

What is Meant by the Word "Life?"

by Michel Henry

Life is a rather vague notion with many meanings since it refers to elementary phenomena, like those of nutrition or reproduction, that are found in all beings which have attained a minimum degree of organization, as well as to both a person's ordinary activity and their highest spiritual experiences. Doesn't the "laudatory import" of the word "life," the prestige of the romantic philosophies which exalt its expansion, rest simply on this confusion? To the idea of life is bound that of the spontaneity which devalues, in one sweep, mechanism, logic, pale abstraction and reason itself. It is to escape the unreality of ideal creations that we plunge back into life, whether it is instinctive or unconscious, supernatural or mystical. Yet if a rigorous philosophy took account of all these various meanings, it would certainly find, in each of them, the very same mysterious essence, approached directly or by analogy, namely that which causes us to be alive. That is why, upon opening the scriptures, we read: "I am the Way, the Truth and Life," or when Kierkegaard wrote that "The Truth is that which we desire to live or die for," or Marx declared: "It is not a man's consciousness that determines his life, but his life that determines his consciousness," we are, in spite of progress in the analysis of language, affected deep within ourselves and deeply moved in our very being. So what do we mean by the word "life?"

Living signifies being. The concept of life is suddenly torn from its apparent indeterminacy when it delineates, simultaneously, both the field and the task of an ontology, in other words of philosophy itself. So if life designates being, the fact of being, we can no longer confuse it with certain specific phenomena, for example those studied in biology or mysticism, phenomena which, far from being able to define or explain life, to the contrary presuppose it, with the same title as all that exists. However is that which gives rise to the concrete character of life and the reason its simple name moves us not lost if we separate from it determinations such as nourishment, sexuality and all the activities that make up the substance of this life which is that of everyone and of which everyone speaks? Feeding oneself, clothing oneself, meeting and embracing another, certainly none of these are foreign to life, these are its main and indisputable manifestations. But what we need to understand is why such determinations are those of life, why and how they are living and on what essence they are based. What we need to understand is what Kafka implies when he writes: "With each mouthful of the visible, an invisible mouthful is proffered us, with each visible article of clothing an invisible article of clothing."(1)

Living signifies being. But being must be such, must be understood in such a way that it signifies life, in exactly the same way. Now that which characterizes Western philosophy – from its Greek origins up to and including Heidegger, (which it explicitly proposes like an ontology or which is unknowingly produced by an implicit ontology) – is that it generally presupposes a concept of being that, far from obtaining the essence of life within it, to the contrary excludes such, insurmountably. That is why the concept of life remains suspect in the eyes of philosophy, not because life (the most certain thing) is something vague or doubtful, but because philosophy has actually been incapable of

thinking it. Why? Because life is constituted in its innermost being and in its very essence as a radical interiority and so, undoubtedly, it can hardly be an object of thought. To the contrary that which characterizes, and defines, occidental being is exteriority. If we consider the wall of this room for example, we must say that it is a particular reality different from the table, different too, and even more so from its being, in other words from that which makes it what it is, and which also makes the table what it is. So what is this being of the wall, or of the table? According to Fichte, in a proposition that is not only his own but contains the destiny of Western metaphysics, it is "its being beyond being".(2) The wall's being does not coincide with the wall itself, it is the wall but in the infinite difference that forever separates it from itself, in such a way that it only achieves itself and finds its identity in this difference, in and through this exteriority.

Why does exteriority refer to the essence of being? Because being means appearing, revealing oneself and the unfurling of exteriority forms the substance of appearance, the pure phenomenality of what phenomenizes itself, the wall's appearance but from the very start of the appearing itself, the field where this appearing achieves the intuition of itself, the becoming visible of visibility, the light in the affectivity of its act of shining. Exteriority is in itself the place where it appears in an appearing that is this being within the exterior as such. Exteriority is in itself the for-itself.

Since the concept of being as exteriority does not result from its simple spatialisation and hence from an immediate and naive view of common consciousness, one perceives that space itself only manifests in the interior of a transcendental horizon that designates nothing other than this original emergence from being outside of oneself and one's first ekstasis. Or again, as Kant said, space is itself in time, understood as the condition of all phenomena, i.e. as their phenomenality. But what is time? To quote Heidegger: "Temporality is the original exteriority in and for itself."(3) Thus the interpretation of spirit as time which has guided Western philosophy since Hegel is only a reaffirmation of presuppositions that always determine without one realizing it.

