

THE TEMPTATION OF TEMPTATION

- From the Tractate Shabbath, pp. 88a and 88b ■

And they stopped at the foot of the mountain . . .

—Exodus 19:17

Rav Abdimi bar Hama bar Hasa has said: This teaches us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, inclined the mountain over them like a tilted tub and that He said: If you accept the Torah, all is well, if not here will be your grave.

Rav Aha bar Jacob said: That is a great warning concerning the Torah. Raba said: They nonetheless accepted it in the time of Ahasuerus for it is written (Esther 9:27): "The Jews acknowledged and accepted. They acknowledged what they accepted."

Hezekiah said: It is written (Psalm 76:9): "From the heavens thou didst utter judgment: the earth feared and stood still (calm)." If it was frightened, why did it stay calm? If it remained calm, why did it get frightened? Answer: First it was frightened and toward the end it became calm.

And why did the earth become afraid? The answer is provided by the doctrine of Resh Lakish. For Resh Lakish taught: What does the verse (Genesis 1:31) mean: "Evening came, then morning, it was the sixth day?" The definite article is not necessary. Answer: God had established a covenant with the works of the Beginning: If Israel accepts the Torah, you will continue to exist; if not, I will bring you back to chaos.

Rav Simai has taught: When the Israelites committed themselves to doing before hearing, 600,000 angels came down and attached two crowns to each Israelite, one for the doing, the other for the hearing. As soon as Israel sinned,

1,200,000 destroying angels came down and took away the crowns, for it is said (Exodus 33:6): "The children of Israel gave up their ornaments from the time of Mount Horeb."

Rav Hama bar Hanina said: At Horeb they adorned themselves, as was just said (ornaments to be dated from the time of Mount Horeb) and at Horeb they gave them up, according to our verse: "They renounced from the time of Mount Horeb."

Rabbi Johanan said: Moses deserved to keep them all, for it is said just afterward (Exodus 33:7): "Now Moses would take the tent. . . ."

Resh Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, will give us back the crowns in the future, for it is written (Isaiah 35:10): "Those redeemed by the Eternal One will come back thus and will reenter Zion singing, an eternal joy upon their head. . . ." Eternal joy—the joy from of old.

Rabbi Eleazar has said: When the Israelites committed to doing before hearing, a voice from heaven cried out: Who has revealed to my children this secret the angels make use of, for it is written (Psalm 103:20): "Bless the Lord, Oh, His angels, you mighty ones, who do His word, hearkening to the voice of His word."

Rav Hama bar Hanina has said (Song of Songs 2:3): "Like an apple tree amidst the trees of the forest is my beloved amidst young men." Why is Israel compared to an apple tree? Answer: to teach you that just as on an apple tree fruits precede leaves, Israel committed itself to doing before hearing.

A Sadducee saw Raba buried in study, holding his fingers beneath his foot so tightly that blood spurted from it. He said to him: People in a hurry, for whom the mouth passes before the ears, you always find yourselves in a state of headlong haste. You should have listened in order to know whether you were able to accept, and if you were not able to accept, you should not have accepted. Raba answered him: It is written about us who walk in integrity: "The integrity of the upright guides them"; about those who walk upon torturous paths, it is written: "The crookedness of the treacherous destroys them" (Proverbs 11:3).

This reading was given in the context of a colloquium consecrated to "The Temptations of Judaism," held in December 1964. The proceedings were published in *Tentations et actions de la conscience juive: Données et débats* (Paris: P.U.F., 1971). *Levinian's* commentary is on pp. 163-182 and the discussion following it on pp. 182-188.

Ju
la 16;

Ju
la 16;

Ju
la 16;

Ju
la 16;

Ju
la 16;

I will be as brief as possible. This afternoon, there will be three presentations instead of the two originally scheduled. I absolutely want you to be able to hear everyone.

My text is drawn from the tractate *Shabbath*, pages 88a and 88b. My conscience is not at ease. In choosing as the title of my commentary, "The Temptation of Temptation," haven't I given in to the temptation of putting exponents onto words, as though they were numbers? Other scruples beset me. During this morning's session, there was a call to action: It is high time for interpretations to come to an end so that the world can finally undergo some changes! I was going to give up my commentary. But I regained some confidence when I thought of the impossibility of escaping all discourse, even at the moment when the world is in the process of changing. Will it not be necessary to put some questions to the comrades who are changing the world? And how is one to escape the horizons opened up by this questioning speech?

Finally, I am a bit embarrassed that I always comment on the aggadic texts of the Talmud and never venture forth into the Halakhah. But what can I do? The Halakhah demands an intellectual muscle which is not given to everyone. I cannot lay claim to it. My modest effort will consist in seeking for the unity and progression of thought in the text, which, as you can already see, is made up of a series of apparently unconnected observations.

For those who are listening to me for the first time, I want to emphasize that my commentary does not intend to decode a supposedly ciphered language. I do not assume that the masters whose discussion I am spelling out had a tacit understanding regarding the symbolic value of the terms used. I do not possess a key with which to decipher magical formulae. In any case, our text bears no resemblance to them.

Finally, in my commentary, the word "God" will occur rarely. It expresses a notion religiously of utmost clarity but philosophically most obscure. This notion could become clearer for philosophers on the basis of the human ethical situations the Talmudic texts describe. The reverse procedure would no doubt be more edifying and more pious but it would no longer be philosophical at all. Theosophy is the very negation of philosophy. We have no right to start from a pretentious familiarity with the "psychology" of God and with his "behavior" in order to understand these texts, in which we see traces of the difficult paths which lead to the comprehension of the Divine, coming to light only at the crossroads of human journeyings, if one can express it thus. It is these human journeyings which call to or announce the Divine.

