must be systematically remembered in the context of moral condemnations of suicide and other human attitudes, as one of the greatest evaluative inconsistencies of affirmativeness.*

By assuming its fatally secondary moral character, affirmative societies accept having to bear some curious paradoxes, as “wars for peace”, or “performing violence in order to end violence”, or “killing murderers for having killed”, and so on. Affirmative modernity sometimes criticizes the frankly morbid taste of “post-moderns” for paradoxes, without realizing its own consideration of “inviolability of human life” fatally results in one of the worst paradoxes of all times: killing in defense of life.

Negative ethics wanted to drastically avoid moving into the domain of these disturbing paradoxes, assuming an initial compromise with first degree morality *to its last consequences*. Thus, in a negative context of thinking: (a) there is absolutely nothing a human can do to become “eliminable” *based on ethical reasons*; (b) there is no *ethical* obligation of unconditionally and indefinitely defending or preserving oneself. So, in a negative ethics, my own life is always at disposal and can be given in exchange for the life of the other. An easy objection is saying the affirmative is also disposed to die, for example, in going into a “fair war” and falling dead; but affirmative humans die fighting, that is, *killing and failing*, the only way an affirmative accepts to die. In affirmative societies, certain values are fostered since childhood, as “courage”, “bravery”, “not letting yourself be scared”, “confronting others”, “to die fighting” and so on; others, on the contrary, are denigrated, as the “cowardice” of giving up, of vacating, of abstaining, stimulating bellicose values.

Negative ethics does not talk of the “inviolability of human life” including indiscriminately the life of others and the own life. The articulation I/others is fundamental in negative ethics because it is the life of *the other* what is, for me, (in each case) inviolable. Nothing the others can do will steal from them their inviolability, since this, in a first degree ethics, refers to their *being itself*, and not to the things they *do* or *may do* within the intra-world. On the other hand, I do not accept, as a negative moral agent, to confront somebody else in an attitude of systematic and unconditional self-defense, even if their attitude is offensive. My own life is certainly also inviolable, but not for me, but for the other. Ethically, I am bound to give my life away if necessary and not to maintain it indefinitely, because the one who must care about the inviolability of my person is not me, but the other. If the other does not take care of me, there is nothing I can do *from the ethical point of view*, and this is the dramatic connection ethics maintains to death, precisely the connection politics suspends in its own instauration, as we will see now.

The reasons of “self-defense” and of “non-humanity of the other” are not accepted in negative ethics as *ethical* reasons to eliminate people, even when we may accept them as *rational or affective* motives of another kind, political or strategic, rational domains which are, among others, characterized by the fatally secondary nature of their morality. *This implies negative ethics accepts there may be rational or affective motives to get out of the scope of morality (for example, killing other people), but certainly there are not ethical motives to do so.* It is philosophically convenient to clearly delimitate the scope of morality, in order to know when we are inside it *and when we are not*; on the contrary, we take the risk – so well seen by Kantian ethics – humans considers “moral” everything they effectively get to do, following a principle of inexhaustible “self-benevolence”. Accepting there are sometimes *rational motives for not being moral* is a tragic element completely characteristic of a negative ethics.

It seems evident the life of the other is not respected in the case of hetero-elimination, unless we argue, in a political-strategic level, the elimination of some people is convenient for the life of most part of mankind. With that, it is perfectly accepted we have slipped out of primary morality. However, what is most important to ask, within a negative ethics, is whether the life of the other is really respected *in self-elimination*. Because someone could allege, in the same previous line, that if I do not kill Hitler, if I let myself be killed by him, I leave him an open gate (or at least I do not contribute in anything to shut it) so he can kill other people and offending morality in the primary sense, something that seems to be a negative ethics' concern. Therefore, there are motives to kill as well as not to kill, but *morality* does not seem to be present in any of the two sides. This situation seems one hundred percent tragic: whether I kill the other and get out of first degree morality or else I let myself be killed by the other, remaining in the first degree morality, but leaving an open door for the other to freely offend first degree morality at will. It seems I must transgress primary ethics if I kill as much as if I let myself be killed (and here we meet some of the ethical-ontological intuitions of Lévinas). Sometimes, an ethics is criticized for being "impracticable"; however, in a practical context, and understanding morality as of first degree, *an ethics has the obligation of being "impracticable"*, indicating this way the very impossibility *of being* ethically.

The matter seems to be put about the others when present and when not present. In case of conflict, I confront someone concrete. The questioning presented above means: sometimes, killing someone who is present means helping others who are not present, and letting you be killed by anyone who is present may represent harming others who are not present. The negative approach shall introduce a complication here, through some additional principle of the following kind: the primacy of the responsibility towards the present other over the responsibility for the not present one. Indeed, by killing the present other I *necessarily* violate first degree morality in the literal sense and without euphemisms, concerning this person who falls dead to my feet, before my eyes. Negative ethics does not allow killing people speculating about the possible

advantages of that elimination to other people who are not there. It may be, I insist, rational to kill him, based on those possible advantages, but certainly it is not ethical in the primary sense. By letting myself be killed, I may harm others who are not present, but this is a mere possibility before the total and imposing factuality of my killing *this present person* in order to avoid other not present killings. So, there should be a principle establishing that, *in case of extreme and inevitable conflict*, moral obligations are primarily obligations about present people.

Politics is the rational level in which morality has been assumed, since always, as secondary. Politics is able not to develop an ethics but just a kind of legal organization morally justified in the secondary level, which seeks essentially the survival of mankind (even to the cost of humanity), survival only reachable through the justified elimination of some humans with some characteristics, and accepting all the morality compatible with this project for survival. Politics strongly believes a first degree morality is a morality for angels (and so, not strictly a morality), and pragmatically starts from the principle we are not angels and, consequently, the most we can achieve in the world is an external harmonization of interests, but not disinterest. Thus, a supposed “moralization of politics” ends up inevitably in a politicizing of moral, in which the inviolability of human being is considered as a principle impossible to be obeyed, and where we can only elaborate *a hierarchical list of humans who are “eliminable”, guided by careful second degree moral criteria.*

This is serious if we think abominable forms of life, such as gangsters and delinquency in general, also have solid “moral principles” and codes of honor, within the fundamental rupture of primary morality. *Definitely, it is very easy to have a second degree morality.* The prison guard may be very kind or even friendly to his prisoner, as the Nazi soldiers were extremely kind, sometimes, to the ancient ladies who got out of the crowded trains in concentration camps, and as exploiting bosses may allow his underpaid employees to drink coffee twice a day instead of only once. However, if the secondary moral level remains so generously open, the

danger consists of giving complements to Saddam Hussein for having rigorously respected the truces and for never having bombed civil populations but “only” military targets, or to praise the Nazis for having killed many of their victims in a fast way without provoking suffering. If staying in morality is difficult and something only angels could do, it is excessively easy for demons to stay in politicized ethics, whatever they may do. It seems intuitively more adequate trying to make, *ab initio*, an ethics for angels than one for demons. I insist: that ethics is “impracticable” should not be an objection but, in some sense, a sign we are going on the right way.

However, the negative survivor, by choosing to keep living, has also accepted, since always, to live in the domain of politics, of indefinite negotiation and violence. We cannot keep living without doing politics but, in case of extreme and inevitable conflict, we cannot even die without doing it (in the sense, seen before, of letting ourselves be killed by a moral transgressor like Hitler). The “ethical victory” of the dead, described on the previous pages on the analysis on Hegel, is an inner victory, but it can open the doors to immorality in the primary sense. Anyway, the only way a negative life can be political without stop being ethical in the primary sense is the questioning of the given through the force of the own absence, in the sense of the victory of the dead over his killer through the unbearable aggression of self-destruction. *The “negative militancy” consists not of having a utopia but of transforming oneself in utopia, of being the emptiness of must be, the very normative gap.* Through his attitude, the negative human enriches the content of his death so, in the moment of dying, this content bursts and commoves the established.

To think on the origin, returning to it once and again (birth is, in the present work, the privileged *locus* of moral reflection), may be, in the perspective of the politics of being, “reactionary”, “archaizing”, and “conservative”. Whoever gets stuck in the Former - perplexed by something primitively unacceptable – will never be forgiven. He is demanded *to go on*, to continue, to be always able to follow “the

great changes”, never to return to what has already been thought. To be in the movement of “progress” is to submerge into hetero-aggressive illusions and into a convinced and arduous struggle against the others, in the dispute for the domain of some sectors of the intra-world. This enraptures, gains adepts and proselytes, makes forget the grounding impotencies, the non negotiable. It gives the impression we are “doing something”, instead of remaining with “arms crossed”, uncommitted and irresponsible. However, in a negative vein, dying may be revolutionary. Those who are able to see the ontological-structural dimension of life will realize that abstaining, in the broad sense, may still be the least of evils, the minimum transgression of morality in a tragic world in which not transgression is impossible.

Note 9. A logical-ethical paradox

There are two things frequently required at the same time from an ethical theory: 1. to be universally valid, and 2. that its author is coherent with its demands, in the sense of having “moral authority” to formulate her theory. But these two requirements could be impossible to satisfy at the same time.

Let us examine the following example: if I say “*All philosophy teachers are dishonest*” (a sentence Wittgenstein frequently tells to his friend Norman Malcolm) and since *I am* myself (Wittgenstein, in the example) a philosophy teacher, we have the subsequent situation: (a) if I say that sentence and sustain its *universal* truth, this should affect *everyone* and, therefore, myself as well: consequently, I am also dishonest. But, in this case, I have no “moral authority” to say this about philosophy teachers in general, since I am, myself, what I intend to criticize. This is how our evaluation mechanisms usually work: in order to accuse others, I am expected to be “clean”, a wicked man cannot accuse other wicked men, etc. (b) But, on the other hand, if I say that sentence, but I, being a philosophy teacher, am

not dishonest, then my sentence is not universally true, because I am, myself, the exception.

The logical requirement is that I must state only universal truths, and the ethical requirement is that I must state only sentences I have moral authority to state. However, when I state sentences as the above mentioned, I cannot satisfy both things at the same time: if I attend the ethical condition, I do not satisfy the logical one and vice-versa. If my own moral criticism affects me, then I have no moral authority to advance it, but if it does not affect me, my sentence fails logically because it does not apply universally. It seems that, in the impossibility to sustain both things, one of them should be chosen and the other one, discarded.

The negative human being makes a clear option in favor of the logical requirement, dramatically accepting that, by staying alive (and perhaps also by dying), it is not possible to have “moral authority” to say all she would ethically wish to say, or to denounce all she would ethically wish to denounce; because, for the very fact of being, she knows she has already inevitably lost her “moral authority” about a great amount of issues. The negative human has nothing to allege against a moral denounce which would also involve her own person: when she says “Everyone”, she means literally “Everyone, including myself”, because she understands self-inclusion as a kind of “logic self-suppression”, inevitable in every responsible survival. The ethical requirement of “having moral authority to say it” is an attempt – of affirmative character – to “leave me ethically safe” from the critical virulence of my own moral statement. However, accepting self-application, by preserving universality even though it affects me, I recover the ethical requirement in another deeper level, being rigorously faithful to the objective content of my own statement, even when harming myself under the form of taking from me the “moral authority” to advance the statement.

In a certain sense, the full assumption of lack of moral authority is a way of assuming the fundamental incoherence of being. Part of the everyday death lived

by the negative human consists precisely in formulating theses whose critical content affects herself, as if staying alive at the logic's cost produced a kind of everyday "ethical suicide", consisting of being obliged to keep making moral appreciations without having the radical right to pronounce them. If we are authentically moral, we cannot destroy the universality of our own statements only to protect our person, or to obtain "the respect of the others", so they can see how I am "coherent to my principles". My "moral authority" is simply part of my fragile survival: someone has to believe or not in what I say, analyzing its theoretical-objective content, and not asking whether I have or not moral authority to state it. I certainly do not have it, in the radical level, though I can always constitute, in the intra-world, one or many justifications of secondary morality within the immorality; this seems inevitable when one has chosen to stay alive.

PART IV

Negative ethics and some contemporary ethical theories on the issue of moral responsibility concerning possible children: discourse ethics (Habermas), moral of seriousness (Tugendhat), critical utilitarianism (Hare), Empirical pessimism (Benatar)

Habermas and the irrecoverable asymmetry of birth

(a) On two types of Skepticism

In his text, "Diskursethik-Notizen zu einem Begründungsprogramm", included in the book *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln*, of 1983, Habermas tries to dialogue with what he calls "the skeptic" (*der Skeptiker*), delineating an imaginary discussion in seven rounds (Habermas, "Ethics of Discours, page 86 of the Spanish edition). A fundamental moment of that imaginary dialogue is the one where Habermas uses, against the "skeptic", a resource which Apel turned popular: "...*the moral theorist (der Moraltheoretiker) can make the skeptic see that, when he starts a concrete argumentation aiming to refute ethical cognitivism, he has to inevitably make argumentative presuppositions whose propositional content contradicts his objection*" (page 92. The translation is mine). Explicitly quoting Apel: "*Anything I cannot deny without incurring in an evident self-contradiction and, at the same time, neither can I deductively ground without a logic-formal *petitio principii*, belongs to those pragmatic-transcendental presuppositions of argumentation which will be always necessary to recognize if though the language game of argumentation may maintain its sense*" (*Idem*).

In the last rounds of the dialogue, Habermas describes the skeptic as someone *who refuses argumentation*: "A skeptic who predicts he will be surprised by performative contradictions will avoid, from the beginning, the game of mistake and will deny all argumentation" (page 109). "Notwithstanding, with the denial of argumentation, the skeptic cannot, for example, deny, not even indirectly, he shares a certain form of socio-cultural life... in one word, he may deny morality, but not the ethicity of the vital relations in which he, so to speak, participates everyday; otherwise he would have to seek refuge in suicide or in a serious mental disease" (page 110). And else: "There is no option to remain absent from the action contexts

oriented to understanding for long periods. This would suppose the retreat to monastic isolation of strategic action or to schizophrenia and suicide. In the long run, such thing is self-destructive". (page 112). Through the imaginary dialogue with the skeptic, Habermas tries to make the postulate of necessarily discursive ethics to be accepted; the strength of the argument is pragmatic because, with relative independence from the semantic content of the skeptic's counter-claim, he shows that, in order to be transmitted – with all its negativity force – it is necessary to move already within a discursive community; so his own argumentation is a self-refutation of his posture.

I believe skepticism is a critical attitude of great use and productivity in philosophy and Habermas himself develops the steps of his theory in a very fruitful confrontation with the skeptic's questioning, in such way that – even if skeptic is finally "refuted" – we should thank his presence and his irritating and stimulating challenges. However, I believe we should show Habermas he has a very partial notion of the "skeptic", by considering him only as someone who "refuses to argue". Without the clear pejorative sense the very term "skeptic" has for him, we can think of other type of "skepticism" which is precisely in the antipodes of the one considered by him; it is the "skepticism" *of a person who, far from refusing argumentation, accepts to argue infinitely until the end, radically, achieving results and outcomes that might shock the sensibility of the "ethical cognitivist" in the Habermas style.*

Since the beginning of this book, I have taken an attitude of that kind (which, in my view, is not "skeptical" in any pejorative sense, nor "nihilistic"), presenting the argumentations on the first chapters as of "a radical and anti-skeptical moralist" (using there Habermas' conception of skepticism), but *disposed to argue until the end, employing the same conceptual tools supplied by the moral cognitivist.* I will call "empty skeptic" the skeptic who refuses to argue, and "plenary skeptic" this who accepts to argue infinitely and radically. Perhaps the "skepticism" is maintained in the negative conviction of the plenary skeptic that it is not necessary,

in argumentation, to destroy concepts and theories, but only put them in movement, let them live. From a negative point of view, the most appropriate way of denying a concept is not killing it, but – on the contrary – letting it die naturally.

Habermas seems much more unarmed before this kind of “skeptic”, who, “instead of retreating from argumentation”, invites to an argumentation *of all*, including of the very basis of moral legitimacy of human life. This kind of “skeptic” certainly does not fall under the usual accusations of “pragmatic self-contradiction” because he accepts, completely and from the beginning, his belonging to a community which argues and presents justifications, and he manifests therein, a kind of ultra-illustrated and ultra-modern intelligence, with no “postmodern” mistrust or suspicion destructive of rationality, but, on the contrary, committed to its more coherent and regular exercise. The empty skeptic, on the other hand, is still an affirmative philosopher and therefore he is systematically defeated by the “dogmatic” (if we can call like this, according to Kant’s vocabulary, the skeptic’s adversary), who simply threatens him - as we saw – with mental disease and suicide.