With these presuppositions, with this interpretation of being as exteriority, has classical philosophy not, however, avoided the issue in that it claims, at least since Descartes, to be a philosophy of consciousness? With this consciousness that proposes itself as a subject opposed to the object and, moreover, as a self, or as inhabited by a self, are we not in the presence of a subjective dimension of interiority different from the world and opposed to it? When the *ego cogito* is made the point of departure of modern philosophy, one forgets to notice, in Descartes' own writings, just how very fragile and fugitive this moment of *cogito* is. Upon the affiliation of this *ego* with this consciousness that says I think, I doubt, I desire, I want and I don't want, the second Meditation is satisfied with asserting: "The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that there is no need of saying anything more to further clarify it."(4) The absence of any serious problematic concerning the ipseity of the *ego*, at the moment when this *ego* is placed in the center of the perspective from which modern thought unfolds, explains the uncertainties and continual follies in regard to the subject of its assumed principle and why the self is found, with the same facility, alternately included in consciousness or excluded from it, and hence why Hamelin can assert that it mustn't be said that "I think"

but "it is thought," and Merleau-Ponty not "I feel" but "one feels;" why today finally the subject suddenly finds itself "eliminated from the problematics" and buried without our any longer having the faintest idea about the identity of the person that we carry with great ceremony to the cemetery. And often in the writings of the same author, even the better ones – Husserl, Sartre to name just two – will successively put forth the immanence or transcendence of the *ego* in relation to the field of consciousness.

But it is this field's being, the being of consciousness itself that, from the beginning, remains ambiguous. Sure it is agreed to divide the illusion according to which this consciousness would be one particular reality different from another, a subject opposed to the object. Understood in its pure concept, consciousness does not designate anything which would, moreover, have this property of being conscious, but the fact of being conscious, the conscious, i.e. phenomenal condition, in short pure phenomenality as such and what Heidegger calls *being*. But what characterizes the philosophy of consciousness is that it implicitly presupposes or explicitly exposes the same concept of being as Western thought in general and heideggerian ontology in particular, the concept of being as exteriority. When Fichte thinks ontologically the being of consciousness, he identifies it with being in general. The being of consciousness is precisely the being of the wall, not the wall, but its own exteriority in relation to itself, in other words exteriority as such. Or again, the being of the wall is its opposition to itself, its representation and consciousness is this representation. So the subject is no different from the object, it designates the phenomenal condition of the object, its representation, in other words its very objectivity. The subjectivity of the subject is, in the West, only the objectivity of the object.

The movement by which the subject's subjectivity is revealed is identical, when all is said and done, to exteriority and to its unfurling historically donning the ensuing phases. In Descartes, apprehension, under the title of "thought," of subjectivity as lived experience and thus as one of life's moments, apprehension which allows one to recognize in the decisive affirmation according to which "feeling is still thinking,"(5) does not preoccupy the philosopher for long. No more than the essence of ipseity, Descartes does not ponder the interior structure of subjectivity inasmuch as it is and can be identical to life. In fact, he soon turns to the opposite, upon reaching the third Meditation the focus of the investigation shifts toward the relation of consciousness to its correlate, from *cogito* to *cogitatum*, and it is this one in reality and movement toward it of consciousness, progressively reduced to this "movement toward," to the opening of exteriority, which comes to comprise the theme of the problematics. The idea of God, as intentional content, the *cogitatum* in general, its mode of presentation in the clear and distinct idea and in evidence, i.e. in objectivity, and that according to the phenomenological modes of its effective accomplishment, is the telos which henceforth directs the investigation, which ultimately aims to establish the existence of the world, to legitimize the collection of assertions borne by it, in other words to transcendently found a theory of consciousness and scientific knowledge in general.