The temptation of temptation may well describe the condition of Western man. In the first place it describes his moral attitudes. He is for an open life, eager to try everything, to experience everything, "in a hurry to live. Impatient to feel." In this respect, we Jews all try to be Westerners, just as Gaston Bachelard tried to be a rationalist. Ulysses' life, despite its misfortunes, seems to us marvelous, and that of Don Juan enviable, despite its tragic end. One must be rich and a spendthrift and multiple before being essential and one. With what conviction did Mr. Amar utter the words "to

enter history" this morning! Oh, above all, we cannot close ourselves off to any possibility. We cannot let life pass us by! We must enter history with all the traps it sets for the pure, supreme duty without which no feat has any value. There would be no glory in triumphing in innocence, a concept defined purely negatively as a lack, associated with naivete and childhood, marking it as a provisional state. But is it forbidden to seek another antithesis to the temptation of temptation? This commentary will venture forth in that direction.

In *The Republic*, after having drawn the ideal of a just but austere State, Plato is made to change his plan. A just and reasonable City is needed. But it must have everything. New needs must arise and proliferate in it. All temptations must be possible. In the Midrash about Noah, the Talmudists, with irony, add *shedim*—demons, spirits without bodies—to the beings who take refuge in the Ark. These are the tempters of postdiluvian civilizations without which, no doubt, the mankind of the future could not be, despite its regeneration, a true mankind.

Christianity too is tempted by temptation, and in this it is profoundly Western. It proclaims a dramatic life and a struggle with the tempter, but also an affinity with this intimate enemy. After having heard yesterday's talks, I think that the person of Christ still remains remote for us. Jews, or at least the vast majority of Jews, remain particularly indifferent to Jesus. This Jewish unresponsiveness to the person who is the most moving to Christians is undoubtedly a great scandal for them. But, on the other hand, all Western Jews are particularly drawn by the dramatic life, the life of temptations which the Christian life is. Christianity tempts us by the temptations, even if overcome, which fill the days and nights even of its saints. We are often repelled by the "flat calm" which reigns in the Judaism regulated by the Law and by ritual.

Westerners, opposed to a limited and overly well defined existence, want to taste everything themselves, want to travel the universe. But there is no universe without the circles of Hell! In the whole as a totality, evil is added to good. To traverse the whole, to touch the depth of being, is to awaken the ambiguity coiled inside it. But temptation makes nothing irreparable. The evil which completes the whole threatens to destroy everything, but the tempted ego is still outside. It can listen to the song of the sirens without compromising the return to its island. It can brush past evil, know it without succumbing to it, experience it without experiencing it, try it without living it, take risks in security. What is tempting is this purity in the midst of total compromise or this compromise which leaves you pure. Or, if you wish, the temptation of temptation is the temptation of knowledge.

The temptation of temptation is not the attractive pull exerted by this or that pleasure, to which the tempted one risks giving himself over body and soul. What tempts the one tempted by temptation is not pleasure but the

32

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

pre sci hu: wo phi no Go we Div car: the

ern life Imj Ga: tun tra(ess(

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

32

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

pre sci hu: wo phi no Go we Div car: the

ern life Imj Ga: tun tra(ess(

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

32

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

pre sci hu: wo phi no Go we Div car: the

ern life Imj Ga: tun tra(ess(

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

32

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

pre sci hu: wo phi no Go we Div car: the

ern life Imj Ga: tun tra(ess(

co Te ex m(fo(so: co: ev(no th(tio

tex cai to in(alr th(gu: ha(do ou

ambiguity of a situation in which pleasure is still possible but in respect to which the Ego keeps its liberty, has not yet given up its security, has kept its distance. What is tempting here is the situation in which the ego remains independent but where this independence does not exclude it from what must consume it, either to exalt it or to destroy it. What is tempting is to be simultaneously outside everything and participating in everything.

The temptation of temptation is thus the temptation of knowledge. The repetition once begun no longer comes to a stop. It is infinite. The temptation of temptation is also the temptation of temptation of temptation, etc. The temptation of temptation is philosophy, in contrast to a wisdom which knows everything without experiencing it. Its starting point is an ego which, in the midst of engagement, assures itself a continual disengagement. The ego is perhaps nothing but this. An ego simply and purely engaged is naive. It is a temporary situation, an illusory ideal. But the ego and its separation from its engaged self so that it can return to its noncommitted self may not constitute the ultimate condition of man. Overcoming the temptation of temptation would then mean going within oneself further than one's self. Cannot the pages upon which we are about to comment show us the way?

One can perceive a certain conception of knowledge, occupying a privileged position in Western civilization, behind or, as a background to, the set of values ruling our morality, or at least in agreement with the feelings animating it.

To join evil to good, to venture into the ambiguous corners of being without sinking into evil and to remain beyond good and evil in order to accomplish this, is to know. One must experience everything through one's own self but experience it without having experienced it yet, before engaging oneself in the world. For experiencing itself is already committing oneself, choosing, living, limiting oneself. To know is to experience without experiencing, before living. We want to know before we do. But we want only a knowledge completely tested through our own evidence. We do not want to undertake anything without knowing everything, and nothing can become known to us unless we have gone and seen for ourselves, regardless of the misadventures of the exploration. We want to live dangerously, but in security, in the world of truths. Seen in this manner, the temptation of temptation is, as we have already said, philosophy itself. It is a noble temptation, hardly a temptation anymore, more in the nature of courage, courage within security, the solid basis of our old Europe.

But opinion, recognized as the sole enemy because it takes advantage of credulity and ignorance, legitimates, if one can put it this way, this all-encompassing curiosity, this unlimited and anticipatory indiscretion which constitutes knowledge, seat of the *a priori* and of the fact. It makes us forget the unsavory joy of knowledge, its immodesty, the abdications and inca-

pacities peculiar to it. It makes us forget all that could, in times of great dangers and catastrophes, have reminded us of the Luciferian origins of this nobility and of the temptation to which this indiscretion responds. Certainly knowledge is worth infinitely more than opinion. But perhaps we are not facing an alternative. Perhaps the demand for truth which legitimates this temptation of curiosity can find purer paths. That, at any rate, is the hypothesis which guides this commentary.