The plenary skeptic, in retaliation, will argumentatively show the dogmatic he should accept, for example, a possible morality of suicide, using his own categories (for example, on the lines developed on Part II of this book, or on others, or those in Ancient philosophy or on the texts of Hume, Kamlah, etc). This way, even when the dogmatic will have managed to lead the empty skeptic to suicide, the plenary skeptic will have managed to lead the dogmatic to having to accept a possible morality of that act. Though the argumentative principles allow condemning the empty skeptic’s undeveloped self-destruction (in the level of what can be considered a “not formal suicide”), those same principles can allow ethically-rationally justifying the “developed” self-destruction presented by some radically reflective philosophy, dogmatic or plenary skeptic.

(b) Habermas playing with children

Thus, the plenary skeptic is disposed to accept the grounds of Habermas' "communicative ethics" without any problem. Let us briefly remember them, through the same text already mentioned:

"The attempt of grounding ethics in the form of a logic of moral argumentation only has a perspective of success when we can identify, in the level where moral dilemmas arise, a pretension of special validity bounded to commands and norms..." (Ethics of discourse, pages 67-68). Habermas distinguishes here, as it is well known, between "strategic" interactions and "communicative" ones. I quote at length: *"I call communicative the interactions in which the participants coordinate in common agreement their action plans; the agreement obtained in each case is measured by the inter-subjective acknowledgment of the pretensions of validity. In the case of processes of linguistically explicit understanding, the agents pose pretensions of validity with their speech acts, to the extent they are reciprocally in accordance about some issues and they also pose pretensions of truth, of righteousness, of veracity... while, in strategic action, an agent empirically influences the other through the threat of sanctions or the promise of gratifications... in communicative action, each agent appears rationally motivated towards an integrated action, and so by the strength of the illocutionary binding effect of a speech act offer"* (page 68).

The Habermasian conception of universality should be understood within this framework: *"The moral principle is conceived in such way it excludes as invalid those norms that do not get the qualified approval from all the possible addressees (aller möglicherweise Betroffenen)... the institution expressed in the idea of capability of universalization of maxims means...: the valid norms shall gain the recognition of all affected ones"* (page 73). *"Only through the grounding of this bridge principle we can advance towards discursive ethics."* (Page 76). Habermas emphasizes that, in moral argumentations, there is a cooperative effort from which

a general will shall arise (pages 77 and 78). “*Of course, only a real participation of each affected can avoid the misinterpretation of one’s own interests by the others... on the other hand, the description each one presents about their interests has also to remain always open to the others’ criticism* “. (page 78)

The plenary skeptical could put in question universality in the field of moral reflection, or rather the specific interpretation Habermas offers about it within communicative theory. However, his “skeptic” strategy will be of other kind: it will consist of accepting the theory – with its universalization principle and everything – and take it to ultimate applications in order to verify its mode of functioning. Universality, in theories as Habermas’, is strongly connected, as we have seen, to the notion of “consideration of all the affected”, evidently trying to prevent the manipulation of the others through decisions that affect them but in which they are not allowed to participate because of having some permanent or transitory feature. The “affected” who seem, *ab initio*, more helpless before the always open possibility of manipulation, are the ones who can generically be called “absent people”. “Present people” can, in general, try at least to claim their rights to participation in decisions affecting them. But how can be taken into consideration the absent people’s interests?

About “absent people”, it seems possible to identify three fundamental types: 1. Living people who are not present at the moment of decision making; 2. People yet unborn; 3. People already dead. The plenary skeptic totally agrees with many authors (Hans Jones, Wilhelm Kamlah, R. M. Hare, among others) who have considered the necessity of defining moral responsibilities before “absent people” precisely because they are infinitely subjected to manipulation. Notwithstanding, and following the argumentative lines developed on this book, the type 2 of absent people seem to be the most unprotected from this danger and consequently the ones who would demand, in certain way, a greater moral responsibility; because the living absent can always be called or convoked to claim their rights, and the dead may have had the opportunity to do so, or have said or written something so

their rights would be respected. But the yet unborn are abysmally more helpless than the other types of “absent people”, because, as we have seen before, *it is their own being that is decided without them* and not any intra-worldly aspect of this being. Of an absent living human being we could say: “We could not find him”, “We forgot to convoke him”, etc. And of a dead one, we could say: “He would certainly have agreed”, “By taking this decision, we continue his work”, etc. But in the case of a yet unborn one, we get silent; we have no justifications based on his being because it is precisely his being we are disposed to constitute.

On the issue of birth, a range of norms are taken into account, of which the basic one is, as we saw in a previous text, the same one God had to assume – alone and asymmetrically – at the moment of creating, in general, a world: that “to be bad is better than being nothing”, something we could consider as an affirmative meta-norm. Based on that, the plenary skeptic could say to the Habermasian dogmatic: “When you talk about ‘recognition of all the affected ones’, you are thinking *not radically*, but only of intra-worldly situations and interactions among already living people, without thinking of *absolute absent ones*”. The super-norm which decides a birth (to be bad is better than being nothing) and all the sub-norms subjected to it cannot obtain a moral justification *inside* Habermas’s communicative ethics, since the decision in which such norms are applied is taken, for obvious reasons, without counting on the participation of the main “affected” one, because it is evident that our own birth *is* of our interest, and *we are* affected by it.

Thus, the ones who decide the birth of a person are obliged to act *strategically* and *manipulatively*, so, according to the principles of communicative ethics, any way to “general will” concerning *this act* is obstructed. Consequently, giving birth to someone is based on ethical-communicatively invalid norms. So Habermas’ proof serves only to verify the validity of intra-worldly actions, but it may take as invalid some fundamental actions connected to the very being of the world and of human beings. This way, *it would only be a proof able to ponder second*

degree morality, that is, a morality that must suppose the transgression of more basic moral principles.

There are at least two less known replies of the dogmatic which would interest me to examine here: in the first one, it is alleged that, despite everything, the one who is going to be born *is present* in the decision of his birth through a certain “representative”. In the second line, it is accepted there is no possible representation, however it is alleged this is the only case it occurs, because it simply cannot be prevented; the proof only refers, as it is obvious, to people who are in condition of taking decisions.

Indeed, the “unborn” could be considered as being “present” in the decision of her birth, based on previsions about human nature or about the usual mechanisms of decision making, or as grounded on the belonging of every human being (even the unborn) to certain stables structures (for example, to a certain community whatsoever), all of them relevant previsions for taking the decision on birth. Therefore, Habermas and Apel use to frequently speak of “potential participants” on the dialogue, which indicates “the recognition of all affected ones” does not necessarily imply the physical presence of them. In the case of Kantian philosophy, since humans are “two-world citizens” – of the phenomonic and the noumenic world – their merely sensible birth matters little from the ethical-rational point of view. Getting in the perspective of the intelligible, the one who will be born has already been born for all the effects of the transcendental decision about her life, because, as a “noumenic being”, we already know all we need to know about her. The a priori baby will be absent only of his “merely sensible” birth and, therefore, of the empirical decision about her birth, but certainly not absent of the transcendental decision about it. However, this kind of answer obviously works with the metaphysical-transcendental basis supposed by Kant, but in declaredly “post-metaphysical” thinking, as of Apel’s and Habermas’, we cannot count, in the contexts of a discourse ethics, on this kind of expedient.

However, saying birth already belongs to the unlimited communication community, or to an ideal situation of speech, or to a community that has already accepted, since always, certain principles of argumentation, though they are all undoubtedly “post-metaphysical” statements, faces ethical dangers similar to those faced by the Kantian “metaphysical-transcendental prevision”, in the following problematic direction: if we are going to say the one who is being born *is* “represented”, in spite of not being physically present, *to which measure is it morally permissible to extend this “habilitation” to legitimately “represent” the absent?* The criterion was clear when we thought “the recognition of all the affected” was literal. The dogmatic may allege that, even in the case of living people who are already born, it is obvious there should be “representatives” of some kind in the multiple decisions taken about those people, being impossible to assemble them all in a room, allowing them to participate literally. The only aggravating, regarding the yet unborn, is that, in this case, we are radically unable to make any prevision of their will, managing intra-worldly information (as we can decide for the absent dentists, or for the absent Jewish, or for the absent underage, or for the absent boy scouts). In that case, every prevision shall be worldly.

But if so, any worldly-structural prevision we may do in occasion of the emergence of a person in the world should also include “negative” considerations. Within that prevision, neither a presumed “will to be born” nor the opposite could be universalized. (After all, many of the people we gave birth committed suicide, or got mad, or manifested they did not want to live, or wished they were never born). Therefore, by giving birth to someone, we are acting unilaterally and strategically, and manipulating the one who is being born, to the extent our decision, though following a rationally grounded “prevision”, contains a decision element which this “representation” does not resolve.

Let us suppose the dogmatic discards this line of thought and accepts birth is effectively coercive and asymmetric. This will not mean to him that giving birth to

someone is immoral but, so to speak, pre-moral, in the sense the proof is thought only to concern adult people who are already born and endowed with capability of decision. Therefore, not only the relations with the ones who are being born would be pre-moral, but also the relations we have with already born small children. Indeed, it can be logically deduced there cannot be ethical relationships with yet unborn from the fact – admitted by Habermas when he comments, in his text, Kohlberg’s theory of moral stages – there cannot be ethical relationships with small children, in the sense that, in relation to them, only authority prevails, as fear, punishment and coercion, a stage which should be considered a “moral stage” only in a rather generic sense. If there are no moral relationships, in a strong sense, with small children – let us say, children under five years old – through a perfect legitimate logic path, we could consider an unborn as a child of zero years old or less, being affected by the lack of moral relationships with children under five. Therefore, regarding a yet unborn, only authority and coercion prevail. So, on this line, the dogmatic admits this is the way it is and it cannot be changed, but he wants to keep the idea this is the unique case it occurs and the ethical-discursive proof, *from birth* onwards, at least from a certain point, can be applied without problems.

But the question the plenary skeptic makes here is the following: if the very being of the person is decided peremptorily, coercively and asymmetrically, strategically and manipulatively, how would humans be able to “cut”, in a given moment, the fundamental bond that links them to coercive and not communicatively decided asymmetry which affects them *in their own beings*? What intra-worldly eventuality could be able to contribute to cut this structural bond? How could humans demand, from a given moment, the strict satisfaction of the communicative conditions that define morality, if they are themselves originated from a rigorous dissatisfaction of such conditions? *How could a being that is infinitely dependent in her very being demand autonomy “afterwards”?* After what? Can, the “education” of the small child stop being, in this vein, the ineluctable continuation of basic authoritarian coercion which originated the child’s own being?

It would seem as if all that could be done afterwards is only to construct autonomy inside a fundamental heteronomy. All questions can be answered to the child (and the child, as the philosopher, is an inexorable question-making machine) to the extent those questions are intra-worldly, but the question on her own being cannot be answered, because it does not seem to be recoverable by ethics. Certainly, we love children, but, as we have seen, that is something with no special connection to morality, the only thing considered here. (Habermas is interested on edifying a theory of moral rationality, not a theory of love).

Thus, it does not seem so simple and non-problematic to sustain something that does not work on procreation and on childhood “works afterwards” in the adult stage. Autonomy cannot be a *creatio ex nihilo*. Human condition is not something one goes assembling with links. Childhood and the adult stage are not separable arbitrarily. Whatever our attitude is before Freud’s theories, the hypothesis the totality of life of a human being as internally referred to its first stages should be considered as a relevant and worth-considering questioning, at least in a speculation field as ethics, and even when a scientific status is denied to Psychoanalysis – as it is in my case. Anyway, in order to better understand this supposed step from a primordial situation of constitutive asymmetry to an alleged situation free from coercions, we need a psychological theory with that kind of questioning. *The suspicious is that our adult “autonomy” can be operating only in a very superficial level, and our ethical personality gets infinitely connected to the coercive asymmetry from which it emerged.*

Kohlberg’s theory, in addition to its relative conceptual poorness and linearity, is still the “*mise en science*” of a certain tendency of thinking (for not saying of “ideology”). That tendency includes the belief in a “universalistic” principle, so the theory of “moral development” determines moral development consists of progressively abandoning “relativism” and “achieving universality”. “Skepticism” is explained as a “necessarily surmountable” stage of the process. Thus, to become a moral person is like transforming in a good Kantian. This suggests there may be

as many “scientific” theories of “moral development” as existing moral philosophical theories. What would avoid Nietzscheans from having their own, where the most advanced stages of the process were those in which the moral agents could get their actions to be unrepeatable, and completely conscious of their grounds on will to power? Or Spinozians to have theirs, where the most advanced stages of “moral development” is shown to the agents assuming the absolute necessity for their allegedly “free” actions, and so on?

Habermas’ proof cannot be radically applied because, in that case, it would ethically put in question the very being of humans and the very dynamics of life, in which coercive procreating is crucial. Given Habermas’ ardent anti-Nietzscheanism, it is ironic that this outcome could be seen, without much effort, as an “ethical-communicative” version of Nietzsche’s intuition of “the essential immorality of life”.

Tugendhat and the seriousness of negative

(a) The importance of being “*ernsthaftig*”

Also Ernst Tugendhat has recognized the problematic relation of ethics with children and other helpless beings: “*These (fetus, small children, animals) are not persons, they do not belong to moral community, if this is constituted by mutual recognition... the miscarriage of modern moral philosophy is shown here in its most drastic form. The responsibility concerning children seems the most intuitively simple case of a moral obligation and, notwithstanding, we do not have any moral theory that can explain it*” (Tugendhat, E., “The helplessness of philosophers before the moral challenge of our time”, page 117; my translation from Spanish).

In the “Three lessons on problems of ethics” (included in *Probleme der Ethik*), Tugendhat has posed something crucial: “*Why do we think the involved people have to decide the norms under which they will have to live?*” (*Problems of Ethics*, page 212. Translation from Spanish is mine). The question follows an example where a mother, after listening to her children, takes a decision for them. And Tugendhat comments: “*The decision which she came to would probably be better grounded, in what concerns its contents, than if the children themselves had come to an agreement. And nevertheless we all think – I suppose – the children should have decided for themselves. Why? Evidently, on the basis of a normal moral that prohibits moral disqualification*” (*idem*). “*I suppose, therefore, we all want to be... autonomous, to personally decide for ourselves*”, because “*... it is morally wrong that a person or a group appeal to their own superior moral wisdom to decide which juridical norms should prevail, without interrogating the other persons involved. That seems to be the reason why moral problems (...) must be necessarily grounded on the discourse of all the involved*” (page 123).

But additionally he states: *“Contrarily to Habermas’ opinion, the reason is not the communicative nature of the process of moral grounding... the irreducibly communicative aspect is not cognitive, but volitional... the problem considered here is not a problem of grounding, but of participation on the power which decides what is legally permitted or not”* (page 123). *“... according to my thesis, the grounding of the very moral conception does not have already the sense of the grounding of a statement, but it is a grounding concerning the entrance into an inter-subjective praxis”* (p. 125).

In the first of the “Three Lessons...”, Tugendhat has admitted social norms need grounding, *“because individuals are subjected to them once and for all through sanctions”* (page 78). *“So there are two possibilities: whether the individual feels this compulsion as mere compulsion or he conceives it as grounded and, to that extent, incorporates compulsion in the scope of his own freedom”* (page 79). That is what he calls “willingness of submission”. *“The grounding would have to consist, therefore, the individual was convinced that, if he had the possibility to decide... he would have chosen it with the same freedom with which he could chose, at any time, to get into a game”* (*Idem*). However, in a post-metaphysical culture like ours, the matter resides – according to Tugendhat – that this “willing submission” to a normative system, admitting its sanctions, feeling guilty for not obeying it, feeling indignation for seeing others disobeying it, etc, does not come determined by a “superior truth” (theologian, metaphysical, like Aristotelian “essence” or “human nature”), but by *“those aspects of self-conception of human being admitted by everyone”* (pp. 129-130).

Following Kantian footsteps, Tugendhat makes a difference between the consideration of someone as a person (in her own being) and the consideration regarding certain characteristics (being a good musician, a good teacher, etc.) (pages 136 and 147). This appreciation for the very person as such is connected to the Kantian issue of the “autonomous ends”. Nevertheless: *“That my being and the others’ being have an intrinsic value is an affirmation Kant can only conceive, of*

course, with the help of his strong (metaphysical) concept of reason. We cannot follow him so far with our weak means". (page 161). Tugendhat tries to elucidate what would be a "person as such" using only these "weak means". I quote at length: *"Every moral conception that is expressed in each case with a determined grounding predicate seems founded in a conception of the essential characteristic of the identity of the person (But not vice-versa!). So does it mean we are obliged to go back to the old Aristotelian interpretation? My answer is no. The meaning we attribute here to the word "essential" does not derivate from a determined predicate; it is not, for example, the essence of the "human being" (or of the "person") but it is the property that, in each case, "we" (the group with a determined moral conception) suppose to constitute, the decisive property of our being, of our conception about ourselves (for example, being sons of God, members of this people, etc.)"* (page 50). The attribution of such essential property *"seems to be, above all, about an empirical fact"*. At this point, the rupture with Kant is produced when Tugendhat commits to a decided de-transcendentalization of rationality itself and, consequently, of all the grounding process.