It should be observed that Husserl's grandiose resumption of the cartesian project and in spite of reservations that, in the end, only bear upon maintaining, in cartesianism, certain transcendental constructions, assists in the same slide from the interest of conscious

matter considered briefly under the title of "hyle" to intentionality, in other words the triumphant eruption of exteriority. Husserl speaks of consciousness as being of a life, experience is what it sees, the *Erlebnis*. The *Lessons on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* attempts to define the substance of this life understood as a field of originary presence, as the living Present. But this present exceeds the abstract limit of the instant only as far as continually linking it to the unbroken chain of retentions and protensions which create from this present a concrete totality yet designate nothing other, inasmuch as intentionalities, than the first burst of being onto the exterior of one's self and its indefinite reiteration. It is true that Husserl clearly perceived, quite brilliantly, that it is not these intentionalities of the original passive synthesis of experience that grant us life, because, offered to retention, this life is only a life in the past or, in protension, a life yet to come. So one must recognize that the first appearance of presence, i.e. life, is anterior to this perpetual slipping of the impression into the past; it actually resides in the impression itself as the original impression (*Ur-impression*). Except Husserl's thought withers before this impression of which it is incapable of grasping the interior essence, which is, however, merely that of life. The impression can, henceforth, though it was already the case in Kantism and Hume, contain existence, it proposes itself as a mysterious given and not comprehended in its being, as an opaque content and, very precisely, the opposite of life. For life is truth, it is only living as revelation of itself and as constituted in the depths of its being and through and through by this revelation. But it is quite remarkable to see that Husserl, when he wanted to treat life according to the same prescriptions as phenomenology, is incapable of entrusting the accomplishment of this revelation to a power other than intentionality. The flow of consciousness accomplishes its self-manifestation only through the play of longitudinal intentionalities which run the length of this flow and, now in the being of each of its phases, therefore presents it to itself at each instant. The marvelous being-for-itself of this flow is its constant intentional reference to itself, the first givenness [*donation*], as self-givenness [*auto-donation*], has no other location than the hollows of exteriority. Also one sees phenomenology orient itself toward the exclusive examination of constitutional problems, i.e. of the transcendental constitution of being. In each case however, this is only an intentional correlate, a *cogitatum*, and Husserl's philosophy merely uncovers the paths or impasses of the idealism and rationalism of classical thought.

It is probably in Kant, to whom we have already alluded, that this thought allows its most obvious limits to appear. The inability of Kantian problematics to grasp life or to even approach its essence becomes apparent in the famous critique of the parallogism of rational psychology that strips all legitimacy from the concept of the soul being identical to that of life. It is in effect the actual being of the ego that the *Critique* claims to unveil to this ego itself, under the pretext that we only know phenomena and that our ego is one itself. But the revindication of phenomenality that fuels the power of the Kantian argument remains a tributary of the Western concept of being. In Kant's view, being in the mode of phenomenon basically means to be given to intuition and thought by understanding. But thought and intuition are both representations, in other words ekstatic projections of a horizon of visibility. As the actual being of the ego cannot, as Kant demonstrates, exhibit itself in an intuition and as there is no longer any concept, this actually demonstrates that it is unrepresentable, that the essence of ipseity is irreducible

to exteriority or even that the presuppositions of Kantian ontology remain closed to the being of life. Furthermore it ensues that Kantism is unable to found what it calls, at least, the phenomenal existence of the ego. The content of internal sense is a blind impression that is never allowed to be tied to an ego, and to this one rather than that one or to a foreign being. The form of this sense is only the empty form of representation of which we do not see why an 'I' "must accompany it," as far as this representation of an 'I' does not have, according to the author of the *Critique* himself, "any content."

An empty form, a dead content, such is the metaphysical situation that dominates Western thought throughout its most diverse formulations. To the extent that being unfolds its essence through the exposition of ekstasis, it produces itself and proposes itself as a being deprived of interiority, inhabited, never offering anything of itself but its "outside", a surface, an area without depth over which the gaze slides and comes to die. In such a way that any deepening of consciousness that one claims to have can only signify the coming of a new objective appearance, of a new "outside" and being itself is only the ekstastic succession of these appearances between which it disperses and from which each returns to the other according to a perpetual transcendence the movement of which is not dissociable from the inexhaustible accomplishment of exteriority, in other words of time as well. So it is not only the spatial thing which, by virtue of a necessity that is its own, offers itself to us through the open series of its silhouettes, so that its being is only an ideal pole situated beyond them, the ideal being itself as omnitemporality; all possible being in general obeys the law of dispersion. In the world all existence is alienated, fragmented, indifferent, opaque, contingent, absurd. Existence is fragmented when it exists only outside of itself in the form of its own image, when it has become a representation – and we recognize here the basis of idealism. Existence is lost when what imparts effectivity to it no longer resides in it but actually outside of it, in its own exteriority in relation to itself. Existence is alienated when the law of its development is no longer its own, but a foreign mind's. The existence which no longer constructs itself and no longer develops itself starting from itself is contingent, and my body, whenever it is no longer the sudden appearance, one with itself, of movement and desire, what I am and what I do, whenever, in its being in the exterior of itself, it resolves itself in this strange juxtaposition of parts and in this unjustifiable assemblage of functions, offering no more to the mind of consciousness, in other words no more in exteriority, than the paradox of an imbecilic configuration. But the forsaking of what appears in the light of ekstasis refers to this and to the mode of unfolding that it accomplishes each time. All transcendence is the principle of an insuperable facticity, objectivity is life's greatest enemy.