Philosophy, in any case, can be defined as the subordination of any act to the knowledge that one may have of that act, knowledge being precisely this merciless demand to bypass nothing, to surmount the congenital narrowness of the pure act, making up in this manner for its dangerous generosity. The priority of knowledge is the temptation of temptation. The act, in its naivete, is made to lose its innocence. Now it will arise only after calculation, after a careful weighing of the pros and cons. It will no longer be either free or generous or dangerous. It will no longer leave the other in its otherness but will always include it in the whole, approaching it, as they say today, in a historical perspective, at the horizon of the All. From this stems the inability to recognize the other person as other person, as outside all calculation, as neighbor, as first come.

It is not just the legitimate need to find a meaning for action and to act consciously which is satisfied in the total lucidity of the knowledge preliminary to the act. There is also a gesture of refusal toward naive spontaneity, the condition—but is it true?—of the generosity of the movement done without calculation. The goal of knowledge is to bring this naivete—understood as the antithesis of generosity—to take everything upon itself, both good and evil, so that it can be shown everything, be tempted and conjure this danger of the unknown in the midst of the danger of temptation. The temptation of temptation is the life of Western man becoming philosophy. Is it philosophy?

Any act not preceded by knowledge is considered in an unfavorable light: it is naive. Only philosophy takes away naivete. Nothing else seems to take philosophy's place here. Can one oppose to it the spontaneity whose innocence it is called upon to remove?

Isn't an act done apart from knowledge, isn't the generosity of pure spontaneity, leaving aside for the moment all cultural influence, in itself dangerous? Besides, isn't naive generosity in its essence a provisional situation which can only preserve from temptations artificially? Can one oppose the naivete of faith to the temptation of temptation when it reveals its philosophical and scientific aspect, as certain as this faith may seem of the divine message to which it adheres? Can childhood answer the Tempter with confidence in the long run? An affirmative answer to this question is sometimes given by Christianity. But spontaneous engagement, in contrast to a theoretical exploration which should, in principle, precede it, is either impossible and dangerous, or provisional.

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

34 am wh dis inc mi sin ref tio Th kn wt me gaḥ its prc inḡ fur me leg of mē wi acc ow inḡ sel exj on wa bec of in ter tat agḥ cre eni coi get

tom, we will comment on the text point by point instead of simply passing quickly over the whole.

And they stopped at the foot of the mountain . . . Rav Abdimi bar Hama bar Hasa has said: This teaches us that the Holy One, Blessed be He, inclined the mountain over them like a tilted tub and that He said: If you accept the Torah, all is well, if not here will be your grave.

The words of Rav Abdimi bar Hama refer to Exodus 19:17, which is about a rather important event in the life of Israel: the giving of the Torah. "At the foot of the mountain"? The text, in fact, expresses itself differently: "below the mountain," *be'arashtit hadhar*. The commentator is quibbling over a Hebrew expression. Is he sticking to the letter? Does he not know Hebrew? Is he so uncultivated as to lend an absolute meaning to prepositions without taking into account the meaning that derives from context? Or is Rav Abdimi pretending to be doing all this in order to convey a teaching? Israel is placed *below* the mountain, if we translate the text literally. The mountain is thus changed into an upside-down bucket. It threatens to crush the tribes of Israel if they refuse the gift of the Law. What wonderful circumstances in which to exercise one's free will—a sword of Damocles! The Israelites coming out of Egypt are about to receive the Torah. The negative freedom of those set free is about to transform itself into the freedom of the Law, engraved in stone, into a freedom of responsibilities. Is one already responsible when one chooses responsibility? This is the problem suggested by Rav Abdimi. Does he think, then, that the choice for responsibility is made under threat and that the Torah would not have been chosen freely?

The choice of the Jewish way of being, of the difficult freedom of being Jewish, would have been a choice between this way and death. Already *eyn bezerah* "the Torah or death," "the truth or death," would not be a dilemma that man gives himself. This dilemma would be imposed by force or by the logic of things. The teaching, which the Torah is, cannot come to the human being as a result of a choice. That which must be received in order to make freedom of choice possible cannot have been chosen, unless after the fact. In the beginning was violence. But we may be dealing here with a consent other than the one given after inspection. Perhaps death threatens a betrayal. Reason would rest either on violence or on a mode of consent that cannot be reduced to the alternative liberty-violence and whose betrayal would be threatened by violence. Wouldn't Revelation be precisely a reminder of this consent prior to freedom and non-freedom? Therefore it would not simply be a source of knowledge parallel to those which come from natural insight. Adherence to it would not coexist *side by side* with the internal adherence which works through evidence. The first, Revelation, would condition the second, Reason. The Torah, received without violence, as it is commonly understood, would be precisely that which

It may be possible, however, to oppose to knowledge preceding engagement something other than innocent doing, childlike and beautiful like generosity itself, something other than doing in the sense of pure *praxis*. For the latter cuts through Gordian knots instead of untying them and is contemptuous of the information with which the European tempted by temptation, simultaneously an adventurer and a man living in supreme security, wants to surround himself. This European is certain at least of his retreat as subject into his extraterritorial subjectivity, certain of his separation with respect to any other, and thus assured of a kind of irresponsibility toward the All. It may be, however, that the notion of action, instead of indicating *praxis* as opposed to contemplation, a move in the dark, leads us to an order in which the opposition of engagement and disengagement is no longer decisive and which precedes, even conditions, these notions.

The Revelation which is at stake in the following text will permit us to discover this order prior to the one in which a thought tempted by temptation is to be found.

In the logic of Western thought, Revelation, unless it wants to appear useless, must comprise elements which no reason could discover. Consequently, these elements must rest on an island of fideism or in a blind confidence in the transmitter of these elements. They must make those who accept them run the risk of having been duped by the Devil. If, on the other hand, these elements are accepted because they already recommend themselves to the discernment of the one who accepts them, then they are in the domain of philosophy. They would already be in its domain even if reason were to decide only upon the authority of the messenger. For here, too, it is the inner certainty of the faithful which would control what Revelation conveys. The paradox is that Revelation nonetheless claims to overcome the apparently insurmountable waverings and doubts of Reason.