Hence, the question is to understand what the expression "considering the very person as such" means (or, in a Kantian line, the person as an "end in himself") – what, according to Tugendhat, is not a mere moral principle among others but the very quintessence of moral behavior (page 135); but this inquiry must not appeal to any religious or metaphysical expedient (not even of metaphysical-transcendental kind) but only to *empirical information* about how the mechanisms of appraisal and self-appraisal of human are socially constituted in each case. However, in that context, the notion of "affirmation" is fundamental to Tugendhat: *"By self-affirmation, or affirmation of one's own being, I understand... the positive volitional relation to existence itself, and therefore the disposition to remain alive... we could say the same about love: loving a person means to voluntarily affirm his being and his well-(being) (and wanting to be with him)... so, the thesis is 'we can only affirm our lives, in the sense of wanting to stay alive', if*

we understand life as worth-affirming, which means, worth-appraising..." (page 138).

And what happens with the small child? *"...the small child only obtains a positive relationship with his being in the context of the experience of love received from his primary caretakers... obviously, the love towards the child is destitute of moral considerations (but naturally not of all other forms of consideration – for example, respect), because the child is not yet open to this valuing or moral dimension..."* (pages 138 and 139).

With these elements, we can now answer to the matter of the "willingness of submission". The society humans live in, through its norms system, establishes, according to Tugendhat, internal sanctions connected to the mechanisms of self-identity of the participants and to their necessity of self-affirmation. *"To the question of why I must limit my freedom according to these precise norms, I answer this way: because these norms have the property of being good to everybody, and because you are one among others. The moral thus founded is the moral of reciprocal respect, which orders to mutually recognize (or to mutually consider) practically as "ends in themselves" (page 162). "...the initial premise is the interest in a feeling of one's own value inter-subjectively understood, the interest in being able to consider oneself worth- appraising" (page 163).* Tugendhat connects this to a kind of broader morality which he calls, in passing, "moral of seriousness" (*Ernshaftigkeit*), because he puts this "considering one's own existence as an end in itself" together with the Heideggerian "authentic existence", as the "responsible existing" (page 117). *"We appraise people in their beings as people... only if we take existence seriously" (Idem). "Probably it is impossible to respect others...if one does not take oneself seriously."* (page 172).

And what happens, at last, to those who are insensible to social sanctions and have no capacity of creating feelings of guilt of the required kind? That individual *"...cannot understand this sense of 'having to' (or observe the norm). To*

such individual, the word 'moral' is an empty word". (page 154). If the individual lacks "moral sense", "...it is not possible to discuss with him... in my opinion, this case is pathological. This denomination, do not intend to be of disdain or contempt; on the contrary, it shows the fact every moral is supported on an empirical basis, on the empirical presupposition of a determined constitution or socio-psychological structure" (page 155).

As I did in the case of Habermas, I am interested in connecting Tugendhat's considerations to the main interests of the present book. In this case, the strategy of the plenary skeptical will be trying to show how the moral of "reciprocal respect" and of "seriousness" is compatible with a negative ethics as the one here outlined, *to the strict extent, however, one accepts the possibility the "empirical fact" searched for grounding includes "negative" elements*, in the relative sense exposed on the preceding sections. But I see three factors – so closely tied, I can only distinguish them artificially – in Tugendhat's text, which contribute to ruin the desired symmetry between "affirmative" and "negative" elements: 1. the psychological superficiality of the analysis; 2. the non-acceptance of socially anomalous behaviors as being moral; 3. the connection – to me, dogmatic – between "self-affirmation" and the decision to "stay alive". These three elements seem to constitute an attitude of non-recognition of the seriousness of negative (in Tugendhat's sense of "seriousness"). I will comment these three factors first and then, in a second moment, I will present the connections between the "fundamental empirical fact", founding of morality, and negativity.

Tugendhat himself is fully conscious of the extremely simple – and, therefore, provisory – character of his psychological analysis. After exposing his thesis of affirmation of one's own life as worth-appraising, he admits: *"Naturally, this thesis is not analytic; it is only the result of an intuition and has to be understood as a psychological hypothesis that must be empirically contrasted... I admit the thesis has to be a little more precise"* (pages 138 and 139). And in the next page: *"Obviously, these analyses are exceedingly crude and can only show which*

direction to follow". The psychological linearity has been almost a constant in affirmative moral reflection in general. Schemes of the kind "The more being the better; the less being the worse", "Something imperfect cannot create something perfect", "The more perfection the more happiness; the less perfection the less happiness", "If X can do A and A is more difficult than B, X can do B" literally invades philosophical traditional literature. But all kind of (what we may call) "inter-crossings" and "ruptures of linearity" are typical of the behavior of objects and human beings.

In Tugendhat's case, the psychological linearity is patent, for example, in his analysis on the relations between morality and love, within the processes of socialization and education of children. Ursula Wolf has observed a fundamental ambiguity in Tugendhat's text between what he calls affective love and moral love. "Moral love" is something that receives its definition inside a certain moral theory. "Effective love" is, on the other hand, much less controllable, and it is possibly human intentionality what promotes more "inter-crossings" and linearity "ruptures": to love affectively is not at all incompatible with the greatest disagreement, the greatest mutual destructibility or with the wish of separation and taking distance; we may want to destroy what we love the most and want to stay close to what we most hate. To live, we may need the ones we love as much as the ones we hate; we may feel strongly attracted for those we depreciate; because we love, we may feel strong wishes to abandon the beloved object; in self-contempt, we may find new possibilities of self-appraisal, and so on. (To Schopenhauer, we owe the most well-known "inter-crossing" of modern philosophy: to commit suicide manifests the highest level of willing to live). In previous chapters of the present book, inter-crossings of this kind were also presented, for example, when talking about a negativity which is highly appraising human life and some kind of "keeping alive" based on the most pure contempt for life.

This insensibly leads to my second critical line of Tugendhat's position. The institutions of the society we live in, which represent the norm system where we

must take a position (together with the controlling mechanisms that guarantee its application), can determine, for example, that “loving what we depreciate” or “wanting to destroy what we love” or “wanting to become distant from what we appreciate” or “grounding self-appraisal on a form of contempt”, far from being “inter-crossings” that suggest the deepness and complexity of human beings, could be considered as purely and simply “pathological conducts” signed by abnormality and psychological derangement, carried out by individuals who, due to an inadequate socialization process, “lack moral sense”. Even when a member of that society considers the current norms as based on pitiful psychological superficialities, society might possess – and usually it does – the controlling mechanisms which give support to that kind of institutionalized psychological linearity: the Juridical-Sanitary Police that protects the standard assessment of the processes of self-identity and formation of personality, ultimately connected to the very formation of the so-called “moral sense”.

Tugendhat, as we have seen, accepts this as a fact (page 155). However, the problem consists here of the following: whether this is simply “descriptive Ethics”, of a more anthropological than strictly philosophical interest (and here are included the risks of “naturalism” in Tugendhat’s theory, frequently stressed by his critics), or, if there is still a normative interest on it, this way of seeing things does not allow to define behaviors as defensible for being moral which could be, as a matter of fact, socially anomalous. *We could think of behaviors whose moral value manifests in the fact the person precisely stops trusting in this “self respect” solidly based on the current system of norms, and torments himself with problems of self-identity that maybe honor him from the moral point of view, even when they put his personality, socially constructed, under risk of collapse.* Marx, as Freud and Nietzsche, would have much to say, no doubt, about the psychological social generation of “feelings of guilt”, which, in Tugendhat’s explanation, are essential for the development of “moral sense”, without which the “moral of seriousness” is not even thinkable.

If we enrich psychology, we will not necessarily see as “pathological” the non-formation of feelings of guilt or shame, but maybe as a consequence of a certain hypercritical moral point of view which refuses to assume feelings whose social origin can be seen as ethically problematic. History is full of cases of human behaviors that, in general, are recognized as of high moral value and, notwithstanding, have drastically removed their agents from the mechanisms of self-identity imposed by current society, people who, no doubt, from the dominant point of view, “lacked moral sense”. In a similar way, we could also recognize noble suicides (as the ones of Petronius or Walter Benjamin), whose motives were, in part, originated from serious inconveniences of internalization of the self-identification mechanisms proclaimed by Nero or by National-socialism. Within Tugendhat’s theory, how could we call such behaviors moral in a normative and not merely descriptive sense?

Finally, the other element which damages the proximity between Tugendhat’s theory and negative ethics, like the one developed in the present book, is the connection – in the way I see, unjustifiable – between the self-affirmation of the person and what he calls “the positive volitional relation with our existence” and the “*disposition to stay alive*”. In fact, this is another case of the psychological linearity criticized before, but, because of its content, it is not an ordinary linearity, but one completely crucial to the main interests of the present book. What is not noticed here is that there may perfectly be “serious” mechanisms of self-affirmation that could be manifested by an intention of *not staying* alive, as we have argued on Part II. The “continuing to live” is a non-essential byproduct of any moral theory: whether from a moral theory that provides the idea life is “worth-appraising” or from one that provides the opposite, we may follow the interest in “staying alive” or in “stop living”.

(b) The negative character of the fundamental “empirical fact”

None of those critical observations affects in anything *the form* of Tugendhat’s project of grounding of ethics based on its de-transcendentalization and on the search for an “empirical fact” that makes it effective, and that does not need metaphysical or theological elements. “*It is the specific challenge of the Illustration: that moral is no longer justified through religious tradition and beliefs and starts demanding some kind of natural grounding*” (*The helplessness of philosophers...*, page 108). But Tugendhat uses the term “natural” not referring to *nature*, and his grounding is indeed much more psychological-social than strictly “natural”. I have tried to show, on the previous chapters, an empirical domain to be understood in two dimensions, one of intra-worldly events and the other structural-worldly, within an interest *on nature in the literal sense*.

Human condition, as presented in these texts, is certainly empirical and contingent (it could have been of another kind); however, at the same time, it is structurally given according to certain directions and not others, thus offering an ultimate and insuperable framework. This absolutely does not mean returning to traditional metaphysical thinking. The considerations regarding human condition, finitude, death, etc, cannot be put, as said on a previous chapter, in the same domain as of metaphysical or theological considerations. We can nowadays develop a practical philosophy without having to take position over the entelechies and the angels, but we cannot develop it without taking position before death and finitude, whatever this attitude may be. Of course the reference to “nature” has been many times unduly inflated – for example, in the context of the discussion on “natural rights”, in the sense of Jus-naturalism – but here it is about considering a *minimalistic structural natural basis*.

When the metaphysical-religious reference points fall, it is hard to see what could “universal reciprocal respect” now be based on, since it seems difficult to keep postulating, in secularized basis, something like an “intrinsic value” of human person, as Kant used to do. Curiously, Tugendhat would repel a natural reference

of the kind accepted in the present book, but he makes efforts to recover the Kantian idea of “an end in itself”, which is much closer to the metaphysical-theological reference than the structural human condition studied here. In several points of his argumentation – similarly as occurred in Habermas’ and Apel’s – there is the strong impression the religious reference is much less feared than the natural one. What I intended to do here – I insist, without modifying the form of grounding intended by Tugendhat – is to indicate a way to determine an “empirical fact” that is *natural* in the literal sense and, at the same time, apt to ground morality.

This attempt intends to maintain the “empirical” grounding in an ethical field, without falling into the religious one, but neither allowing to approach to a merely “juridical” grounding (as well observed by Ursula Wolf quoted by Tugendhat: “...with help of a similar contractual model... we generally do not reach moral, but a morally grounded juridical system” (*Problems of Ethics*, p. 134). The attempted “reconstruction” of the Kantian notion of “end in itself”, in psychological-social terms, destructs the very notion, because here appears the paradox of “an end in itself”, referring to the mark of normative decisions of a certain empirical society and, consequently, the possibility of a multiplicity of “ends in themselves”, something Kant would hardly accept as a plausible reconstruction of his concept. As presumably rational, that idea of a “value in itself” of the person seems incurably metaphysical-religious. The advisable in this point is simply accepting we should think “beyond Kant”, and not try to reconstruct at any cost his moral notions without his indispensable metaphysical-transcendental basis.

Actually, we do not need the notion of an “end in itself” or an “intrinsic value” of the person in order to have moral notions which we are not disposed to renounce, as, for example, *reciprocal respect and inviolability of the human person*. *But to accept an inviolability of human person, we do not need the idea that this person is “valuable” or “worthy” or that it is an “end in itself”*. In order to reconstruct the notion of inviolability, we only need the idea of *equality among all humans*.

However, we are not obliged to conceive that equality in affirmative terms; it can be a *negative equality*. A universe in which all humans are equal – and therefore inviolable to each other – is logically compatible to a universe where humans have absolutely no “value in itself” or “intrinsic value” at all. Inviolability would be based only on the fact there are not and there cannot be defensible rational arguments on which a person could legitimately find support to torture, chaise or kill another person who is basically like him.

Remembering our analysis on structural human condition, on the first chapter of this book, we have strong reasons to think on our world exactly as a world with those characteristics, that is, one where all humans are inviolable in their persons for being *naturally and negatively equal*. Whatever are the mechanisms of “recognition” and “appraisal” and “self-appraisal” intra-worldly developed in a society, we can see our lives as being, since always, immersed in a kind of fundamental “indignity”. Of a being thrown up to the world, subjected to structural pain, to a process of inexorable physical and mental degradation, to other’s aggressiveness and to the aggressiveness of his own project of self-instauraton and with the permanent danger of moral disqualification, we can ask: where could he obtain a *structural-worldly* “dignity”, based on the mere fact of being a human? Any dignity that can be recognized by others can only come from intra-worldly agreements, through systems of norms that are socially established, as Tugendhat well explains. In the worldly-structural level, the idea of a fundamental “disvalue”, or of a worldly “indignity”, seems much more plausible and post-metaphysical than the one of a mysterious and little intelligible “intrinsic dignity” (if we have really become orphans of Father), though offensive this may seem to our pride and our narcissism.

Notwithstanding, what is fundamental here is that this “natural and negative equality” can be *source of morality* – and, specifically, source of inviolability -, a morality not subjected to the normative comings and goings of the different empirical societies and, at the same time, free from metaphysical assumptions

different from the minimal assumptions of naturalized ontology. The full conscience about the very lack of any structural value, beneath the intra-worldly prestige and merits humans pompously give to each other, can be a legitimate source of morality, as much or more than a presumed conscience about “our own value”, which in affirmative societies have been source of pride, aggressiveness and intolerance. Tugendhat said seriousness requires “taking oneself seriously”, but this cannot be absolute: the moral dangers of taking oneself excessively seriously should be evaluated. From the offense to our narcissism and pride could arise, on the other hand, a moral force that would perhaps not emerge from the regular stimulation of these affirmative attitudes. When a man allows himself to torture another, his action is ethically miserable not because his victim has a kind of “intrinsic value”, but because he, the executioner, could not present even one serious rational argument through which he could prove he has any superior “value” that gives him the “right” to do what he is doing.

It is absurd and disproportionate that the torturer, equally affected by the fundamental indignity of his victim, has managed to accumulate on his hands – through intra-worldly manipulation of lies, compensations, pseudo-rights, false privileges, favorable circumstances and brute force – so much power to perform that unspeakable, indescribable suffering to his “fellow negative”. This gives us a *factual-empirical* support, directly connected to human condition, to condemn the act of the executioner as immoral. *What makes human beings inviolable is paradoxically their structural disvalue.* The idea is that an originally degrading empirical fact could provide a better “empirical fundament” to morality in a way an honorable empirical fact never could. The difficulty “post-metaphysical” philosophers have to recognize negative empirical facts of fundamental character (that writers like Orwell, Swift and Blake, among many others, show with such clarity) makes us think they still have not renounced entirely to be good sons of God; despite the proclaimed “program of secularization” of thinking started by Illustration, they still maintain their thoughts in the line of a world that cannot be structurally bad.

Now, I want to return to children, which is what really interests me here. The moral of seriousness, while it maintains its purely affirmative bases, will continue not giving a solution to the problem of a moral responsibility before children. When analyzing Habermas' theory, we saw it was inevitable to recognize the coercive and authoritarian nature of our relationship with small children (and, by extension, with the unborn). In Tugendhat's description, finally, the totality of human beings, the adults as much as the children, are described as coercively obliged (though coerciveness may be softened with the idea of "willingness of submission") to construct their identities according to the social norms of the group which they have always belonged to, under penalty of being treated as sick or delinquents "lacking moral sense". The important thing in this perspective is to give to children, very early, the elements so they could be proud of themselves and learn how to handle correctly the mechanisms of administration of the identification processes, accepted by the society in which they are born and where they will die.