Objective being stripped of reason is the sole text of rationalism. It seeks everywhere evidence, proof, which always signify a making evident of what must be established and can only be in this way. As all assurance, all certainty arises from objectifying, Heidegger could think that modern technique would fulfill the teleology of rationalism and reveal its true nature, namely the will of submitting itself to being [*l'étant*] while making an object from it, the object of an action, of which the scientific theory is one of the most remarkable forms. If this action results in the ravaging of the earth, it is because technique is blind in regards to the essence where being [*l'étant*] rests. But this essence is

actually that of exteriority, this is what makes an object from being [*l'étant*], the devastation of the world in the epoque of modern theory is a consequence of Greek theory, technique inscribes itself in the history of being and belongs to it.

The attempt to challenge rationalism fails as long as it is supported by identical ontological presuppositions. For instance, in the middle of this century with the said philosophy of existence. The renewal of themes, the substitution with triangles and axioms of historical and corporeal existence, of relation to the other, of angst and death is less effective than it appears if historicity is only the accomplishment of ekstasy and death its correlate, if the body is defined by intentionality, if angst remains misunderstood in what concerns its innermost possibility, in other words the affectivity of life within it. The dereliction of existence surrendered to the world, the dehiscence of the present worn away by a nothingness, the "I am not what I am," all this pseudo-pathos would not have prematurely aged if it expressed something other than the old reign of exteriority, if it knew how to find the path which leads to life.

For life remains in itself. It has no outside, no face of its being is offered to the grasp of a theoretical or sensory gaze, nor presents itself as object to any action whatever. No one has ever seen life nor will it ever be seen. Life is a dimension of radical immanence. As long as we can think this immanence, it will signify the exclusion of all exteriority, the absence of this transcendental horizon of visibility where everything is susceptible to becoming visible and that is called the world. Life is invisible. Nevertheless the invisible is only an adequate concept to think life if we distinguish it absolutely from an invisible which is naught but a limit mode of the visible and so basically still belongs to the system of consciousness as one of its degrees. Therefore the husserlian impression, after its retentive conversion, runs the series of temporal sites that sink further and further into the past, with a clarity that doesn't cease diminishing, to sink, at the limit, into the "unconscious." So this temporal flow, as long as it is no longer perceived but reproduced in imagination or memory, again gives itself to us with its phenomenological differences corresponding to temporal differences, in such a way however that the whole of the flow, no longer being present in anyone except in the mode of the quasi, finds itself affected by a phenomenological deficit which is supplementary and specific, peculiar to reproduction. With all these modifications however, we are dealing with consciousness and its degrees, not with life. To radically dissociate the invisible of life from the deteriorating modes of the world's phenomenality, we simply say that: a mode of objectivity or consciousness is always susceptible to transforming into another, a confused, obscure or marginal consciousness can turn into a clear, distinct consciousness and finally into the full light of the evidence. The phenomenological process of elucidation, all processes of clarification in general, every engagement of consciousness, whatever that of intellectualism or psychoanalysis might be, all thought rests on this possibility inscribed in the course of experience and is identical to it. To the contrary, what belongs to life and is found constituted in its being as invisible is on principle incapable of turning into the determination of the visible or into any one of its modalities. Life is neither conscious, nor subconscious, nor unconscious – nor is it susceptible to becoming so.

For this reason too the invisible of life has nothing to do with the original nontruth which is at the foundation of all truth. If the disclosing occurs at the beginning of what is not disclosed and assumes it, disclosing and nondisclosing are that of a world and must be understood at its beginning. Even less is the invisible the simple negation of the visible or its result, the hypostasis of a negative term claiming value for being and defining its positivity. For, if life has no face, it isn't anything, it is not the simple lack of phenomenality.