The text on Revelation on which we are commenting bears precisely on this relation between the message of truth and the reception of this message. For the recipient of the message cannot yet benefit from the discernment which this message is to bring him. The text, then, will shed light on whether it is possible to escape the temptation of temptation without either reverting to childhood or always violently restraining it. Perhaps the text suggests a way of avoiding both the alternative of an infinitely cautious old age and of an inevitably rash childhood by establishing the relation between being and knowing in another way. It may set to work a notion which takes away the value that the temptation of temptation has acquired for us.

I have cut up the text into small paragraphs. It is, in any case, something that happens of itself. The difficulty lies more in the building and sewing back together. That is what we shall try to do. And, according to our cus-

It may be possible, however, to oppose to knowledge preceding engagement something other than innocent doing, childlike and beautiful like generosity itself, something other than doing in the sense of pure praxis. For the latter cuts through Gordian knots instead of untying them and is contemptuous of the information with which the European tempted by temptation, simultaneously an adventurer and a man living in supreme security, wants to surround himself. This European is certain at least of his retreat as subject into his extraterritorial subjectivity, certain of his separation with respect to any other, and thus assured of a kind of irresponsibility toward the All. It may be, however, that the notion of action, instead of indicating praxis as opposed to contemplation, a move in the dark, leads us to an order in which the opposition of engagement and disengagement is no longer decisive and which precedes, even conditions, these notions.

The Revelation which is at stake in the following text will permit us to discover this order prior to the one in which a thought tempted by temptation is to be found.

In the logic of Western thought, Revelation, unless it wants to appear useless, must comprise elements which no reason could discover. Consequently, these elements must rest on an island of fideism or in a blind confidence in the transmitter of these elements. They must make those who accept them run the risk of having been duped by the Devil. If, on the other hand, these elements are accepted because they already recommend themselves to the discernment of the one who accepts them, then they are in the domain of philosophy. They would already be in its domain even if reason were to decide only upon the authority of the messenger. For here, too, it is the inner certainty of the faithful which would control what Revelation conveys. The paradox is that Revelation nonetheless claims to overcome the apparently insurmountable waverings and doubts of Reason.

The text on Revelation on which we are commenting bears precisely on this relation between the message of truth and the reception of this message. For the recipient of the message cannot yet benefit from the discernment which this message is to bring him. The text, then, will shed light on whether it is possible to escape the temptation of temptation without either reverting to childhood or always violently restraining it. Perhaps the text suggests a way of avoiding both the alternative of an infinitely cautious old age and of an inevitably rash childhood by establishing the relation between being and knowing in another way. It may set to work a notion which takes away the value that the temptation of temptation has acquired for us.

I have cut up the text into small paragraphs. It is, in any case, something that happens of itself. The difficulty lies more in the building and sewing back together. That is what we shall try to do. And, according to our cus-

Let us first take these lines in their literal sense. If, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the Torah was imposed through violence, it was "assumed," as they say today, later, after Jewish history had been lived. A charming story! Esther, but also Haman, dangers and miracles. What a good thing it is to be Jewish! Unless such incidents would inspire one to pull out. From now on, one would rather live without triumphs and without Haman, without miracles and without disasters.

But to justify the Torah by choosing in the course of Jewish history the day after a dangerous adventure, experienced because of unfaithfulness to this Torah (for that is how the unexpected events of the Megillah are to be explained for the Talmud), is perhaps to insinuate that the link between the giving of the Torah and the threat of death has a meaning different from that of a truth imposed through violence. The Torah itself is exposed to danger because being in itself is nothing but violence, and nothing can be more exposed to violence than the Torah, which says no to it. The Law essentially dwells in the fragile human conscience, which protects it badly and where it runs every risk. Those who accept this Law also go from one danger to the next. The story of Haman irritated by Mordecai attests to this danger. But the irresistible weight of being can be shaken only by this incalculable conscience. Being receives a challenge from the Torah, which jeopardizes its pretension of keeping itself above or beyond good and evil. In challenging the absurd "that's the way it is" claimed by the Power of the powerful, the man of the Torah transforms being into human history. Meaningful movement jolts the Real. If you do not accept the Torah, you will not leave this place of desolation and death, this desert which lays to waste all the splendors of the earth. You will not be able to begin history, to break the block of being stupidly sufficient unto itself, like Haman drinking with King Ahasuerus. You will not be able to exorcise fatality, the coherence of determined events. Only the Torah, a seemingly utopian knowledge, assures man of a place.

The Talmudic text on which I have just commented certainly has not taken the biblical text of the Book of Esther literally. I wish to underscore this permanent dissonance between what the Talmud draws from the biblical text and what is found in that text literally. Similarly, I wish to underscore our attempt to translate Talmudic discourse into modern language. It means that we draw from an allusive and enigmatic mode of speaking, a bearer of multiple meanings, a few schematic representations. I wish to emphasize this so that our friend Rabi, when he reviews this colloquium in the newspapers, does not repeat his objection to the preceding one: "I went back to the indicated biblical texts and nothing of what the Talmud is made to say on their subject is to be found there. . . ." I have insisted more than once that the Talmudic spirit goes radically beyond the letter of Scriptures. Its spirit was nonetheless formed in the very letters it goes beyond, so as to

FOUR TALMUDIC READINGS

preceden freedom of thought. 'I'hum, the Torah would play a role of the first importance in the theory of knowledge itself. The content of the received Torah would be able to be expressed in its inner coherence, just as all the philosophies inspired by it or denying it. But this coherence of a system must not be taken for the prior experience of the Torah itself.

Would the choice between truth and death be a reference to education, the process by which the mind receives training under the master's rod in order to rise toward comprehension? That the mind needs training suggests the very mystery of violence's anteriority to freedom, suggests the possibility of an adherence prior to free examination and prior to temptation. This adherence cannot be considered naive, for naivete is an unawareness of reason in a world dominated by reason. It lags behind. It does not condition. Of course I could also ask myself whether "Torah or death" means that outside the Torah Judaism sees nothing but desolation and, that, in this sense, the choice for the Torah was rational and free. But it would once again affirm that no hesitation was possible, that the free choice of the Torah was made without any possibility of temptation.