Obviously, by doing so, society has already coercively decided for the yet unborn, in the sense that (so they say) "if they had the opportunity to decide", they would accept "to limit their freedom according to norms" in order to be "objects of affirmation on the part of the others," to the extent such norms have the property to be "good for all". Tugendhat does not present this as an ideal, but as a description (and so the dubiousness about the strictly ethical-normative character of his theory). According to such description, faced social norms, we are all in the same condition as the unborn. Certainly, on those bases, whether the problem of an ethics concerning children is diluted or it is transformed into an unreachable objective.

In my negative perspective, Tugendhat's complaint on the lack of a moral before children *is inextinguishable, since such morality cannot exist*, and for structural reasons. Regarding the yet unborn, we have however the structural abstention, but on the small child we only dispose of a tragic and radical

responsibility which, in no moment, will conceal the immorality in whose framework is reconstructed a second degree morality for children. The least we can do before the bittersweet and desolate glance of children is never dissimulate for them the terrible violence of their appearance in the world.

R. M. Hare and “possible people”

(a) On the fundamental ambiguity of the Utilitarian principle: the principle of “gratification” and the “anesthetic” principle

As classically formulated by John Stuart Mill, the principle of utility reads: *“...actions are fair to the extent they tend to promote happiness; and unfair while they tend to produce the opposite of happiness. Happiness is understood as pleasure and absence of pain; unhappiness as pain and absence of pleasure... pleasure and exemption of pain are the only things desirable as ends; and all desirable things... are so whether through the pleasure inherent to themselves or as means for promotion of pleasure and prevention from pain”* (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter II, p. 48 of Portuguese edition; my translation). Again, on chapter IV of this work, Mill puts the question: *“...humanity does not desire anything except what constitutes pleasure or what consists absence of pain”* (p. 76). Jeremy Bentham also refers to the principle in the same terms, understanding “utility” as the property under which the object tends to provide benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness or to avoid the occurrence of harm, pain, evil or unhappiness.

In this classical formulation of the Utilitarian principle, it seems to be present a crucial ambiguity. This consists of the following: Mill, like Bentham, considers the two expressions “looking for pleasure” and “avoiding pain” as mutually interchangeable, as if each one of them led directly, and with no hiatus, to the other. In principle, “looking for pleasure” and “avoiding pain” are two intentionalities that share one characteristic: their results cannot be granted. Looking for pleasure does not mean finding it, and trying to avoid pain does not mean one effectively manages to avoid it. But, on the other hand, whoever searches pleasure (maybe without finding it) is putting himself into the intentionality of avoiding pain, while (and here the symmetry seems to end) whoever tries to avoid pain (succeeding or not) does not necessarily puts himself into the intentionality of looking for pleasure.

It seems avoiding pain is a “minimal” intentionality, whose exercise will not be enough to put whoever assumes it on the track of pleasure, a “maximal” intentionality.

This can perhaps be seen in a clearer manner when the sought pleasure is obtained and when the avoided pain is, in fact, avoided. Indeed, if someone manages to feel pleasure, the more intense it is, he will certainly have, at the same time, stayed away from pain; he will have avoided it in the same act of achievement of pleasure. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that the opposite also happens: whoever has managed to avoid pain will not necessarily experience pleasure in the same act of that avoidance. Perhaps, the only thing he will have obtained is “not suffering”, which is not equivalent to “feeling pleasure” or “enjoying”. It seems there is an asymmetry between pleasure and pain, not considered by the classical Utilitarian principle (Note that the question is formal: what should be done for something to be present has no symmetry with what has to be done for something to remain absent. It is not about the relation pleasure/pain, but about the more general relation avoidance/searching. The same asymmetry would occur between the “avoidance of pleasure” and the “looking for pain” – as it could happen, for example, in the life of an ascetic -: avoiding pleasure does not automatically puts him on the track of pain. In general: only avoiding something does not put anyone on the track of searching the opposite. Avoidance is weaker than searching, so one cannot pass from the first to the second, whatever are the places of pleasure and pain within the relation avoidance/searching).

This makes us think the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain respond, actually, *to two different principles* and not to only one, two principles that are as “embedded” in the apparently unique Mill’s principle of Utility, that I will call, respectively, “principle of gratification” (“All men look for pleasure”) and “anesthetic principle” (“All men seek to avoid pain”). If we accept this is so, two different types of Utilitarian theories should arise from that differentiation, a “Utilitarianism of

gratification” and an “anesthetic Utilitarianism”. While the first one would be a “maximal” Utilitarianism, the last would be “minimal”, in the sense that, according to it, the most humans could try to obtain would be the avoidance of pain, without intending it as much as the achievement of pleasure (It would be a more austere and afflicted Utilitarianism than the Utilitarianism of gratification).

There are at least two ways to prove those principles are different: (a) in the question of moral imputation; and (b) in the question of though it is possible another principle transcending them both.

Indeed, we are able to justify a behavior C of a person A, from the moral point of view, when A did C *in order to avoid an intense pain* (for example, betraying under torture or offending someone in the moment of suffering the intense pains of a terminal disease), but we would not justify it if A had done C *in order to obtain an intense pleasure*. There are certain actions we justify on behalf of the anesthetic principle, but we are not disposed to justify on behalf of the gratifying principle. Pain (and especially extreme pain) has a characteristic pleasure does not (whether it is extreme pleasure or not): it is *pressing*, it corners, it blocks ways out, leaves no empty spaces, saturates all the space. Thus, we can criticize a hedonistic ethics for not leaving space, for example, to altruistic actions, while we cannot criticize an anesthetic ethics with the same arguments: in the case of extreme pain, it would be cruel to demand altruistic actions from the agent, but this would not be so in the case of extreme pleasure. This suggests they are two different principles and the usual Utilitarian principle is not simple, but composed and ambiguous.

In the second place, from the works of Freud and Nietzsche, among others, the so called “principle of pleasure” was basically questioned, as it appears in the formulations of classic Utilitarianism among other theories. Especially the Freudian argument goes in the direction human being has, in the light of a “deep psychology”, complex connections with pain and death, in the sense of a living oriented to them according to a compulsive need to repeat pain despite the

suffering. This would point out to a “beyond the principle of pleasure”, in the sense human beings would not be referred, strictly, to *pleasure* as a final end. But these formulations of a “beyond the principle of pleasure” can be understood as a beyond the gratifying component of the classical Utilitarian principle; it cannot be directly applied to its anesthetic component. So, though we may prove human beings, through the compulsion to repetition, do not search strictly *pleasure*, we cannot say they completely give up the domain of avoidance of pain.

The compulsion for repetition does not search intense pain, even after abandoning the field of influence of the principle of pleasure in the gratifying sense. The compulsion for repetition could be interpreted as a kind of flirt with pain, as if it was about feeling pain just until a certain point, but without letting it come to extreme and unbearable intensities. Therefore, the compulsion for repetition could be interpreted as a sophisticated manner of avoiding pain, but in no way as a sophisticated manner of searching pleasure, since what is searched is the painful moment. The so called “death impulses” are certainly not desire for dying, but an exercise of symbolic control of death through a kind of indefinite approach to it, avoiding effective death as categorical and concluding fact. So, *per se*, and without addition of other elements, a “beyond the principle of pleasure” is not, *ipso facto*, a beyond the anesthetic principle of pain avoidance.

In the following pages, I will try to show how this fundamental ambiguity of the Utilitarian principle has direct influence in Hare’s argumentation on the moral obligations concerning possible people, although, as it is usually said – and Hare himself has said – the Utilitarianism he assumes is one of consideration of interests and preferences, more than one of the consideration of pleasures and pains. We will see that, in his inquiry, Hare incorporates elements of “gratification” that justify the kind of critical observations I intend to present here.

(b) Hare's lack of radicality on the consideration about the nature of a worth-living life

When considering the issue of our moral responsibilities before possible people (in his book *Essays on Bioethics*), the first question we should make, according to Hare, is if I, myself (in each case), would prefer being or coming into existence instead of not being or not existing. "(...) *given the power to prescribe existence or non-existence, which do I prescribe?*" (Hare, *Essays on Bioethics*. p. 70). "*Most of us are thankful for our existence; and what one can be thankful for must surely be something one prefers to its absence. I am not suggesting existence is in itself a benefit, but only that it is, for those who enjoy life, beneficial as a necessary condition of this*" (p. 71). Here is formulated the "preferentialism" of Hare's Utilitarian theory: it is not said life is *good* in the sense of pleasure, but in the sense it would be *preferred*.

From that point, Hare develops a hypothetical experiment according to which we are in a situation where we can communicate with our possible progenitors and ask them, if so we wish, that they bring us into existence. "*My claim is that, if we have something more than zero happiness, if our lives are, at least, worth-living, we would all ask for that*" (page 71). And more: "*... in considering whether to bring a new person into existence, I have to look at the question as if I were going to be that person, or as if that person were going to be myself. So, it will be relevant what, for that person, it would be like to exist; and, of course, what, for him, it would be like not exist (...) if...his existence was moderately agreeable for him, then it seems to me that I am constrained by universalizability, to treat this fact as just as relevant to my moral thinking as a similar fact about my own actual existence; and we have seen that most of us have reason to be thankful for our own actual existence*" (p. 73).

Hare admits that "*what makes our life worth-living is a very difficult thing to decide and something that every one has to decide for himself*" (p. 75). And he gives some examples of his own experience: he did not consider not worth-living,

the moments he spent as a prisoner during the war, but he considered not worth-living the moments he suffered for the mistakes made by some of his sons: “*At such times, I even got near wishing I did not exist*” (*Idem*). In the case of war, he comments: “*I think that, face with the prospect of such an existence prolonged throughout my life I would prefer not to exist. But it is hard to be sure*” (*Idem*).

On the chapter of the book dedicated to the moral issue of abortion, Hare asks what we can know about the fetus (a typical “possible person”) in order to ponder whether it is moral or not to avoid its development. “*We know, for example, that it has the potentiality of becoming into a human adult – that is, if pregnancy comes to term, it will have turned into a baby, and if the baby survives, it will turn into an adult more or less like us*” (page 168). Immediately, He asks the reader to suppose that, among the characteristics of the fetus – relevant to the consideration – the capability to suffer was not included. “*...we can ignore this property if we confine... to cases where we can be sure it will not suffer*” (page 171). Examining the case of the moral rights of the fetus, Hare reaffirms his previous ideas: if there would be a manner this fetus was me, and if I could communicate with my future mother, “*I am sure I shall not say ‘Carry on, have the abortion; it’s the same to me’*. Because my existence now is valuable to me, I shall not – other things being equal – (...) that she should have the abortion, thereby depriving me of the possibility of existence” (pp. 173).

And his idea goes a way which particularly interests me: “*I value my existence, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the good things that happen to me, which could not happen if I did not exist... that (...) does not show that mere existence is in itself a good, but it does show that it is a good at least as a means to other good things that those who exist can have. Therefore, faced with the possibility of existing now or not existing now, the normally happy person will tell his mother not to have the abortion*” (pp. 173-174) We should note that, throughout his argumentation, Hare uses, within his “preferential” Utilitarian theory, elements of the “gratification” kind (if not “hedonistic”), when talking, for example, about “the

one who enjoys life”, “more than zero happiness”, “moderately pleasant existence”, “normally happy person”, and so on.

But what is crucial here is that, all over Hare’s consideration about the moral rights before possible people and its consequences for practical problems as abortion, there is no use for the difference between what happens *within* the world and *what we know about the world itself*, in the usual lack of radical reflection. I want to say, *ab initio*, this distinction is not particularly “Heideggerian”, though the terminology (“worldly/intra-worldly”) is, but – as indicated before on the present work – those terms were used by philosophers who were completely out of Heidegger’s scope of influence, like for example, Wittgenstein, a philosopher whose arguments Hare would certainly be much more disposed to listen to than Heidegger’s (See *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 3.221, 6.42, 6.44). While in the *Tractatus* this difference is made summarily, in the *Conference on ethics*, of 1930 (approximately), it is absolutely crucial. In this text, Wittgenstein refers to a kind of experience in which is manifested, according to him, the imperative and absolute character of moral requirements, as something that stays literally “out of the world” (since, in the world, “all sentences are worth the same”, without any kind of privilege). “*I believe the best way to describe it is saying that, when I have it, I get amazed before the existence of the world. So I feel inclined to using sentences such as ‘How extraordinary that things exist, or ‘How extraordinary that the world exists’*” (Wittgenstein, *Conference on ethics*, pages 38-39 of the Spanish edition; my translation).

Wittgenstein believes these expressions “have no sense” (according to semantic criteria), but this does not affect the fact he believes it is important to make that difference in order to trace the limits of ethics: “*If I affirm: ‘I get amazed before the existence of the world’, I am using the language wrongly. I will explain myself: it has perfect and clear sense saying I get amazed that something is as it is. We all understand what means saying I get amazed by the size of a dog bigger than anyone ever seen before... I get amazed by the size of this dog because I*

could conceive a dog of another size, that is, of normal size, by which I would not be amazed. Saying: 'I get amazed that this or that thing is as it is' only makes sense if I can imagine it not being as it is... But it lacks any sense saying I get amazed by the existence of the world because I cannot represent it as not being" (page 39).

To Wittgenstein, establishing this difference is not senseless at all, since, by doing so, we perceive the affirmations about the world itself fall out of the limits of language as regulated in the *Tractatus*, which can only capture the logic of affirmations made within the world. In order to deactivate the importance of the difference, Hare would have to prove it as non-sense within the context of his own ethical theory; but this is difficult because, according to Wittgenstein's semantics, the "lack of sense" of the difference is something much stronger, according to which also all the moral argumentations developed by Hare in his book (and in all his books) would certainly be equally considered by Wittgenstein as senseless.

However, it is important to highlight that, in Hare's pondering, the difference is not omitted: it clearly *appears*, but it is not used in the core of the argumentation. Indeed, when he says he is not stating *existence itself* is good, but only that certain things *within existence* are good (or when he says it is not necessary to prove existence is good in itself, but only that existing should be preferred to not existing, *since existing constitutes a condition for good things to happen within existing*), he is recognizing, in some way, the pertinence of the distinction within his Utilitarian scope of thinking. The only relevant "goodness" for his consideration of the "worth-living" character of existing will be the goodness of what happens *in* existence, and not any alleged goodness *of existence itself* as such, something Hare believes is not *necessary* to demonstrate (perhaps because it *is not possible* to demonstrate? For the clearly affirmative intentions of Hare's thinking, all makes us suspect that, if there were an available proof of *the very goodness of the world*, he would use it immediately!).

So, if the difference between coming to existence and what happens within existing, or because of it (life as a condition for other things), is finally relevant, why not using it at the moment of the hypothetical experiment where each one of us would talk to our future mother, putting ourselves in the place of the possible person whose birth is being discussed? Why not consider, in this hypothetical experiment, the information, also available, about *existing itself* as such, and not only – as in the case of the argumentation presented by Hare – information on what people do *with* existence and *in* existence once they are born?

What *rational* grounds has the “being thankful for our own existence” referred by Hare? On which fundamentals can one say, in each case, “my existence is valuable to me now?” Hare affirms this feeling emerges when I manage to do, in existence, things that make my life reach a level that makes it “worth-living”. Nevertheless, by the examples he presents, it seems he does not differentiate between, as least, two things: (a) “worth-living” in the sense of something positively “good”; and (b) “worth-living” in the sense of something simply “endurable” (or “tolerable”). To live as a prisoner during a war is certainly not something “good”, but it is something that, according to Hare’s own testimony, is, to a certain point, “endurable”. Shall we put the issue of the “worth-living” of existence only in the pure level of endurance? If what will be considered in the evaluation of existing is neither its “intrinsic value” (because that, according to Hare, cannot or “does not need” to be proved) nor even its intra-worldly positive value, but only its value of “being endured”, the evaluation does not seem to have too much force, nor is it very encouraging. It responds to a minimal Utilitarian criterion. After all, almost anything can be “endured” (think about what the prisoners of Auschwitz have managed to “endure”, according to what the survivals tell), but it seems irrational and anti-intuitive to say, therefore, this life is “worth living”. That something can be “endured” does not mean it is “worth-living”. In that, we can recognize intra-worldly events could reach such unpleasant levels that lead the supposed “worth-living” character of existence to the pure and simple “enduring” level.