Life senses itself, experiences itself. Not that there is anything which has, moreover, this property of feeling itself, but this is its essence: the pure experience of itself, the fact of feeling itself. The essence of life resides in self-affection. Because the concept of self-affection is the concept of life, it must be thought through in a rigorous fashion. This rigour is lost when self-affection designates, as in Kant and then Heidegger, internal sense. With internal sense it is actually the innermost being of subjectivity and what life makes it that is found questioned in its first possibility. How the elaboration of this question leads, in the writings of these two authors, to a decisive error, can be seen in that the affection which is achieved in the internal sense is that of time itself through the three-dimensional temporal horizon that it ekstatically projects; it is in this sense an affection of time by itself and this is the reason Heidegger expresses it in kantian terms as "self-affection." But it is also clear that this affection of time by the ekstastic horizon that it projects and that it receives is an affection by the original milieu of alterity, it is the imaging of a world, it is this world in its pure worldliness, it is the transcendental exteriority that constitutes the sole content of this affection. Such an affection is simply sensibility in its specific structure, for a sense always designates an affection as something foreign to the power that senses it. To the contrary life, in its first affection, is not affected by anything other than itself. It, itself, constitutes the content that it receives and which affects it. Life is not a self-position, a self-objectivisation, it does not place itself before itself to affect itself in a seeing of itself, an apperceiving of itself, in the sense of a manifestation of self that is the manifestation of an object. For this is what life is not and cannot be. Life affects itself, exists for itself, without offering itself to itself in the object-ing [*l'objection*] of ekstasy, it senses itself without the intermediary of a sense, of an internal sense nor of any sense in general. But this original self-affection in a truly radical sense, in the sense of an absolutely exclusive immanence of all intentional rupture and of all transcendence, is not a postulate of thought. We haven't constructed being logically or dialectically, we do not seek the conditions according to the path of a reflexive analysis, we do not say "it is necessary that," it is necessary that subjectivity be for itself, that life comes to be as simple and permanent, as the One and itself, before it can be affected by anything else. Phenomenology has the means to confront the ultimate problems of philosophy and, in a particular way, it alone can do so. What senses and experiences itself, without the intermediary of a sense, is in its essence affectivity. Affectivity is the ordinary essence of revelation, the phenomenological self-affection of being and its ordinary appearance. That is why the invisible is not the antithetical, formal and empty concept of phenomenality, but its effectuation in the effectivity of feeling. That is also why the invisible cannot change itself into determinations of the visible nor travel the progressive degrees of consciousness from the unconscious to the full light of evidence, because here where life unfolds its original reign in the effectivity of the

feeling of self, there is no exteriority nor can it have any. This is what the remarks of simple psychologists or a profound philosopher like Scheler say on the disruption that the attention brings to the normal play of our feelings. It is not a question of an intervention of consciousness in the course of our life but, quite to the contrary, of the fundamental impossibility of the intentional gaze discovering this life in its reality, in other words in the radical interiority of the self-affection of its affectivity. Being, we must strongly assert contrary to Heidegger, is not what must be thought, for it cannot be. And it is not a modification of this thought, a new way of apprehending reality, of interpreting it or understanding it, which is capable of modifying anything with being, as long as being resides within life. "It is not humans' consciousness which determines their life." And not because this consciousness is imperfect or temporary, but because the milieu where it transforms, the knowing being facing which it wants to take into its gathering perception and offer to the light of intelligibility, does not contain the essence of life but excludes it. This is again why, the pretention, ultimately that of rationalism, of modifying through a grasp of consciousness, a progress of knowledge, or a gain of objectivity, people's lives and its own history, makes one smile. For a change of reality can only come about where this reality unfolds its essence, in life, in and through life alone. Such a change intervening in life, coming from it and as its own movement, as actual change in its flagrant opposition to the impotency of theoretical discourse, of all theory and all ideology in general, we call *praxis*.