Let us put aside momentarily the possibility of a prior consent, as distinct from reason as it is from violence; let us put aside the analysis of a notion of consent pointing to a third way, which cannot be identified with unreasonableness. It is equally clear that this way cannot be identified with the philosophical notion of reason. Henceforth, the following objection is understandable.

Rav Aha bar Jacob said: That is a great warning concerning the Torah.

"Great warning" is the commentators' attempt to translate an obscure expression, the meaning of which would be, they claim, to be put on one's guard. We are indeed well warned: If the Torah is accepted under threat of death, we are not accountable in case of transgression. Let us allow ourselves to be tempted then. Everything is allowed! To accept without examining or because of violence, refusing to be tempted in this manner— isn't that giving oneself over to the infinite and irresistible temptations of irresponsibility? If reason is to emerge from a choice made without reason, how is one to keep oneself from making unreasonable choices? Or, to come back to our way of formulating the problem: If temptation defines the philosophical reason of the West, does this definition exhaust the notion of reason? The answer: the refusal of temptation, the trust granted from the start, should not be defined negatively. The order thus founded extends, after the fact, to the act of foundation. Reason, once it comes into being, includes its pre-history.

Raba said: they nonetheless accepted it in the time of Ahasuerus, for it is written (Esther 9:27): "The Jews acknowledged and accepted. They acknowledged what they accepted."

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

preced import Torah philosc must r Wo the prc order t the ver ity of a adhere son in Of cov outside sense, again a rah wa Let tinct fr notion unreasc the phi underst Ra "Grn expressi guard. v death, v to be te because oneself reason i oneself formula the Wes refusal c negative dation. . . . Raba s ten (Esh what t

reestablish, despite apparent violence, the permanent meaning within these letters.

The biblical text to which ours refers is about Esther, who institutes a festival involving gifts to the poor, a feast, and readings of the Megillah in order to commemorate the deliverance of Purim. The Israelites "acknowledged and accepted" all this. But the word for "acknowledged," *kymu*, can also mean "they fulfilled it." To receive the gift of the Torah—a Law—is to fulfil it before consciously accepting it. Ten centuries after Mount Sinai, what had been a forced acceptance would be freely accepted. But, here, when we look more closely, we see that this free acceptance amounts to practicing before adhering. Not only does acceptance precede examination but practice precedes adherence. It is as if the alternatives liberty-coercion were not the final ones, as if it were possible to go beyond the notions of coercion and adherence due to coercion by formulating a "practice" prior to voluntary adherence. Consequently, it is as if the adherence given under constraint revealed a beyond-freedom-and-constraint, a commitment leaving no room for what we normally call adherence. In the very last part of our text, would it be this that is called *Temimut*?

Let us summarize the result reached up to this point: Freedom begins in what has all the appearance of a constraint due to threat. The text might be teaching us this pedagogy of liberation. But is it a pedagogy? Is it a method for children? Without being less pure than the freedom that would arise from freedom (in the non-engagement of the one who is tempted and who tries his luck), the freedom taught by the Jewish text starts in a non-freedom which, far from being slavery or childhood, is a beyond-freedom.

This introduces what follows, in which the theme broadens. The following passage in fact shows us that this anteriority of acceptance in relation to freedom does not merely express a human possibility but that the essence of the Real depends on it. In this anteriority lies hidden the ultimate meaning of creation:

Hezekiah said: It is written (Psalm 76:9): "From the heavens thou didst utter judgment: the earth feared and stood still."

The universe in which the power of the Eternal is manifested is scared by his word. The word *veshakta*, which we have translated as "was still," means, of course, the stillness of peace and consequently literally expresses calm. This explains the ensuing question: How could the earth have experienced two contrary feelings simultaneously, that of fear and that of calm?

Did our Talmudists not read Corneille and did they not hear of a "obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles"?⁵ Insensitive to literary effects, they must also be wary of dialectics for Hezekiah to be able to ask the following question:

T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu

T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu

T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu

T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu

T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu

T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu
T] hi m ca en sci als qu

If it was frightened, why did it stay calm? If it remained calm, why did it get frightened? Answer: First it was frightened and toward the end it became calm.

Hezekiah is not only ignorant of Corneille and wishes to ignore the reconciliation of opposites but also seems certain that Psalm 76 has to do with the gift of the Torah. On this point, let us restrain our irony. Don't great thoughts become clear through great experiences? Don't we moderns say: Here are the circumstances that finally made me understand such and such a saying in Pascal or Montaigne? Aren't the great texts great precisely because of their capacity to interact with the events and experiences that shed light on them and which they guide? In the end, doesn't one have the right to ask, when reading Psalm 76, which concrete situation justifies this lyricism, which, after all, is not a mere rhetorical flourish?

But let us return to our text. We now know how the contradiction of verse 9 and of Psalm 76 resolves itself. But here is a new question:

And why did the earth become afraid? The answer is provided by the doctrine of Resh Lakish: For Resh Lakish taught: What does the verse (Genesis 1:31) mean: "Evening came, then morning, it was the sixth day"? The definite article is not necessary. Answer: God had established a covenant with the works of the Beginning (with the Real called to come forth): If Israel accepts the Torah, you will continue to exist, if not I will bring you back to chaos.

(The sixth day of Creation alludes to a definite day: the sixth day of the month of Sivan, the day of the giving of the Torah.)

The mountain turned upside down like a tub above the Israelites thus threatened the universe. God, therefore, did not create without concerning himself with the meaning of creation. Being has a meaning. The meaning of being, the meaning of creation, is to realize the Torah. The world is here so that the ethical order has the possibility of being fulfilled. The act by which the Israelites accept the Torah is the act which gives meaning to reality. To refuse the Torah is to bring being back to nothingness. One can now see how verse 9 of Psalm 76, which earlier seemed to undergo a forced reading [*qui, tout à l'heure, semblait sollicité*], extends the meaning of the situation we have examined above to the entirety of Being. The unfortunate universe also had to accept its subordination to the ethical order, and Mount Sinai was for it the moment in which its "to be" or "not to be" was being decided. The refusal of the Israelites would have been the signal for the annihilation of the entire universe. How does being realize its being? The question of ontology will thus find its answer in the description of the way Israel receives the Torah. This way consists—such is the thesis we are upholding—in overcoming the temptation of evil by avoiding the temptation of temptation.