This is relevant in a moral consideration that has already renounced to demonstrating the “intrinsic value” of existing, but alleges, even though, life should be *preferred* in the hypothetical situation, because existing would provide conditions or “means” for good things to happen in the intra-worldly level. But if neither this can be said, the arguments in favor of a worth-existing life get drastically weaker than it appeared to be. What *rational arguments*, and not only punctual feelings, would present people having information about life, for example, the survivors of Auschwitz, in order to *prefer* existing in the hypothetic situation, since life, on one side, does not manifest any kind of “intrinsic value” and, on the other, we do not have rational guarantees of any kind life, intra-worldly, will include those gratifications Hare refers to, and that would motivate, in a crucial way, the affirmative decision in his hypothetical experiment? So, life does not seem to have value in itself, neither to give any guarantee it will be composed of gratifying, productive and personal achievements.

So, introducing *worldly* considerations, those arguments simply loose almost all their force, if they ever had any. It is very curious – almost comically curious – to see how Hare, on the chapter about the issue of abortion, systematically lets aside each and every *structural* consideration on the value of life. When he refers to the characteristics of the fetus – the information we already have – he says, as we have seen, that among those characteristics there is that the fetus will be transformed, if pregnancy goes on normally, “*into a baby, and if the baby survives, it will turn into an adult more or less like us*”. *But why stop there?* This stopping is completely non-critical and typically affirmative. Actually, we have *much more structural information* about the fetus: we know it will turn into a baby, the baby into a young man, the young man into an adult – “more or less like us” -, but we also know the adult will turn into an old man, the old man into a decrepit, with dramatic mental and physical health problems, decadent and each time more dependent and fragile, and, at last, this decrepit will turn into a dying person (much possibly into a terminal patient) and finally into a dead!

Why all this information is not considered relevant for the hypothetical experiment about the “preference for existing”? Is it only because it is unpleasant to think about it and easier to work exclusively with wishful thinking? Is not this structural information strictly pertinent to take a decision about the possible people in the hypothetical situation? Thinking of what waits for me in terms of decadence, decrepitude and fragility, could I not – put in the place of the fetus – doubt a lot about what I will say to my future mother – in the experiment proposed by Hare – regarding her possibility of making an abortion? I am not saying that now, in the light of this “complete” structural transformation (always so suspiciously “incomplete” in the usual affirmative lists), the fatal answer will be: “Please, have an abortion. I do not want to have to pass through all this”. No. I am saying the information is certainly *relevant* to take a decision, whatever it may be. The experiment leads to a *choice*, not to an obvious “preference for life”.

In what *rational* sense should an old man be “grateful” for his decadence? In what sense should I be “grateful” for being worn out, swooning and finally dying? When we consider existence – already accepted (even by Hare) as not “valuable in itself” – is at least “valuable as a mean” to things we consider good, is it not relevant to consider that existence is a mean to terrible things, not eventual (as the concentration camps), but structural unpleasantness completely guaranteed by the very human condition (that is, decaying, swooning and dying)? Could that “thankfulness” be still something *rational*? Should this “thankfulness” not be, after all, something one feels “in spite of everything”, and not “because of” something? Is every “Yes to life” not of an emotional order? (I will suggest this on the Epilogue II).

Early on his text, Hare tries to leave aside these “negative” elements of judgment in the moment he writes, immediately after considering the issue of decision on existing or not existing: “*Here there is a danger to be avoided. We shall confuse the issue if we allow into it any thought of the ‘fear of death’, which we all have. This fear is something which we have had built into us by evolution...All this,*

however, is irrelevant to our question, because the so-called 'fear of death' is a fear of dying or, usually, of being killed. By contrast, what I am asking is, not whether I prefer remaining alive to dying or being killed, but whether I prefer existing now to never having existed. Since if I had never existed I could not die, the fear of death does not enter into the question, though it is extremely hard to prevent ourselves being irrelevantly influenced by it" (pages 70-1).

This is extremely fallacious. Certainly, Hare is right in saying the issue is not rather I want "to stay alive or not", but if, radically, "I want to be" in the sense of radically refusing "to never have existed". This difference is genuine, but does not take the "fear of dying" out of the question. An argumentation line perfectly relevant to the issue would be, on the contrary, the following: "I prefer to have never been born – even accepting the not so remote possibility of intra-worldly gratifications – precisely for not being compelled to create the condition of having to die, to falter, to structurally suffer and disappear and, consequently, to have to live permanently with fear of all this".

Precisely, what Hare illegitimately does is to remove dying in its structural character from his consideration, this very dying that being born will bring inevitably together with it, and that does not configure any "mean" to achieve good things, but, on the contrary, the fundamental inhibition of all possibility. The fear of dying is, after all, the fear of *being*, the fear of having been born. It is perfectly legitimate to consider as relevant these elements of judgment in the moment of taking a *rational* decision about existing or not. Since coming into existence carries with it structural pain, fainting and death, I can legitimately want "to have never been born", even admitting existing is, sometimes, a mean to obtain certain more or less enjoyable satisfactions, and my effective life may be reasonably full of such satisfactions. This does not remove rationality or points as "sick" or "disturbed" the posture which would say that, after all, to be born "is not worthy".

On the contrary, it certainly does not seem a much balanced rational decision choosing to exist only in function of some highly uncertain *quantum* of intra-worldly satisfactions, always confronted to the always open possibility of a *quantum* – that can be very high – of pain and intra-worldly displeasures and, *moreover*, having to count on wears and tears, diseases and physical and psychical failing, completely guaranteed by the very structure of human condition, ending up in total annihilation. Before this panorama, the option for life has to include some emotional elements to be sustained. Thus, it is extremely doubtful or simply a fake, to say “*most of us have reasons to be thankful for our own actual existence*”. Life seems more sustained by impulses than by reasons.

Hare’s Utilitarianism, in which he examined the issue of the value of life, is, I think, a minimal Utilitarianism, attending only to the “anesthetic” component of the Utilitarian principle, letting aside the “gratifying” component. The only proof he presented about affirmation of life or about preference for existing is exactly the following: “We wish to have been born not because existence is a good in itself, but because it is a condition for enjoying some good while we were able to endure the rest.” To life is not given, then, a “value of gratification”, but only an “anesthetic value”, a “value of endurance”, because there is nothing in Hare’s argumentation that discards the possibility of an intra-worldly life full of misfortunes (as of the prisoners of Auschwitz), a life that will still be, for him, “worth living” (that we only can rationally understand in the sense of “endurable”). But in this light, Hare’s statements seem exaggerated and unjustifiable when he says “my existence is valuable to me now” or “we can be thankful for our existence”, since the only that can be offered to life, according to his theory, is an “anesthetic value”, a value of pure “enduring”.

I believe Hare’s vision is essentially correct (the world has no intrinsic value, and life can only be endured, in the light of the tenuous hope of some intra-worldly gratification without guarantees), *but it does not seem right to present this as a reason to affirm existence in opposition to the other possibility*. Adding the rational

and structural-worldly elements of judgments, the balance clearly inclines to the other side, and the possibility (certainly not the necessity) of reasoning in the following alternative way also arises: “We do not wish to have been born because: 1. in the first place, life has no intrinsic value (admitted by Hare); 2. Secondly: because existence is not a guaranteed condition of intra-worldly good. Nothing rational discards the possibility of an existence literally full of misfortunes; 3. Third: because existence is a *guaranteed* condition for structural pain, decadence and death, even when, in the best hypothesis, this existence can be full of intra-worldly good, 4. Forth, because it does not seem to have any rational sense giving existence to someone, since we cannot give them a positive ‘gratifying’ value, but only an ‘anesthetic’ value or a “value of endurance”: why giving birth to someone in order to anesthetize him, or to protect him or her from being? (why removing them from where, so to speak, they were in ‘total anesthesia’?) It would have full sense to give birth *to gratify newborns*, but this is precisely what we cannot do *under any guarantee of the intra-world*, and what we can absolutely *not* do in virtue of severe guarantees *of the world itself*.

On item 3, I admitted a life can be – with much luck – full of accomplishments, joys, triumphs, etc, and, at the same time, subjected to structural tragedy, as inevitable. I have been told sometimes that the opposite is also a usual experience: feeling deeply happy for simply *having been born*, in spite of intra-worldly misfortunes. (Anna Frank’s smiling face). I believe there is a profound and educating asymmetry between both experiences, if the intention is to present rational arguments and not only punctual feelings not rationally justifiable. *There is no rational support to feel happy simply for being, since being is overburden by structural tragedy, wastage and death. If this experience exists, it is based on a feeling that does not count as an argument.* By contrast, *there is* rational support – all that has been formulated on the present book – for the demonstration of structural pain and the consequent moral disqualification that supports a disvalue of *simply being alive*, even when such disvalue is not in most

of moments directly lived, but constantly concealed by strong and not rationally guided mechanisms of survival.

Ultimately, experiences are not my last point of reference; we experience all kind of unreliable things (and this is maybe my deepest rupture with Phenomenology and Existencialism). Here we have a *logical* proof. That being, itself, can be *rationally* disvalued through arguments in spite of intra-worldly gratifications, it has no parallel with the fact the being itself could be *emotionally* reinforced and valued though “experiences”, in spite of intra-worldly misfortunes. So there is here a *logical* asymmetry, even when there can evidently be experiences of both things. It is impossible to consider wastage, decadence, decrepitude, fading and death as “gratifying”, as positive values, even though we can, to a certain point, “endure” them. *Each and every gratification is always intra-worldly*. From the ethical-rational point of view, there would only have sense in coming into existence if there was in it a worldly-structural gratification that could be logically demonstrated, and not only lived through arduous mechanisms of concealment under the form of supporting feelings and experiences.

(In the previous argumentation, I was not interested on discussing with Hare in the level of the concrete “bioethical” issues he considers, for example, abortion, but about issues of fundamental character. I mean that what was here argued goes on the direction of a minimalist ethics of abstention. An argumentative line that defends *abstention* does not necessarily also save *abortion*. In general, an ethics of abstention does not justify, of course, crime. Abstaining does not have the same logical structure as making-not-be. It is then possible that a negative ethics is anti-abortion, in spite (or in virtue) of being anti-conception. But I cannot develop this issue here).

David Benatar and the limits of empirical pessimism

Introduction

In his book *Better never to have been* (Oxford, 2006), David Benatar claims that coming into existence is always a serious harm and that procreation is ethically problematic, that's to say, the two theses sustained in the present book, published in Spanish in 1996. Benatar is not therefore an affirmative thinker, but I pretend to show that his purely empirical method is not sufficient to support a sound pessimistic position in regard to a negative ethics.

He presents his basic arguments on Chapters 2 and 3 of his book. The line of argument of Chapter 2 can be considered as formal, while that of Chapter 3 develops a material-type line. In this work, I present logical and methodological objections for both lines of argument. Furthermore, I discuss Benatar's assumption on the alleged independence between the two lines.

(a) Two notions of "possible being".

In his introduction, Benatar formulates an asymmetry which he considers to be crucial to the formal argumentation; the asymmetry goes this way:

"Both good and bad things happen to those who exist. However, there is a crucial asymmetry between the good and the bad things. The absence of bad things, such as pain, is good even if there is nobody to enjoy that good, whereas the absence of good things, such as pleasure, is bad only if there is somebody who is deprived of these good things. The implication of this is that the avoidance of the

bad by never existing is a real advantage over existence, whereas the loss of certain goods by not existing is not a real disadvantage over never existing". (Better never to have been, p. 14).

He starts his argumentation from two axioms: "(1) *The presence of pain is bad*" and: (2) "*The presence of pleasure is good*" (p. 30), two statements apparently well-established. At the level of *presence* of these things, there seems to be total draw. The differences appear in the level of *absences*. The relevant assertions are the following: "(3) *the absence of pain is good, even if that good is not enjoyed by anyone*" and: "(4) *the absence of pleasure is not bad unless there is somebody for whom this absence is a deprivation*" (p. 30)

According to the author, to understand this asymmetry between absences one should adopt the perspective of potential interests of a "possible being" within a counterfactual account. Given the crucial importance of this text for my purposes, I quote it in full:

"... (3) *can say something about the counterfactual case in which a person who does actually exist never did exist. Of the pain of an existing person, (3) says that the absence of this pain would have been good even if this could be achieved only by the absence of the person who now suffers it*". (p. 31).

And:

"*Claim (3) says that this absence is good when judged in terms of the interests of the person who would otherwise have existed. We may not know who that person would have been, but we can still say that whoever that person would have been, the avoidance of his or her pain is good when judged in terms of his or her potential interests. (...) Clearly (3) does not entail the absurd literal claim that there is some actual person for whom the absent pain is good*". (p. 31).

To show that (3) is not an "incoherent" statement, Benatar shows it as a statement "*with reference to the (potential) interests of a person who either does or does not exist*" (p. 30). As he concedes, one could make a consideration of (4) essentially identical to that made in (3):

"One could (logically) make symmetrical claims about the absence of pleasure – that, when judged in terms of the (potential) interests of a person who does or does not exist, the absence of pleasure is bad". (p. 31, note 23)

All this line of thought is viable if we keep the same concept of "possible being" as counterfactually represented. So, we could paraphrase, for example, the statement at the beginning of page 31 in the following way: "Of the *pleasure* of an existing person, (4) says that the absence of this *pleasure* would have been *bad* even if this could only have been achieved by the absence of the person who now *enjoys* it". And the paraphrase may continue this way: "Claim (4) says that this absence is *bad* when judged in terms of the interests of the person who would otherwise have existed. We may not know who that person would have been, but we can still say that whoever that person would have been, the avoidance of his or her *pleasures* is *bad* when judged in terms of his or her potential interests". Just as in the case of the absence of pain, this does not imply the absurdity of saying that *there is* really a person to whom the absence of pleasure is bad. That is, *if we use the same notion of "possible being" (the counterfactual notion) in the two cases (absence of pain, absence of pleasure), there is no asymmetry at all.*

But immediately in the same footnote (p. 31) Benatar adds: "*However, (4) suggests that this symmetrical claim, although logically possible, is actually false*". This suggests that the asymmetry cannot be obtained only by means of the formal argumentation, but it rather needs the material elements from the other line of argument, even though Benatar explicitly defends the independence between the two lines (for example, in pp. 14 and 93/4. See last section of the present text). But from the strict formal point of view, everything seems to "draw". On that footnote,

Benatar concedes that the only thing his consideration showed so far is that (3) "is not incoherent". But neither it is "incoherent", from a strictly logical point of view, to say that the absence of pleasure is bad even when this damage is not suffered by anyone. This may be challenged by false or inadequate, but not by "incoherent"; so, the not incoherence is not a decisive argument in favor of (3).

If the counterfactual conception of a "possible being" is used in the same way when assessing the absence of pleasure and the absence of pain, the alleged asymmetry would not follow. What is happening here is that in certain moments of his argumentation, Benatar uses a different notion of "possible being", a concept that could be called "empty", according to which a "possible being" would be the one that simply *is not present in the world and neither is counterfactually represented*. Clearly, these two concepts are incompatible: when using the counterfactual conception, it is irrelevant that the being is not present in the world, since he/she is counterfactually represented; and when using the empty conception, it is irrelevant making considerations of any kind about the possible being because, in this conception, there is no such a being at all. Benatar allows the "counterfactual conception" of a possible being when dealing with the absence of pain, but he imposes the "empty conception" when dealing with the absence of pleasure.

Ideally, someone could say (using the empty conception) that for the absence of pain to be good, there has to be someone for whom this absence is enjoyable, and (using the counterfactual notion) that the absence of pleasure is bad even when there is nobody to suffer from it. If the "possible being" is conceived in (3) in the empty conception, the absence of pain would not be good (or bad), and if the "possible being" is conceived in (4) in the counterfactual conception, the absence of pleasure would not be not bad, but bad. This would be establishing the asymmetry of the way around of Benatar, and with the same drawbacks. In fact, to stay within the logical requirements, it would be right using both for the absence of pleasure and the absence of pain, the same conception of "possible being"

whatever it is (counterfactual or empty). What is illegitimate is to mix them within the same line of reasoning.

Therefore, the argumentation in favor of asymmetry is imperfect because it applies unilaterally a procedure that is based on a fallacy of equivocation in the meaning of the term "possible being". The equivocation is best viewed if we put the words "for a possible person" after "the absence of pain is good" in (3) and after "the absence of pleasure is not bad" in (4) (p. 30). I maintain that the expression "for a possible person" does not mean the same in the two sentences.

(b) Weakness of the “support asymmetries”

To strengthen his position, Benatar tries to provide indirect evidence or "supports" in favor of the alleged asymmetry between (3) and (4): for example, that it has significant "explanatory power" in the explanation of other asymmetries usually endorsed, such as that there is a duty to avoid bringing into existence people who suffer, but there is no duty to bring into existence people who enjoy (p. 32-33), that procreating is not a moral duty (people without children are not considered immoral); that while it is strange to declare that giving rise to someone to benefit him/her, it is not strange to declare that one does not give rise to someone to free him/her from suffering (34); that by adopting the point of view of the possible being, we can only regret for having brought somebody into existence and not for not bringing him/her (34-35) and, finally, that on uninhabited land, we do not regret that no one lives happily on them, while we regret of land inhabited by unhappy people (p. 35).