What is this movement of life, which must start from itself, inexhaustibly producing what it produces? In the first place such a movement is on principle individual, it is the proper transformation of the individual, while resulting from itself as its own creation. This is because life, finding its living-being in the self-affection of its affectivity, is in this way monadic. Self-affection is the essence of ipseity if the Self is the fact of sensing oneself, the identity of affectant and affected. Life then is not like a river indifferent to the nature of the wheels that it turns, being has no need to deny itself within its universality to assume the moment of particularity. Quite to the contrary the particular, if one wants to speak in this way, is the essence of being, its most intimate possibility, and the unfolding of its positivity. The self, a self, [*le moi, un moi*] does not differentiate itself from another by certain natural, psychic or spiritual qualities, by the fact that it is more sensitive or more intelligent, that it is born at such place or in such époque, and the *principium individuationis* has nothing to do with the categories of exteriority. One self [*moi*] differentiates itself from another because it is itself originally, and it exists in its self-affection and through it. It is this being-itself within and through affectivity which puts all life in relation to itself, which causes it to be life and at the same time opposes it to all else, in the absolute self-sufficiency of its radical individuality.

Is not each individual life however a tributary of the milieu where it develops as the ensemble of circumstances that it traverses and which are for it so many hazards? Is it not affected each moment by the world and determined by this affection? But the affection of the individual by the complex of sensibility presupposes its affection by the world where this complex gives itself to feeling [*sentir*], presupposes sensibility itself. Sensibility, the ecstasy of the horizon in its transcendence, however, presupposes in its turn the self-affection of this act that opens us to the world, presupposes life and its affectivity.

Everything that affects us in the world and touches us, everything that comes to us can only do so as long as this coming is first and foremost the coming of life in itself, its experience without limits in feeling [*le sentiment*]. This is why nothing visible reaches us which is not also an invisible. Because affectivity constitutes the essence of affection and its hidden life and makes from it a life, what we feel, determined each time by the affectant, is found to be overdetermined by the effectivity of life within us. So it is that life ultimately offers an explanation of what we experience, namely of itself. It is necessary to challenge the superficial explanations, those which proliferate now more than ever. It is not the trauma of birth, the vicissitudes of infantile or adult sexuality which provoke our angst. Something like angst, like any affective tonality in general, can only occur in a being originally constituted in itself as self-affection and finding its essence in life and in affectivity. There are many things in the world that give rise to our sufferings and joys, but they only do so because suffering and joy are susceptible to taking form in us as possibilities of our very life and as the fundamental modalities of its own realization, i.e. of its phenomenological effectuation.

How does life bear within it the fundamental affective tonalities as its own modalities? As long as it experiences itself in the radical immanence of its self-affection, life is essentially passive in regard to itself, it is bound to itself, incapable of breaking this bond, of taking any distance in regard to itself. Here basically is what characterizes life, the impossibility of escaping itself, of reserving behind itself a position of withdrawal where it is permissible to retreat, to escape from its own being, as well as from any of its oppressive aspects. As far as life is driven to itself in the insurmountable passivity of this experience of self which cannot be interrupted, it is a suffering, "suffering one's self" in and by which it is irretrievably delivered to itself in order to be what it is.

Yet in the experience of this "suffering its self" and in its pain, life experiences itself, fulfills itself, is given to itself in the perfect adherence of being riveted to itself, it swells with its own content, enjoys itself, it is pleasure, it is joy. The fundamental dichotomy of affectivity – the fact that a spontaneous division takes place between all of our affects according to their indicated tonality, whether positive and agreeable or negative and disagreeable – is not a simple empirical curiosity or a natural given, it is rooted in the essence of life and expresses it. But then it is the course of this life, the possibility of the passage of all our affects, one into another, that we comprehend. Joy follows pain not only because in the world a favourable event follows an unfavourable event, but largely because joy can follow pain. And this possibility of passage from pain to joy is identical with their common possibility, the essence of which they derive from one another, as Kierkegaard discovered when he saw that at the bottom of despair the essence of life appeared identical to bliss and leads to it.

The passage from suffering to joy presents us with the reality of time. Life is temporality, but the temporality of life is difficult to conceive. Modern philosophy has made tremendous progress with the thought of time. Nevertheless it could not produce an authentic phenomenology of the temporality of life but only a phenomenology of the consciousness of time, which is totally different. A phenomenology of the consciousness of time is a phenomenology of the representation of time, a phenomenology that treats

time as a representation and finally as the very structure of representation, in other words, as we have seen, as the original explosion of being into exteriority. What causes the ontological shortcoming of a similar conception is that it changes into a dimension of pure unreality. Unreal are the pure place of future and past and, likewise, that which appears in them. Unreal the present itself, as long as one defines it as a consciousness of the present, an ekstastic horizon and thus, again, an exteriority. The actual present, the living present is the phenomenological effectuation of self-affection, the impression, if you prefer, but grasped in its essence and its innermost possibility, in the radical immanence of its affectivity. Whereas the slipping of the impression into the past signifies the substitution of this immanent temporality of life with a consciousness of time where the substance of the present flows beyond it, where the flight of all effectivity into exteriority, which dominates post-husserlian thought like it dominates modern thought in general, is already at work.