We are coming to the third part, which is essential for our presentation. It will bring out the unique nature of an event such as the giving of the

Torah: one accepts the Torah before one knows it. This shocks logic and can pass for blind faith or the naivete of childish trust, yet it is what underlies any inspired act, even artistic, for the act only brings out the form in which it only now recognizes its model, never glimpsed before. But we must ask ourselves whether every inspired action does not derive from the unique and original situation of the giving of the Torah. Doesn't the meaning of inspiration itself emerge from this situation? More precisely, doesn't the reversal of the normal chronology of accepting and knowing indicate a going beyond knowledge—a going beyond the temptation of temptation—but a going beyond different from that which would consist in a return to childish naivete. The latter, in fact, is still on this side of all temptation, does not protect against it, and, essentially provisional, itself asks to be protected. To go beyond the temptation of temptation could not be the deed of an undeveloped human nature. It is a perfectly adult effort.

Rav Simai has taught: When the Israelites committed themselves to doing before hearing, 600,000 angels came down and attached two crowns to each Israelite, one for the doing, the other for the hearing.

"We will do and we will hear." Rav Simai emphasizes the extraordinary nature of this biblical statement. Six hundred thousand angels came down—the number is not random. Each Israelite had his angel. The gift of the angels will remain of a personal nature, and the angels attach two crowns to each Israelite, one for the "doing" and the other for the "hearing." Jewish tradition has taken pleasure, we know, in this inversion of the normal order, where hearing precedes doing. The tradition has not exhausted all the resources of this error in logic and all the merit which consists in acting before understanding.

Is it certain, though, that the Israelites spoke against all logic and against all reasonable reason? Maybe they expressed their trust. Through trust in him who speaks, we promise to obey and now we will listen to what he tells us. Nothing is less paradoxical, except the very origin of trust prior to all examination. The Talmudic text will nonetheless call the paradox of this inversion an "angel's mystery" several sentences later and consequently seems very conscious of the problem. Martin Buber, in his translation of the Bible, finds an ingenious interpretation. He takes the letter *vav* of the text as a subordinate conjunction, which is a perfectly legitimate usage. "We will do *and* we will understand" becomes "We will do *in order to* understand."

We think we must look further. The question is not to transform action into a mode of understanding but to praise a mode of knowing which reveals the deep structure of subjectivity, with which our text ends, *Temimut*. Thus, the concern to show, in the first place, that the apparently upside-down order is, on the contrary, fundamental. Indeed, the commentators ask themselves

why only two crowns rewarded the "we shall do and we shall hear." Wasn't a third crown needed to reward the reversal of the sequence?

But is it certain that the crowns were rewards? Weren't they the very splendor that doing and hearing take on when they follow each other in the inverse order to that of logic? Wouldn't hearing and doing in this reversal cease being a misunderstanding and a partial doing? The angels' crowns consecrated the splendor that these notions take on in the new order. In it, they become sovereign. We will try to explain this paradox. Let us simply emphasize that the inverted order is opposed to the one in which the temptation of temptation functions.

As soon as Israel sinned, 1,200,000 destroying angels came down and took away the crowns, for it is said (Exodus 33:6): "The children of Israel gave up their ornaments from the time of Mount Horeb."

Rav Hama bar Hanina said: At Horeb they adorned themselves as was just stated (ornaments to be dated from the time of Mount Horeb) and at Horeb they gave them up, according to our verse: "They renounced from the time of Mount Horeb."

Mount Horeb at times indicates the time and place of renouncing and at other times that of the ornaments. But the Talmudist's reading consists above all in connecting the exaltation of Sinai (Horeb) to the fall. They are nearly simultaneous. The Jew is at Horeb to be adorned, and already he is stripped: We are simultaneously armed against all accommodation with the situation of someone who is tempted by evil and already falling. The excellent choice that makes doing go before hearing does not prevent a fall. It arms not against temptation but against the temptation of temptation. Sin in itself does not destroy *Temimut*, the integrity which expresses itself in the "We will do" preceding the "We will hear." The sin here responds to temptation but is not tempted by temptation: it does not question the certainty of good and evil. It remains an unadorned sin, ignorant of the triumph attained by faults liberated from scruples and remorse. Thus a path back is available to the sinner. The adherence to the good of those who said "We will do and we will hear" is not the result of a choice between good and evil. It comes before it. Evil can undermine this unconditional adherence to the good without destroying it. This adherence is incompatible with any position beyond or above the good, whether it be the immorality of esthetes or politicians or the supra-moralism of the religious, all that moral extraterritoriality opened up by the temptation of temptation. This undoubtedly indicates that the doing which is at stake here is not simply *praxis* as opposed to theory but a way of *actualizing without beginning with the possible*, of knowing without examining, of placing oneself beyond violence without this being the privilege of a free choice. A pact with good would exist, preceding the alternative of good and evil.

Unadorned sin. The Israelites feel sorry after their so rapid, so easy fall. "The children of Israel gave up their ornaments." Certainly, this text refers to sadness, but it also refers to its cause. The Torah is not about to tell us a paltry story about jewels, even if it involves the unusual event of women who no longer adorn themselves. In a sacred text, we could only be dealing with essential jewels, with celestial crowns lost because of those who wanted to become like other people, to examine before accepting, without fearing the temptation of temptation. They could not but feel their original connection with the good, which had made them say: "We will do and we will hear."

Why 600,000 angels to bring the crowns and double that number to take them away? These crowns were beautiful and heavy, each requiring the efforts of an angel. But the generous act of human rising goes halfway to meet the glory which crowns it. It could also be, however, that the fall of living men, no longer equal to the culture they bear, immediately bequeaths this culture, become deadweight, to the philologists, who, with difficulty, raise it to the level of their theories. There you have Judaism, without Jews, handed over to the historians!