Regarding the first support asymmetry, one can argue, first, that the symmetry in this case can be restored just by the same procedure applied in the first case. One can paraphrase, for example, the statement on the beginning of

page. 32 by saying, "...the reason why we think that *there is a duty to bring* happy people into existence is that the presence of this pleasure would be good (for the enjoyers) and the absence of pleasure is bad (even though there is nobody to suffer the absence of pleasure)". Here, we simply allow that the absence of pleasure is assessed according to the potential concerns of the person (using the "counterfactual conception" of possible person): if counterfactually represented, *there is someone* who is harmed by the absence of pleasure. On the other hand, we could say in strict symmetry: "In contrast to this, we think that *there is not a duty not to bring* suffering people into existence because while their pain would be bad for them, its absence would not be good for them (given that there would be nobody who would be benefited from it)". Here, we allow that the absence of pain is assessed according to a non-represented being (the "empty conception"): if there is no real being, no one can be "benefited".

Secondly, it seems wrong to claim that there is not, in our societies, a duty to procreate, if understood as a *moral* duty. Indeed, the moral character of an obligation is seen in the actual attitudes and behaviors of a group, rather than in effective punishment mechanisms (with which the obligation would cease to be moral to become legal). In the case of procreation, the moral character of its obligation is clearly seen in the following evidence: (1) There is social pressure for people to have children, pressure that can become intense, embarrassing and even threatening (e.g., generating suspicion of homosexuality, perversion, bad character, etc. on those who do not procreate), (2) There are incentives and social benefits for those with children, which shows that, in the impossibility of having a law enforcing reproduction, mechanisms are established for non reproductive people not to enjoy these benefits, (3) Within the prevailing view, life is regarded as something very valuable, and therefore, it is ethically correct to have children, and the contrary position is considered "selfish", especially if the person enjoys "a good quality of life". This leads to the idea that *there is a moral* obligation to procreate, and if a certain tolerance *exists* this is something typical of a requirement of *moral* type, since there are no effective constraints to force people to reproduce.

For all this, it does not seem that this new "asymmetry" is in good condition to provide plausible "support" for the first one. And the others are even weaker: the notion of "stranger" is dubious, subjective and socially relative, but even considering the term as it usually works, it is false that it is "strange" that people justify having children in terms of the benefits they cause them, and many people even accept that this should lead to try to have as many children as possible. Only when we refer to children who will be born very sick, it is not "strange" to say that we avoid having them for their own sake. On the contrary, it would sound very "strange" in our society to say that we will not have children to avoid them from the hardships of life, when there is not a specific disease or impairment.

Following with the other "support asymmetries" considered plausible, of course one can regret for the children's sake the fact that they were not born, under the very common argument that if they could give their opinion, the children that will be born healthy would like to live and wish that their mothers would not abort them (the common sense argument reproduced by Hare). In the current situation, the parents think they are benefiting their children by having them, and later the vast majority of children think that they were actually benefited. Finally, it is perfectly plausible that someone knows an uninhabited island and think of how much pleasurable this place would be if it had, for example, an amusement park; there is nothing "strange" in the fact that someone with this project in mind who could not achieve it for some reason, feels sorry for the many people who could enjoy it and will be without this pleasure.

I think, then, that none of these other presumed asymmetries, even though they may be widely endorsed by the multitude (p. 36), is stronger than the initial one, so that they cannot work as its "support". Nevertheless, Benatar attempts to extract the result that coming into existence is always a serious harm from this supposed asymmetry, which appears to him to be well established. To do this, he analyzes "scenarios" in several figures. In figure 2.1 (p. 38), there is a scenario A,

where X already exists, and a scenario B, where X never existed. In scenario A, there is pleasure and pain and in scenario B, there is lack of both things. The point is that, according to Benatar, in scenario A, the presence of pain is bad (assertion 1) and the presence of pleasure is good (assertion 2) *for the existing being*, but in scenario B, while the absence of pain is good (assertion 3), the absence of pleasure is neither good nor bad (assertion 4) *for the possible being*, and, in particular, it is not bad.

The obvious reply would be saying that, symmetrically, in scenario B, since X does not exist, the absence of pain is good and the absence of pleasure *is bad*, but this is precisely what Benatar rejects. Because, according to him, when someone does not exist, the fact of not having pleasure is not bad, but we can say that it is good for this possible being not to suffer from pain (p. 38). When considering the attempts to restore symmetry, Benatar says that the one who held that the absence of pleasure of the possible being in scenario B is bad (as reflected in the figure 2.2, p. 39), would be supporting a "too strong" thesis (p. 38), while he considers "too weak" (p. 39) to attempt to restore symmetry saying that, in scenario B of the non-existent being, neither the absence of pain nor the presence of pleasure would be good or bad (as reflected in the figure 2.3. , p. 40).

According to my previous argumentation, I believe that both alternatives are perfectly correct: in figure 2.2, in both cases the possible being is considered in the counterfactual conception; and in figure 2.3., in both cases the possible being is considered in the empty conception. These two possibilities do not make the mix of "possible being" conceptions, and that is why the symmetry is properly preserved in these figures. In 2.2, the absence of pain is good and the absence of pleasure is bad, for a possible being that if he could choose, he would choose this way (i.e., for a possible being counterfactually conceived); in 2.3, both the absence of pain and absence of pleasure is neither good nor bad, since, in the empty conception, there is simply no one who suffer or enjoy, and there is no representation of their preferences. There is total draw.

Benatar coherently believes that 2.2. is "*too strong*" because if the absence of pleasure is considered bad "... *we should have to regret, for X's sake, that X did not come into existence. But it is not regrettable*" (38-39). But I have already shown that it may well be regretted, which shows that 2.2. is not "*too strong*" at all. Examining the other case, Benatar correctly says that in 2.3., "*not bad*" means "*not bad, but not good either.*" "*Interpreted in this way, however, it is too weak. Avoiding the pains of existence is more than merely 'not bad'. It is good*" (p. 39). But this may be the case for existing people; for non-existing ones, saying that neither the absence of pain or pleasure are neither good nor bad is perfectly appropriate, and not "weak".

(c) Crossing argumentation between absence/presence and existing/not-existing dualisms.

If symmetry can always be restored in the indicated way, the pessimistic results of Benatar about that not existing is always preferable to existing (even in a life with pleasures) do not follow. He states (p. 41) that it is clear that the absence of pain in scenario B (where X never existed) is better than the presence of pain in scenario A (where X exists). But this, if I am right, has not been proven. If it is allowed to the possible being simply not being anything (without counterfactual representation), it makes no sense to say that the absence of pain in scenario B is better than the presence of pain in scenario A, because one possible being in this empty sense cannot be "benefited" from the absence of pain. On the other hand, Benatar argues that the absence of pleasure in scenario B is better than the presence of pleasure in scenario A, because nobody is deprived of anything in B. But I have already shown that restoring symmetry, i.e., allowing the possible being to be counterfactually represented, makes perfect sense to say that the absence of pleasure in scenario B is worse than the presence of pleasure in scenario A,

because a possible being in this sense may be harmed by the absence of pleasure, in a counterfactual consideration.

All these problems arise in the application of the terms "absence of pain" and "absence of pleasure" *to existing and to non-existing beings*. It seems not impartial to put the comparison between scenarios A and B only in terms of a confrontation between presences on one side and absences on another, *since scenario A also shows absences*; scenario A is in fact a combination of presences and absences (both of pain and pleasure), while in scenario B, obviously, we have only absences. Benatar admits that these possibilities are not reflected in his matrix (p. 41), although they are implicit. But this point is too important as to keep it in the background, because it will have decisive influence at the time of the comparisons between scenarios A and B.

When comparing the presence of pain in existing people and the absence of pain in non-existing people, Benatar says: "*In the first comparison we see that non-existence is preferable to existence. Non-existence has an advantage over existence*" (pp. 40/41). But this is much less uncontroversial than it seems to be if we look at the difference between "absence of pain or pleasure *existing*" and "absence of pain or pleasure *by not existing*." Benatar attempts to support his assertion on the apparently indisputable fact that the absence of pain is better than the presence of pain, *but it is not clear that the absence of pain by not existing is better than the presence of pain existing*, due to the high price we should pay for not existing. If Benatar argues that it is not a high price because existing is always a serious harm, *it is precisely this point that the asymmetry would have to demonstrate, and not to presume*. It seems that we must already have the (material) proof that non-existing is better than existing to accept the absence of pain by not existing is always better than the presence of pain existing. Here, we move in a circle.

In the case of absence of pleasure, Benatar states:

"In the second comparison...the pleasures of the existent, although good, are not an advantage over non-existence, because the absence of pleasures is not bad. For the good to be an advantage over non-existence, it would have to have been the case that its absence was bad". (p. 41).

I have already shown to be perfectly plausible to accept this as being precisely the case, if we use "possible person" in the counterfactual way. Benatar's statement intends to rely on the apparently undisputed fact that the absence of not depriving pleasure is better than the absence of depriving pleasure, but it is not so obvious that the absence of not depriving pleasure *due to the fact that the person does not exist* is better than the absence of depriving pleasure *when the person exists*, and as before, he presupposes that it had already been shown that non-existence is always better than existence, which is precisely what is in question.

Benatar makes here a mistake that he complains against the hypothetical opponents who object that "good" should be an advantage over "not bad" because the feeling of pleasure is better than a neutral state (p. 41). He complains that this is treating "absence of pleasure" in scenario B (of never existing people) as if it were similar to the "absence of pleasure" in scenario A (of existing people); but he does exactly the same in the case of the "absence of pain": he makes no difference between feeling pain existing (scenario A) and not feeling pain by not existing (scenario B). The presence of pain in A is worse than the absence of pain *in A*, but not necessarily worse than the absence of pain *in B obtained at the price of not existing*. In any case, it seems illegitimate and partial to compare absences (of anything) in absolute terms, instead of comparing absences *within existence* and absences paying the price of not existing.

To give more strength to his asymmetry, Benatar presents (p. 42) an analogy: we have two persons, S and H, S has a tendency to fall ill, but with ability to recover quickly; H does not have this ability, but this person never gets sick.

Thus, it is bad for S to get sick and good for S to recover quickly, but while it is good for H never being sick, not having quick recovery is neither good nor bad for him. From this, it follows that the state of S is not better than the state of H, since a world where I can get sick and recover quickly is not better than a world where I never get sick. The analogy with birth seems clear. But yet in this analogy, the same problem identified above is present, because one can argue that H is not better than S, because although it is better, in scenario A, not getting sick than getting sick, this may not be the case if never getting sick is paid with the price of not existing. There is one important difference between never getting sick for not being born and never getting sick because I was born and have a very good health. This suggests that it could be better to get sick *existing* than never getting sick by simply *not existing*. It appears again that the asymmetry already needs the material thesis that not existing is better than existing, which is precisely what was intended to be proven by the asymmetry.

In the last chapter of his book, Benatar states that there are many problems for those who reject the asymmetry. One of them would be to accept that we have a moral reason, and perhaps a duty, to create people for them not to be deprived of the pleasure, or that we should regret that we do not bring people to the world or the fact that they do not live in a pleasant place, etc. *But, as was shown, there is nothing wrong in these consequences from the strictly formal point of view*; on the contrary, they seem formally compelling. On the other hand, Benatar says that rejecting the asymmetry would lead us to accept that we do not have good moral reasons, based on the interests of a possible suffering person, to prevent his or her birth, nor could we regret having brought him or her to existence based on these sufferings, nor we should want people who suffer miserably in some part of the world to never being born. But again, none of these consequences is wrong from the strict formal point of view; they just do not fit in Benatar's convictions about life. Benatar is convinced that this is a life of suffering and that people should not be born and I absolutely agree with him; but only the alleged asymmetry between absence of pleasure and absence of pain cannot establish these points; in fact, it

has to presuppose them; this undermines the thesis of the independence between the two lines of argument.

(d) Benatar's material argumentation: limits of the empiricist approach

The formal argumentation tried to show that not being born does not harm (on the contrary, it benefits); the material argumentation will be devoted to showing how being born harms a lot. Within an empiricist and Utilitarian stance of the calculation of losses and benefits, Benatar said it would be a mistake to evaluate the quality of human life by a simple absolute summation: one evil for one good. We must understand how these goods and evils are "distributed" in existence (p. 62), the intensity of pain and pleasure, life extension, and the fact of having lived experiences so bad (such as to lose body parts) that no good can compensate. It is a fact that all people permanently suffer from fatigue, hunger, thirst, intestinal malaise, thermal differences, pain, lethargy, frustration with disabilities, headaches, allergies, chills, stomach aches, heat flows, nausea, hyperglycemia, guilt, shame, boredom, sadness, depression, loneliness, dissatisfaction with their bodies and suffering for more serious illnesses of those we love or of ourselves (p. 71). Human desires are compelling and disturbing (p. 75) and human life, in a cosmic point of view, seems to lack any sense. Chapter 3 ends in apocalypse, talking about natural disasters, hunger (89), devastating diseases (90) and violence (91). The presence of "well-known features of human psychology" may explain the positive opinion that people have, in general, of their own lives: the tendency to optimism, the incredible ability to adapt to new circumstances, however painful, and the tendency to compare our lives with other's and coming out winning in comparison (p. 64 - 69).

In this methodology, the poor quality of life is shown through an empirical assessment of evils and benefits, where these are considered as objects susceptible of manipulation and measurement. But experience is always open to

new information and pondering. Benatar's pessimism is based on the world as it currently is, but in some moments he refers to *how the world could be different*. On page 79, he imagines a world where, in the dynamics of desires, the period between deprivation and fulfillment is unnecessary, so that pleasure was immediately obtained; and on page 84, he imagines a world in which human life was much longer, devoid of pain and frustration and with much greater capacity to acquire understanding. Benatar accuses people for not having sufficient imagination to conceive these worlds better than ours, but one could think that the opposite is happening at present: the scientific and technological imagination just escaped from all limits.

Nowadays, it is thought, for example, in a world where medicine could, in the not so distant future, discover the secrecy of aging and make people simply no longer die from aging and start to live indefinitely, or a world where the replacement of deficient organs by new ones would be very simple, or where serious illnesses were things of the past. They talk about a genetic program of well-being, change of the eco-system and re-writing of the genome, seeking for a world full of unprecedented benefits, which would greatly compensate the still remaining damages. In this view, Homo Sapiens would be the only species able to free the world from suffering, so that it is vital that humans can survive on earth. Benatar could accuse the authors of these ideas of anything but of "lack of imagination." According to them, it would be rational and ethical continuing to generate people in a world still bad, but with good perspectives for improvement even if it is the result of a mammoth task that still takes many generations. I do not see how merely empiricist and Utilitarian methodologies can deal successfully with this type of objection.

In the context of Benatar's material argumentation, we find some mixture of these Utilitarian strategies and quotes from Schopenhauer that is supposed to "illustrate" them. But this is curious because the Schopenhauer's method of inquiry has nothing to do with the Utilitarian method. Schopenhauer attempts to show the

poor quality of life through a consideration of a structural nature: humans are endowed of mortality since their birth, of a tremendous anxiety of affirmation in life, and of a brain big enough to clearly see their tragedy. Their suffering is therefore unavoidable, and not due to mere empirical reasons. (Schopenhauer (2005), Part IV, sections 56 to 59). Suffering, for Schopenhauer, in the form of pain, boredom, and moral failure, is not a mere empirical fact, but a necessary feature of existence. (Even attenuating his own pessimism, Schopenhauer states that, precisely, this inevitable and necessary feature of suffering should give relief to humans because their condition would be even worse if the pain was something contingent that could somehow have been avoided. See Schopenhauer (2005), Book IV, section 57, p. 411). Benatar employs Utilitarian calculus to get his results, based on the mere predominance of evils on goods, but on the other, he celebrates Schopenhauer, whose pessimism is based on the problematic character of the structural origins of life, and not on the mere empirical calculation of “gains and losses”.

The odd thing is that the structural elements are not absent in the book of Benatar, but mixed with the Utilitarian resources. For example, every time he alludes to death and disease, or to the insatiable desiring mechanisms (p. 74), he is actually pointing to structural elements of life that should not be put to the same level as allergies, headaches or injustice; there may be lives without them, but they are all decaying and terminal. But the moment where Benatar best visualizes the structure of human life is the last chapter, when trying to resolve the apparent paradox that, being birth bad, death must also be considered bad. For the philosophical common sense argues as follows: since being born was bad, to die must be good. Benatar answers to this question in an appropriate way, but in doing so, he clearly shows the mix of empirical and structural methodologies that I am trying to put in evidence:

“...it is because we (usually) have an interest in continuing to exist that death may be thought of as a harm, even though coming into existence is also a

harm. Indeed, the harm of death may partially explain why coming into existence is a harm. Coming into existence is bad in part because it invariably leads to the harm of ceasing to exist” (p. 213).

Here, Benatar finds out that being born mortally and dying punctually (some day) are just aspects of one and the same process: being born mortal is already starting to die, and that is why both issues are bad, because they are intrinsically connected. The use of structural elements by Benatar is quite curious, because, on the one hand, he openly acknowledges the "unavoidable" and "endemic" character of pain in Schopenhauer's philosophy of life (pp. 76-77), without seeing that this contradicts the idea that there is nothing "necessary" in the harm of coming into existence (p. 29).

The structural point of view of Schopenhauer, I think (which I adopted in the present book myself), is better equipped to meet the objections of meliorists such as Doyal, who believes in the "brave new world": the crucial problem would not be in changing worlds, but purely and simply *in becoming one world* (any world); the mortality of emergence of a world will continue to exist in this world without disease or aging, for when the technical procedures to obtain these benefits were available they will block the birth of new generations, not mentioning the many social, political and economic conflicts that these scientific advantages will bring. Therefore, if the material argumentation is convincing, it will be for the structural elements it contains, rather than due to the efficacy of the mere Utilitarian calculation.

(e) On the alleged independence between formal and material argumentation.

At various moments in his book, Benatar states that the two lines of argument, formal and material, are independent:

“The arguments in the third chapter thus provide independent grounds even for those who are not persuaded by the arguments in the second chapter to accept the claim that coming into existence is always a (serious) harm” (p. 14).

And:

“There is more than one way to reach this conclusion. Those who reject the arguments in Chapter 2 that coming into existence is always a harm may nonetheless be persuaded by the arguments in Chapter 3 that our lives are actually very bad” (p. 93 / 4).

At the beginning of Chapter 3, the author insists that evidence independent from asymmetry will be provided (p. 61), as a "continuation" of the arguments of Chapter 2, where nothing was said about the magnitude of the harm imposed to those who are born. With this, it is assumed that the issue has already been well established, and in Chapter 3 we will see only how serious the situation really is. This suggests that what is really important has already been shown by the formal demonstration, and that arguments of Chapter 3 could, ultimately, be exempted (having been proven that life is bad, maybe it is just emphatic showing that it is *very bad*).

I hold the exact opposite is the case: while I agree with Benatar that the material arguments do not need the formal ones (based on the supposed asymmetry), the inverse situation seems not to be the case: *the formal arguments need the material arguments*. This dependence appears for the first time when, just before asymmetry is presented, Benatar uses several lines (from page 32) on issues of material type ("*As a matter of fact, bad things happen to all of us*", "*No life is without hardship*", etc.), and to face the well-known optimistic objection that "also good things happen to those who exist," he presents the asymmetry. But my previous arguments, if correct, show that the formal line is not able to show alone

that failing to procreate does not harm (and that, to the contrary, it benefits), or that not existing is always better than existing. Precisely, because in the purely formal level, symmetries are restored, the material elements are required to decide the issue in favor of the pessimistic view.

Indeed, after knowing the material evidence that human life is very bad because we are constantly disturbed by unpleasantness, devoured by insatiable desires and shaken by the meaninglessness of life, we can accept that not feeling pain *by not existing* is better than feeling pain *existing*, because we now know *that existing is very bad*: if not to feel pain we have to pay the price of not existing, *we know now that this price is not too high*. On the other hand, we can also accept that not depriving pleasure by not existing is better than depriving pleasure existing, *for now we know that existing is very bad*: if to feel pleasure, we have to pay the price of existing, *now we know this price is too high*. But this makes the material evidence much more important than it was, and especially than Benatar himself thought it was, no longer considering it as mere "continuation" or supplement of something that would have been proven before.

I think this evidence of the dependence of formal arguments over the material ones suggests that perhaps it would have been better for Benatar's argumentative procedure, to reverse the order of the chapters, i.e., to quickly dispose of material evidence about the poor quality of human life to go better equipped to the formal line. However, given this situation, one could maintain something much stronger: not that the order of the chapters should be reversed, but that all the formal argumentation could be dispensed with. Given the dependence of formal argumentation over the material one, the many problems of formal argumentation and the great power of the material line (especially if improved with a clear explanation of the structural elements), one could simply dismiss the arguments of Chapter 2 and support the demonstration of the main theses of the book (that coming into existence is always a serious harm and that

procreation is ethically problematic) only on the material arguments, without having to use support asymmetries, indirect evidence and questionable analogies.

TWO EPILOGUES

EPILOGUE I

SUMMARY OF THE ETHICAL QUESTION IN THE NEGATIVE APPROACH

Steps towards Negative Ethics

1. Throughout the history (of philosophy and of humankind) an intrinsic positive value has been given to human life. Because human life has this intrinsic positive value, procreating is good (or more: it is the most sacred and sublime moral value) and committing suicide is bad (or more: it is the worst, the greatest moral sin).
2. With intrinsic value I mean: whether life has a metaphysical value (as in Christianity) or it has a practical value (as in Kant's ethics); in any case, there is a basic value, which makes human life inviolable. Ethics, in this tradition, is understood as an activity aiming to determine how-to-live a life ultimately guided by that supreme, basic value, intrinsic to human life.
3. Negative ethics starts with a negative ontology that presents life as having an intrinsic value, but negative. Therefore, it primarily denies Agnosticism, the idea that in life there is good and bad things, and that neither a positive nor a negative value can be derived. Nevertheless, it is the very being of life that is bad, not in the sense of a metaphysical evil, but in the sense of a sensitive and moral uneasiness.
4. The very being of human life is a terminal structure that starts to end from the beginning, and that causes uneasiness in the sensitive level, through the phenomena of pain and boredom, and in the moral level, through the phenomena of moral disqualification. We are thrown into a body always

subjected to disease, in fast process of aging, decline and final decomposition, in obligatory neighborhood with others in the same situation, what leaves little space for mutual moral consideration.

5. Positive values do exist, but they are all of the order of beings (and not of the order of Being) and they are all of a vindictive character, or reactive to the structural uneasiness of Being; moreover, they pay high ontological prices (when a value is created, new disvalues are also, new conditions for non-consideration to other people). Positive values are thus, inevitably intra-worldly, reactive and onerous.
6. Ethical theories have regularly supposed that it is possible to live an ethical life. Negative ethics states that an ethical life is possible only in the level of intra-worldly ethical values, reactive and onerous, within the structural uneasiness. Negative ontology (which is a naturalized ontology, to the extent that the characteristics of being are basically those of nature) replaces, therefore, the rationalist affirmative ontology of tradition, in the light of which all European ethical theories we know were built.
7. Specifically, attending particular ethical theories, humans are unable of being virtuous (Aristotle), or of observing the categorical imperative (Kant) or of fighting for the happiness of the majority (Mill); when we face the whole context, we are aware of not being ethical in the terms of any of those theories. To avoid having to go into the nuances of each ethical theory, we can understand that all of them demand, at least, the consideration of other people's interests, the non-manipulation and the non-damage (we call this FEA, fundamental ethical articulation). Negative ethics shows that people regularly violate FEA, what is called moral disqualification.
8. In this level, negative ethics simply shows that, when the usual and current affirmative categories are seriously taken into consideration, the result is

that all human actions are morally disqualified at some point, in some respect, at some moment or situation of its performance or compliance. This is important because it is not the case that “negative” categories lead to these results, but affirmative ones, when radicalized, do the job. This suggests that all European ethical theories we know perform an internal differentiation within general moral disqualification, declaring to be “moral” some disqualified actions, and disqualifying others in a sort of second order disqualification.

9. But why do we have the strong impression that ethics exists and that we can be moral agents? When ethics talk about happiness, virtue or duty, when they accept the difference between good and bad people, they are concealing the structural disvalue of the being of human life as such, forgetting the intra-worldly, reactive and onerous character of positive values. Actually, we are all morally disqualified; disrespectful people do not constitute a small group of exceptions. All ethical theories that we know are “second degree ethics”, concealing, through all sort of mechanisms, the structural disvalue of human life, the moral disqualification and the situated and partial character of all positive value. (The usual ethics are built within the framework of a radical ethical impossibility).

10. The fundamental deforming factor in ethics is the persistent belief that life is something good, that some people are good because they follow the norm of life, and other (few, exceptional) are bad for transgressing it; without seeing that goodness is built inside a fundamental evil, in a concealing and never gratuitous way (paying prices). The impossibility of ethics is hidden in everyday life, and also in the prevailing affirmative philosophical thinking, guided by the ideas of the positive value of life and of the exceptional nature of “evil”.

11. As a corollary of this new view of things, procreation can be seen as an act morally problematic and, in many cases, simply irresponsible, since it consists in putting a being into existence knowing he or she will be placed in a terminal situation (in a terminal body), in constant friction and corruptible (sensitively and morally) structure, where the positive values will always be reactive and will pay high ethical and sensitive prices. Even the ontically responsible procreations are morally problematic, because the most one can offer to children is the capability of defending themselves against the terminal structure of being, in a scope of necessary disrespect of others in some degree. Besides giving them a structural disvalue, this is done in self benefit and in a clear exercise of manipulation of the other, using him or her as a means.

12. Another important corollary is that suicide, far from being, in this perspective, the more horrible moral sin, it turns into an act that has better chances of being moral than many others, to the extent it empties the spaces of struggle against other people. Even though it may also damages, it does so not differently than the rest of human acts; the suicidal act is as reactive and onerous as the other acts, and maybe less (since it is about a sort of self-sacrifice, of stopping to defend oneself with no restrictions); and it is, certainly, the last disrespectful act. After all, we can cause more damage staying than we do leaving. (In any case from the sole disvalue of being of human life does not emerge suicide as a necessity, but merely as a possibility: each one of us will have to decide whether to continue or not struggling against the disvalue of being until our final defeat)

13. Pain, boredom and moral disqualification are permanent and structural motives for abstaining of procreating and for suicide, independent from specific motivations.

14. The disvalue of the very being of human life is what cannot be accepted or assumed; something that will be currently concealed until the end, because the basic value of human life is seen as what sustains all the rest. Life continues due to a powerful vital impulse, immoral and irrational. The arguments do not affect this value; it overruns all arguments, even the better ones. Humans stay alive and procreating not because life is intrinsically valuable, but because they are compelled to live even in the worst conditions. It is a mere “value of adhesion” (with something as a “value of resistance”, of competitive nature). *Etwas Animalisches*.

15. Philosophers and people in general should understand that what they call “value of human life” is not value of human life in its being, but they are pointing to the values which humans are compelled to create precisely because life, in its being, *is not good*. (We do not need to give value to something already valuable). Our defensive and vindicatory actions try to make life something good (or at least tolerable), and these actions are confused with the being of life itself. Human life is, in any case, a conjunction of structural disvalue and positive intra-worldly invented values. And the persistent tendency is to take the seconds as if they were refutations of the first. (I call this the “fallacy of the way back”). But the existence of positive values is not the refutation of the disvalue of the being of life, but, on the contrary, its powerful confirmation: the worse are the rigors of being the more intense and dazzling are valuing intra-worldly inventions.

Recent ideas on suicide

I heard once a mother saying: “I gave him life; if he does not like it, he can commit suicide”. But this is a morally dubious statement because abstention seems to be much easier than suicide. On the contrary of what many people think and

say, committing suicide is, at present at least, a very difficult enterprise. Committing suicide faces several problems, technical, practical, juridical, etc. But mentioning just the moral difficulties, the first thing to say is that suicide will violate FEA, as any other human act. Therein, the most one can do in the track of a quest for the morality of suicide will be trying to describe some characteristics of the final act that do not make it more immoral than many other human acts, or that can make it more moral than other human acts. My specific points are as follows:

(a) The thesis of moral disqualification condemns suicide not specifically as *suicide*, but as a human act whatever. Therefore, in negative ethics, there is not a specific moral condemnation of suicide; suicide is morally disqualified as any other human act, in the sense that no human act can be beneficial to all people at the same time; they cause damages to someone, regardless how well intentioned they may be. The immorality of suicide is stressed, in the affirmative contexts, because the radical fact of moral disqualification is not recognized (due mostly to the ignorance of the negative ontology, and because of the metaphysical conception on human being in vigor).

(b) On the other hand, as it can be observed, the suicidal act does not damage in a peculiar way: through powerful psychological and biological mechanisms, people tend to accept and continue living after the death (suicidal or not) of their loved ones. It is true that there are people who never recover from the suicide of a loved one, but it is also true that there are people who never recover from the homicide of a loved one. There is nothing in suicide that makes it especially traumatizing to all humans. To the contrary, there are people who can feel relieved when they know that a loved one decided to die, instead of watching him slowly languishing in a “natural death”.

(c) The thesis that suicide would be an act *particularly immoral*, the worst of all, is based on some metaphysical or religious thesis connected to points of reference nowadays in crisis or abandoned. If the negative ontology is accepted, there is a

permanent structural motive to killing oneself (the negative structure of the being of life and the reactive character of positive values, finally defeated); and therefore it is absurd the question of psychologists and sociologists about the motives of the suicide, as well as the transformation of suicide into “enigma”; in the light of negative ontology, the true enigma is how human beings keep living after all. But we still have to find the *moral* motives to suicide, because killing us just to run away from the negative structure of being is not, *per se*, morally justified.

(d) There is a first aspect of the suicidal act that seems to clearly put it in the direction of morality: the suicidal manages to challenge the natural (and social) powerful impulse of staying alive without conditions and in any circumstance; it seems that all morality has as necessary condition (although not sufficient!) the capability of overcoming this natural tendency. But of course one can have this capability without the suicide being moral: for it to be, the overcoming of the natural (and social) resistances of staying alive must have a moral motivation. However, the fact that suicide complies with this necessary condition seems to put it in advantage with regards to all those human actions of continuing to live at any cost and with no conditions.

(e) My idea of formal suicide resides in that killing oneself is morally justified when the negative (terminal) structure of the being of life totally strangles, or is about to strangle, the possibilities of living a life of moral consideration to the others. If human life is, in its structure, the search for equilibrium – always unstable - between the terminal structure of being and the intra-worldly invention of values, it seems to be morally justified the suicide performed when the spaces of this invention were or are about to be totally closed. The general pattern of moral justification of suicide is as follows: “*It is morally justified to stop living in all situations where the intra-worldly creation of values has literally (or predictably) been blocked by the advance of the terminality of the being of life in its natural and social deployments*”. Of course this pattern does not *order* every person who is in this situation to commit suicide; it just says that those ones who do it does not

commit an immoral act (besides the inevitable break of the FEA which affects every human act); those who do not do it, may have merit, but it cannot be ordered.

This pattern shall morally justify the suicides of Seneca and Walter Benjamin, committed for motives of social strangling of possibilities, and the ones of Arthur Koestler and Mário Monicelli, who killed themselves to run away from incurable illness. This pattern leaves aside, in principle, a huge amount of suicides without the support of moral justification (but there may be other kinds of justifications). For example: suicides that include homicides, aggressive suicides, revenge suicides, suicides for protest, performatic suicides, proud suicides, suicides for lack of success (or for excess of recognition!), suicides for love (Werther), suicides for competition (Russian roulette), and even the “altruistic suicides”.

This is what makes me reject every other kind of suicide as being moral, if they are committed in “wide spaces”, that is, without being cornered by the terminality of being, regardless how “altruistic” its motives may be. The only thing that can justify suicide is that it was committed in an extreme case, under risk of not having any ethical life left. This justification is out of reach for the “altruistic suicidal”, to the extent he or she has spaces (or “freedom”) to keep living morally, difficulties notwithstanding. One should evaluate the moral onus (the inevitable moral disqualifications) of continuing alive and those of killing oneself: the balance, in formal suicide, is clearly favorable to self-suppression (because there are no way out); in the case of the altruistic suicide, by contrast, it is not excluded the possibility that continuing to live is more moral – concerning the others - than the pretense “sacrifice” of the martyr (letting aside the many genealogical inconvenient of the altruistic acts already captured by Nietzsche).

(h) The suicidal pattern could be broadened if two conditions are satisfied: (h.1) Understanding “or predictably” in the formulation of the matrix in a very wide way.

That is: the strangling of possibilities may not be literal, but it can point to a situation leading inevitably to strangling. This is clear in the case of a person who has been diagnosed with a degenerative disease and who wants to die before its final consummation; however, a suicidal for political protest could claim that, in staying alive, sooner or later the strangling of possibilities would arrive (through ideological censure, political repression, police violation, etc). (h.2) Granting to people a high level of reliability to judge over the strangled character or not of their possibilities of moral life (recognizing to young Werther the right of saying: “Without my loved Carlota, I would not be able to live a moral life”). If h1 and h2 are complied, the pattern could justify many other suicides or all suicides perhaps. I, personally, do not find this line reasonable, for the same previous motive: when the strangling is not literal or almost literal, nothing prevents that continuing to live can be more moral than killing us. A calculus should be in order.