But the celestial crowns were not lost for everyone.

Rabbi Johanan said: Moses deserved to keep them all, for it is said just afterward (Exodus 33:7): "Now Moses would take the tent. . . ."

Whatever the reference to Exodus might be, Moses did keep his two crowns. Our childlike trust in Moses is confirmed and flattered. But isn't there more in this text? Perhaps the text wishes to speak to us of those moments of Jewish history in which Judaism remains nearly without Jews, as did Mr. André Amar and the young student who took part in yesterday's discussion. He asked whether Judaism had become a mere abstraction, so greatly does reality clash with the mythical model in the books. The text may be speaking to us of those times in which Judaism is practiced or studied only by a tiny minority, perhaps by only one man, when it seems to be completely contained in treaties, immobilized between book bindings, and when living Jews have lost all influence as Jews. The text affirms, without, alas, proving it, that even in those conditions, Judaism has not lost all its luster. Moses, even if he loses his kingdom, remains a crowned king. The young student who spoke yesterday, anxious that in order to rediscover his Judaism he always addressed himself to Jews who had themselves lost it, can put his mind at rest. The masters of the Talmud foresaw the situation. They find it serious but not desperate. Judaism has not lost its radiance because, for a time, it happens to live only in a few consciences or to have gone back into the books that transmit it, like Moses' mind withdrawn to his tent. Here Resh Lakish speaks again:

Resh Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, will give us back the crowns in the future, for it is written (Isaiah 35:10): "Those redeemed by the Eternal

One will come back thus and will reenter Zion singing, an eternal joy upon their head. . . . " Eternal joy—the joy from of old.

Moses will therefore not remain the only one crowned. Judaism will come out of the books which contain it and come out of the narrow circles which practice it. The messianic promise is not possible unless the original perfection is given back to each person individually, unless each person finds his own crown again. I do not lay further stress on this, as the text seems to say it directly without waiting for the commentator.

Our text now comes back to the paradoxical order of "We shall do and we shall hear." The Talmudists keep on being astonished by it. The two paragraphs which follow forcefully underline the importance of this sequence and also show how concerned the Talmudists were to distinguish the inversion of order from the expression of the simplicity of childlike souls.

Rabbi Eleazar has said: When the Israelites committed to doing before hearing, a voice from heaven cried out: Who has revealed to my children this secret the angels make use of, for it is written (Psalm 103:20): "Bless the Lord, Oh, His angels, you mighty ones, who do His word, hearkening to the voice of His word."

They do before hearing. It is a secret of angels which is in question here, not the consciousness of children. Israel would thus have been another Pro-metheus. It would have seized upon the secret of pure, unmixed intelligences. "We will do and we will hear," which seemed to us contrary to logic, is the order of angelic existence.

And here is the second passage emphasizing the same idea. The new order is not simply natural and spontaneous.

Rav Hama bar Hanina has said (Song of Songs 2:3): "Like an apple tree amidst the trees of the forest is my beloved amidst young men." Why is Israel compared to an apple tree? Answer: to teach you that just as on an apple tree fruits precede leaves, Israel committed itself to doing before hearing.

But where has anyone ever seen apple trees bearing fruit before leaves?

Rav Hama says it is so: such apple trees exist! The Tosafists⁶ ask the same question. Nothing proves, they say, that the Hebrew text is speaking of apple trees and apples. It is citron trees that are being discussed here. Citrons stay on the tree for two years and can thus seem to be waiting for leaves. The image is beautiful. Here we are, in a marvelous orchard, where the fruits come before the leaves. Marvel of marvels: a history whose conclusion precedes its development. All is there from the beginning. The fruit which negates the need is the image *par excellence* of the negativity of his-

tory and dialectics. The fruit is there from all eternity. History does not grow but extends. The final order awaits the leaves among which other fruits will appear.⁷

For our question, that of the temptation of temptation, the idea of a fruit preceding leaves (and flowers) is obviously essential. The Torah is received outside any exploratory foray, outside any gradual development. The truth of the Torah is given without any precursor, without first announcing itself in its idea (like Malebranche's God), without announcing itself in its "essay," in its rough draft. It is the ripe fruit which is given and thus taken and not that which can be offered to the childish hand, groping and exploring. The true which offers itself in such a fashion is the good, not allowing the one who receives it time to look around and explore. Its urgency is not a limit imposed on freedom but attests, more than freedom, more than the isolated subject that freedom establishes, to an undeniable responsibility, beyond commitments made, for in them the absolutely separated self can put itself into question, claiming to hold the ultimate secret of subjectivity.

But here is the final section. This priority of doing over hearing, this inversion of the logical sequence—the secret of angels—gives rise to an exchange of ideas between two interlocutors, a Sadducee and a sage of Israel. We have a debate within a debate. Is he the same Sadducee of whom we spoke this morning? The editors of the Talmud sometimes write "Sadducee," sometimes "Min," sometimes even "philosopher." An anti-Jewish Christian? In any case, it is someone who does not recognize the Jewish way of being in the truth, someone who cannot accept the particularism of the Jewish attitude in regard to truth: the Sadducee is a European.

A Sadducee saw Raba buried in study. . . .

Buried in study! How amazing! These people who want to act before hearing are not ignoramuses. One sees them always studying,

holding his fingers beneath his foot and rubbing it so hard that blood spurted from it.

The sight is not edifying enough. One might have expected to see Raba meditating dreamily, while caressing his beard or rubbing his hands. Raba's gesture is odd: he rubs his foot so hard that blood spurts out. That was the degree to which he forgot himself in study!

As if by chance, to rub in such a way that blood spurts out is perhaps the way one must "rub" the text to arrive at the life it conceals. Many of you are undoubtedly thinking, with good reason, that at this very moment, I am in the process of rubbing the text to make it spurt blood—I rise to the challenge! Has anyone ever seen a reading that was something besides this

effort carried out on a text? To the degree that it rests on the trust granted the author, it can only consist in this violence done to words to tear from them the secret that time and conventions have covered over with their sedimentations, a process begun as soon as these words appear in the open air of history. One must, by rubbing, remove this layer which corrodes them. I think you would find this way of proceeding natural. Raba, in rubbing his foot, was giving plastic expression to the intellectual work he was involved in. Thus, he was deep in thought when the Sadducee began to insult him:

People in a hurry for whom the mouth passes before the ears [You speak before hearing, you give your agreement before examining], you are always in a state of headlong haste. You should have listened in order to know whether you were able to accept, and if you were not able to accept, you should not have accepted.

The objection is clear: headlong haste appears as the greatest error in judgment. You go too quickly, you accomplish before hearing, you do not take your distance, you are not lucid. And Raba—to place the relation of man to Revelation outside the order in which "good sense" functions—refers to Scriptures. The Sadducee, or the Min, accepts Scriptures. The verse should be able to convince him.

It is written about us who walk in integrity: "The integrity of the upright guides them"; about those who walk upon tortuous paths, it is written: "The crookedness of the treacherous destroys them." [Proverbs 11:3]

The quotation cannot be reduced to a simple appeal to authority. Neither is it necessary to take it as a "moralizing" text, promising security to the obedient and threatening the rebel with ruin. Don't integrity and perversity have to do here with the logical structure of the subject? Wouldn't integrity here be a norm of knowledge rather than a norm of conduct? The subjectivity completely made for the true would be the one which would enter into an alliance with it prior to any manifestation of this truth in an idea.

But here is where the logical integrity of subjectivity leads: the direct relation with the true, excluding the prior examination of its terms, its idea—that is, the reception of Revelation—can only be the relation with a person, with another. The Torah is given in the Light of a face. The epiphany of the other person is *ipso facto* my responsibility toward him: seeing the other is already an obligation toward him. A direct optics—without the mediation of any idea—can only be accomplished as ethics. Integral knowledge or Revelation (the receiving of the Torah) is ethical behavior.

Such a knowledge does not need to interrupt its course to ask itself what road to follow, oriented as it is from the beginning. "We will do and we will

It will at least be admitted that this freedom does not have any leisure time in which to assume this burden and that, as a result, it is from the start as if compressed or un-done by suffering. This condition (or uncondition) of hostage is an essential modality of freedom—its primary modality—and not an empirical accident of a freedom always remaining above it all. In this impossibility of running away from the imperious cry of the creature, the assumption (of responsibility) in no way goes beyond passivity.

Certainly, my responsibility for everyone can also manifest itself by limiting itself: the ego may be called in the name of this unlimited responsibility to concern itself about itself as well. The fact that every other, my neighbor, is also a "third party" in relation to another neighbor, invites me to justice, to weighing matters, and to thought. And the unlimited responsibility, which justifies this concern for justice and for self and for philosophy can be forgotten. In this forgetfulness egoism is born. But egoism is neither first nor ultimate. The impossibility of escaping from God—which in this at least is not a value among others—is the "mystery of angels," the "We will do and we will hear." It lies in the depths of the ego as ego, which is not only for a being the possibility of death, "the possibility of impossibility," but already the possibility of sacrifice, birth of a meaning in the obstinateness of being, of a subordination of a "being able to die" to a "knowing how to sacrifice oneself."

NOTES

1. Viazemsky, cited by Pushkin as an epigraph to the first Canto of *Eugene Onegin*. [Prince Peter Viazemsky (1792-1878) was a poet and one of Pushkin's best friends. (Trans.)]
2. The French reads *comprise comme antithèse de la générosité*. Throughout this section *naivete* has been associated with generosity, not its antithesis. It is difficult to interpret Levinas's meaning here. (Trans.)
3. *Eyn berera*: Hebrew expression meaning "no choice." (Trans.)
4. "Assumed" here means to accept consciously one's condition, the term figures prominently in the vocabulary of existentialist philosophy. (Trans.)
5. "An obscure light falling from the stars" (*Le Cid*, act 4, scene 3). (Trans.)
6. See note 3 of Levinas's Introduction. (Trans.)
7. The identification of the fruits which appear in the Bible has become a matter of linguistic habits. Why not take the liberty of translating as "citron" that which the tradition translates as "apple"? By what right, for instance, is the forbidden fruit, the cause of original sin, identified with an apple? The Rabbis of the Talmud maintain that the forbidden fruit, the eating of which led to the knowledge of good and evil, was wheat. They link the fall of mankind to its basic food. At least, we understand that botany is not at issue in all this.

PROMISED LAND OR PERMITTED LAND

■ From the Tractate *Sotah*, pp. 34b-35a ■

That they may explore the land for us.

—Deuteronomy 1:22

Rav Hiyva bar Abba said: The explorers sought only the shame of the land, for about this it has been said, "That they may explore (veyashperu) the land." And elsewhere it has been said (Isaiah 24:23): "The moon will be ashamed (veshapra) and the sun will be confounded. . . ."

"Here are their names: for the tribe of Reuben, Shammua, son of Zaccur" (Numbers 13:4). Rav Isaac said: We have a tradition according to which the explorers are named after their actions, but we only know how to interpret one name, that of Sethur, son of Michael. Sethur because he has given the lie to (sathar) the words of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Michael, because he has weakened him (mak). Rav Johanan has said: We can explain yet another name: Nahbi, son of Vophsi, because he hid (hibbi) the words of the Holy One. Son of Vophsi, because he jumped over (pasa) the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

"They went toward the South and he came to Hebron" (Numbers 13:22). The text should have been: and "they came." Raba answered: This teaches us that Caleb, separated himself from the "plot of the explorers," prostrated himself on the graves of the patriarchs and implored: My fathers, ask for mercy so that I may be preserved from the "plot of the explorers." For Joshua, Moses had already granted mercy, for it is written (Numbers 13:16): "And Moses gave the name of Joshua to Hoshea, son of Nun." May Yah (God) preserve you

This reading was given in the context of a colloquium consecrated to Israel, held in November 1965. The proceedings were published in *Israël dans la conscience juive: Données et débats* (Paris: P.U.F., 1971). Levinas's commentary appears on pp. 151-166 and the discussion that follows on pp. 187-193.