II

ON THE UNLIMITED SAYING YES (FOR AND AGAINST NIETZSCHE)

1. *“At that time I understood my instinct wanted to do all the contrary of what had intended Schopenhauer’s instinct: coming to a justification of life, even to what is most terrible, doubtful and deceptive in it...”*(*Will to power*, aphorism 1005; my translation from Portuguese).

When affirmative philosophers encounter “nihilism” – the rational and moral condemnation of life, the radical disvaluing of life – they usually consider that attitude as an error, as a mistake that should be cured by some kind of methodology, the transcendental analysis (Kant) or even the analysis of language (Wittgenstein). This way, life is never defended on behalf of its own “value”: in order to struggle against the radical questioning of life, the “nihilistic” enemy is tried to be situated in the place of *non-truth* and *non-morality*, in the place of the

monstrous. Nietzsche's originality consisted in conceding to "nihilism" both truth and morality, and the great merit of Schopenhauer consisted of having taken the necessary conflict between life and truth to its extreme point, so *the defense of life for its own merits can finally be assumed, something never dared before, not even by the great affirmative philosophers (even for them, life itself was indefensible)*.

In this case, life does not send "emissaries" or "representatives" in the fight against "nihilism", but life decides to personally act in its own defense, a defense of *life itself* and not of "the duty to preserve it" or the fictions that make it endurable. If philosophy must lead necessarily and unavoidably – according to the direction taken since Plato to Schopenhauer – to the radical disvaluing of life, *the answer will not consist of showing philosophy is "mistaken", but showing life can reply not less radically by disvaluing the philosophy that disvalues life*. By being denied, life denies, but not in the sense of considering nihilistic philosophy false, but in the sense of showing that any denial of life obtains its own legitimacy – the vital force of the denial – precisely from what it intends to deny, regardless the mere "truth" of its actual statements.

The application of the usual set of philosophical categories – being, conscience, reality, unity, end, etc. – must inevitably produce, when applied to life, its radical disvaluing. *"The fundamental error consists precisely that, instead of comprehending conscience as a tool and as a particularity of the totality of life, we put conscience as a criterion of life, as a supreme state of the value of life: this is the mistaken perspective of a parte ad totum..."* (*Will to power*, aphorism 707). Many philosophers have sustained that what the "nihilistic" says against life "was not properly legitimated"; but when situating such lack of legitimacy in terms of "false" or "nonsense", they will keep concealing the very nature of philosophy. Nietzsche tries to show the *illegitimacy* of the philosophical discourse about life is indicated precisely by the strict, rigorous and irrefutable *truth* of its nihilistic statements.

Assuming this posture is fundamental in order to subject the philosophical discourse to a kind of test of legitimacy or illegitimacy as a language about life, because if “nihilism” is declared to be “false” or “nonsense”, philosophy, once more, runs away from a necessary confrontation with itself, beyond its automatic self-laudatory discourse as “disinterested search for truth”. The most interesting of this Nietzschean “terminal argument” – in contrast to the “existential” readings of this Nietzsche today unfortunately *à la mode* – is the fact it is much more a methodological-linguistic argument than an “existential” or “vital” one, in the sense of pointing the inadequacy of the traditional set of philosophical categories when someone intends to inadequately apply them out of their proper field of application.

2. It is usually insisted a lot in the “fragmentary” character of Nietzsche’s thinking, connecting it to the aphoristic form of exposition and his difficulties of systematization. However, not all that is written aphoristically is, *per se*, fragmentary reflection. Fragmentation of thinking is not only a question of style. There is, in Nietzsche’s work, a *non* fragmentary thinking about the relations between life and truth, an issue with which he has been concerned since the early opusculum *Truth and lie in extra-normal sense*, to the last notes of *Will to power*, in a suggestively uniform sense and even when aphorism is not employed. The development of this issue can be studied, as it seems, in three fundamental stages: in the first one, Nietzsche denounces the confusion of truth with what helps living; in the second, he invites to see life as fundamentally fake; in the third he denounces the nihilism of truth. (These stages are not strictly historical, nor point to an effective sequence given in the peculiar narrative of Nietzsche’s writings).

First stage. In *Human, all too human I*, Nietzsche refers to “the bad habits of inferring” like: “*An opinion provides happiness, so it is true; its effect is good, so the opinion itself is good and true...*” (aphorism 30), which leads to the temptation of making the opposite inferences, equally mistaken: “*... an opinion causes pity, uneasy, so it is true*”. “*The pleasant opinion is admitted as true: this is the proof of*

*pleasure (or, as said the Church, the proof of force), which all religions are so proud of, when they should actually be ashamed.” (Idem, aphorism 120). “Nothing is proved against the truth of a plant when this plant is proved not to contribute in anything for the healing of sick people...Therefore science provides so little genuine happiness to whom recriminates science for its coldness, its dry character, its inhumanity...” (Aurora, aphorism 424) (See also *The Gay Science*, aphorisms 121 and 347).*

The most “compact” text about this issue is undoubtedly the first section of *Beyond good and evil*, named “Prejudices of philosophers”. However, the most ironic denounce of the confusion between truth and what helps living is in another part of this same book, when Nietzsche refers to the philosophers of the future, and specifically to the ones of the 20th century! (Is it possible to imagine the enormous deception he would have when meeting Habermas and Hare?): “They will be stronger, rougher...than humanitarian people would like; they would not establish relations with ‘truth’ because truth ‘pleases’ or ‘elevates’ or ‘excites’ them; on the contrary, the belief that precisely truth could provide such pleasures to sentiment will be sober in them. Such rigorous spirits will smile when someone tells them: ‘this thought elevates me; how could it not be true?’ Or: ‘This work delights me; how could it not be beautiful?’” (*Beyond good and evil*, aphorism 210)

This first stage denounces completely usual affirmative mechanisms of thought, as the persistent attempt to put truth beside life, as if the movement of life had to always follow what humans consider true and virtuous. But such coincidence could only be magical. Truth and virtue are criticized by Nietzsche as anthropomorphic categories. When life is not coercively obliged to be embedded into “truth”, the truths humans of science (psychologist, physiologist) discuss should be frightening and unbearable. But no one has ever seen a philosopher being annihilated by his own “truths”; on the contrary, it seems the “truths” he finds keep providing him a certain conceptual functionalized *comfort*. Science, in

opposition, does not console. *“Nor the gods of Greece knew how to console, and when Greek society got ill, those gods died”*. (Aurora, aphorism 424)

Second stage. But life, in its own expansive and indomitable movement, immediately protests because of its unbearable prison within the limits of mere truth, a “truth” that intends to measure life, and so life escapes *from that truth* towards what, in relation to truth, would be *mistake, delusion and the immorality of life*. This textual moment is worth-quoting at length: *“During long ages, intelligence has generated nothing but mistakes. Some of them have resulted useful and preserved the species...Such mistaken articles of faith, always transmitted by heresy, finally came to build a basic heritage to human species... Much later, appeared those who denied and put at doubt similar propositions and, much too late, truth also emerged, the less effective form of knowledge. It seems we cannot live with it, because our organism is disposed to the opposite of truth; all its superior functions...work with those ancestrally incorporated fundamental mistakes...Therefore, the strength of knowledge does not reside in the grade of truth it has, but in its antiquity, in its grade of incorporation, in its character of vital condition”* (The Gay Science, aphorism 110).

And more: *“To us, the falsity of a judgment is not an objection against it... and we are inclined, by principle, to affirm the fakest judgments of all... are the most indispensable for us... that renouncing fake judgments would be as renouncing life”* (Beyond good and evil, aphorism 4). *“How much truth can it bear, how much truth does a spirit long for...? This was for me the key-question in the consideration of values”*. (Will to power, aphorism 1041). *“... all life is based on appearances, art, deception, optics, in the need for perspectivism and the deceptive...before moral...life must lack meaning in a constant and inevitable way, since life is something essentially not moral; life, finally oppressed under the weight of contempt and eternal No, shall feel unworthy of being object of appetite, as the proper non-valuable in itself.”* (The birth of tragedy, Attempt of Self Criticism).

Thus, the second stage of the process is accomplished: after an attempt of identification of truth with life, life overcomes the limits pre-imposed by truth and, taking advantage of the force, fertility and beauty of mistake, illusion and immorality, it manages to run away from these limits. Therefore, it is supposed the revenge of truth (of philosophy, of moral) will not take long, and will be terrible. This leads us to the last stage.

Third stage. Life has shown, in a rather disrespectful way, its preference for mistake and falsity. The second stage has questioned the presumed conciliation in whose light traditional philosophical discourse was formulated. If conciliation was not possible, what could be the option for the philosopher who sees himself as the “guardian of rationality”, as a defender of objectivity and virtue? The answer can only be: nihilism! That is, the radical denial of any moral and true value of life, the rejection of life for being fake and immoral. Moral conduct itself is defined as struggle against the natural, as an ought-to-be that never occurs in the world but to which humans must aim at with all their forces. The philosophical truth tried, in the first stage of the process, to come to a friendly agreement with life, but life – in the second stage – disrespectfully broke the limits of that agreement. Now, in terrible retaliation, the philosophical truth formally constitutes itself as radical denial and annihilation of the world.

At this point, the thinker is compelled to become a doctor, a physiologist: similarly as Wittgenstein considers a waste of time trying to give a positive solution to metaphysical issues, being preferable to show they were only diseases of language, these same issues are considered by Nietzsche as *symptoms*. “*The unconscious disguise of physiological necessities, under the mask of the objective, the ideal, the pure spiritual, go so far that it frightens, and more than once have I asked myself, in general terms, if philosophy has not been, up to now, just an interpretation of the body, and perhaps a mistake of the body... All those audacious extravagances of metaphysicians, specially their answers to the questions of the value of existence, can be seen as symptoms of determined types*

of bodies... of their plenitude, their power, their sovereignty in history and also their retards, their fatigues, their weakening, their premonition of the end and their will to deceasing" (The Gay Science, Foreword, 2).

"We keep ourselves well from saying that (the world) has less value: nowadays we would consider ridiculous man had the pretension of finding values that exceeded the value of the effective world... This deviation had its most recent expression in modern pessimism and a more ancient and solid expression in the doctrine of Buda, and also in Christianity..." (The Gay Science, aphorism 346). But the very nothing-of-the-world is also "wanted", and with the same intensity and passion as any other "object", because Will never can remain empty. Nothingness does not succeed in annihilating the Will, that manages to transform nothingness into a new and fascinating object of willing. The nihilistic finds in nothingness all he did not have found in the world: plenitude, stimulus to will and, inclusive, immortality. The affirmation of his knowledge supposes the annihilation of the world, with which he finally reconciles through a negative mediation.

Actually, in this third stage, we watch a new attempt of recovering of life by the part of truth, but now in the level of a life "decreased" by nihilism: all that cannot be sustained for more time through a vigorous form of life is interpreted as fake and sin. The almost immediate effect of that is the escape of value out of the world, and life, at the same time, gets invaded by *evil*. This must be, no doubt, the great victory of morality: *"The Christian, for example, who hates sin, calls everything a sin. Precisely for believing in an opposition between good and evil, for him the world gets invaded by hateful things that he must constantly struggle against. The "good man" sees himself as surrounded by evil, constantly pursued by evil; he sharpens his vision and ends up discovering signals of evil in everything he does. So he obviously considers nature as evil, man as corrupted, goodness as a grace and, consequently, as humanly impossible... Notwithstanding... one cannot refute a disease..." (Will to power, aphorism 351).*

The criticism against nihilism in the third stage is not against this or that moral, but against *the moral point of view* in general, since the fundamental ethical articulation is connected to the insuperable difference between to be and ought-to-be, and to the possibility of “going against oneself”. Therefore, it is not the case of criticizing particular “nihilistic morals”, but showing that *moral, as such, is viscerally nihilistic*, to the extent the moral discourse cannot develop but through the depreciation of the world and through the creation of an Ultra-world, to the extent moral discourse cannot live without the depreciation of the world.

3. Nietzsche *is* an affirmative philosopher, but not in the sense criticized by the present book; *his affirmativeness is not argumentative* and, precisely because of it, he is the only affirmative who could escape from the radical questionings presented here. Nietzsche accepts that, in the light of current philosophical categories, the expansion of vitality must necessarily fall under a strong moral questioning. But, on the other hand, the nihilistic thesis must be profoundly disturbed in the moment when, instead of trying to demonstrate its “falsity”, it is condemned to simply get filled with its own vitally decreased “truth”. Nietzsche shows, not argumentatively, the same I have meta-argumentatively tried to show here: *there are no affirmative arguments “in favor of life”*. Unless someone was able to consider “argumentative” texts like this:

“Today I allow everyone to express their desire and their dearest thought and today I am going to say myself what I most long for, and this is the first thought that came to me this year, the thought which, from now on, will be for me the reason, the guarantee and the sweetness of life. I want to better learn everyday how to consider beauty what things have of necessary; thus, I will be one of those who make things more beautiful: Amor Fati, may that be, from now on, my love. I do not want to challenge what is ugly. I do not want to accuse, not even the accusers. Let my only denial be to look away. And above all, I do not want, under any

circumstance, be anything other than someone who say yes". (*The Gaya Science*, aphorism 276).

Or maybe, can the following text be considered "argumentative"?

"I experience a melancholic pleasure in living in the middle of the confusion of these narrow streets, of necessities and voices. How much joy, how much impatience, how many wishes, how much desire to live and how much inebriation of life reach the light in each passing moment! And notwithstanding, these people, noisy, living and satisfied of living, will quickly fall into silence! Behind each one of them goes their shadow, their obscure fellow traveler...I note with joy that humans completely resist conceiving the idea of death and I would like to contribute to make one hundred times worthier being meditated the idea of life" (Idem, aphorism 278).

Nietzsche takes life to the field where it has no more defenses or justifications, no favorable sophisms, no coherence, absolutely nothing to its favor, so from the same core of this fragility – in which life was confined by truth – arises the most amazing attack against nihilism and against the rational forces against life, the merciless judgment against the judge himself. The time will come to reveal the high vital prices of truth and virtue. *"The longing for truth could conceal the longing for death. So the question 'What is science for?' is reduced to the moral issue of 'What is moral for?', if life, nature and history are immoral?"* (*The Gay science*, aphorism 344).

The option for life is an option for pure joy, punctual and eternal in its punctuality, by the precise temporality of living. Thus, happiness remains definitively relegated, ready to be ardently rebuilt by moral theories (as Utilitarian "happiness of the greatest number" or Kantian "*Selbstzufriedenheit*"). It is joy and not happiness what matters, what puts-into-being (inter-esse). The intra-worldly joy that consumes itself is the appropriate attitude for a life that has said yes to the

sense of Earth. However, we ought to say the Nietzschean enthusiasm before the exuberance of life - documented in the poetical texts above quoted – and the unlimited saying Yes which derives from it, do not form part of the (non-comforting) scientific description of human phenomena Nietzsche intends to offer. The denial of the world or the exultant dance of life are attitudes that are, each of them, connected to a vital cost we may or not be able to pay with the coin of our health and forces.

Indeed, in Nietzsche's texts, it seems to live an unresolved tension between accepting "nihilism" as an exultant form of life and Will to Power and its accusation as *decadent*, dying, sick, dangerous, contagious, corruptive and weak. It seems, *ab initio*, defensible – in the same sense opened by Nietzsche – the exuberance of a negative life, the passion for a dangerous survival dominated by the interest for morality, the sublime exaltation of abstention and the nobility of a voluntary and consummating death. Nietzsche could not, in fact, oppose to it, I do not say with arguments, but not even with passions or enthusiasms, since enthusiasms do not oppose to each other as arguments do, they do not establish relations of "contradiction" among them: to some exalted enthusiasms in favor of life there can always be opposed not less exalted ones in favor of reason and morality. Once Nietzsche has shown us, following Schopenhauer's footprints, life and truth can mutually deny, his strictly scientific labor has come to an end: every "enthusiasm", in any direction, is superfluous. *What was expected from Nietzsche was his competent services as genealogic psychologist, as "symptomatologist": preaching in favor or against life is religious, as any other preaching. It is neither scientific nor philosophical.*

"I have learned the art of considering myself happy, objective, curious and, before anything, healthy and perverse, what seems to me the 'good taste' of the sick man. (...) The man who suffers has no even right to pessimism! ... Optimism as a mean of cure, in order to have, afterwards, the right to become pessimist from time to time" (*Human, all too human II*, Forword). It is, therefore, perfectly

understandable – to say it in a Nietzschean style – that we, negative philosophers, have earned precisely this right. The present book has been written in the full exercise of our right to be healthy pessimists.

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