But then what does the temporality that phenomenology has been able to consider consist of, the real temporality that concerns reality, changes into it and does not stop for an instant, the temporality of the impression itself, its self-movement, which does not emerge from what was alive in us to go outside of it and outside of us, which is not the sudden leap into the unreal, the death at each instant, but the movement of life taking place within it as its actual interiority and which does not cease to be part of it? Isn't such a concept contradictory? What does "passing" signify if everything is here and does not cease to be here in the indissoluble bond of self-affection to itself, if what passes does not separate from itself, if what passes is life remaining in itself?

Consider my hand, not the objective hand which does not touch the table, does nothing and never has done anything, but the subjective power of prehension, the fundamental "I Can" of which the self-affection constitutes our original corporeity. Since birth, this ability to accomplish a great number of movements about which we now say that they have passed. Where are they? Have they fled like the husserlian impression, slipping from now into the past and more and more into the past, into a growing obscurity and, finally, into the unconscious? And if they must come back, do they do so as memories, through the unreal mode of production of a representation which never conveys the original? Or rather the act of taking, all those that we have accomplished, all those that we will accomplish, are they not forever and already here, are they something other than the self-affection of the ability of prehension and its potential actualization? And when this actualization ceases, the act does not fall back outside of us and does not further distance itself from us on the vanishing line of time, it remains in us like the remaining in itself of this power, like this latent tension that defines our being and is not abolished. What remains and is no longer conscious is not the material trace, the dead being burst – juxtaposed – gathered into the mythological unconscious of classical thought or of its freudian skeletons. What remains and is no longer conscious, and never has been, is the remaining in itself of life in its hidden being. In this remaining in self all of life's powers remain in themselves, they remain so as effective powers, ready to unfold, those which do not cease to unite with themselves and that I can unite with, me who is only their being given to themselves, me who is their life. That is why being cannot definitively continue to be thought in terms of exteriority. Everything that lives and acts occurs

starting from what remains in it and as what remains, occurs under the form of iteration and repetition. Nothing returns but everything originates, in the living present, in the power of life.

In an fable entitled "The Nearest Village," Kafka tells the story of an old man sitting on his doorstep and watching the people pass by. If they knew, he thought, how short life is, they wouldn't even go to the nearest village for they would understand that they don't have enough time to go. This text signifies the unreality of time. If we look behind us at our past life, we see that it is all reduced to nothing, that there is only this instant that we live. And the future, no more so, it too is nothing. If we want to find ourselves in this time, return for example, despite Kafka's warning, to the village of our childhood, we will find nothing, nothing that is us, we would be like the crusader before the old tomb of a god. All of which means that life is interiority and nothing will ever be found in exteriority.

Stranger to time, to exteriority, eternal – for eternity is nothing other than the indissoluble bond of self-affection, eternity is the essence of life – nevertheless life exhibits within it a proper temporality, the actual temporality of which we are seeking the concept. This does not consist only in the differentiated actualization of the constitutive potentialities of life, nor in the continual passage of one tonality into another; such a passage that within it nothing disappears but remains in what "succeeds" it as its essence and possibility, in such a way that throughout all these modalities life does not cease to experience *itself*, does not cease. The most original temporality of life must comprehend itself from its basic passivity. Life is not only passive in regards to itself – or rather this passivity in regard to itself signifies the passivity of life in regard to its own ground. That life experiences itself means that it has not posited itself as the content of its affection – itself –, it experiences it as what it has not posited but is given it and does not cease to be given it, as what comes into it from what it is not. But nor has life posited its essence, the fact that it comes in this way into itself nor does it experience itself in this self-delight. Life is simply the passivity of this coming into self and the endless movement of this coming into itself of life, it is time. What comes does not come from the future. What comes is the coming of life within itself, such that life experiences what comes while experiencing itself, in such a way that, experiencing itself, plunging through the transparency of its affectivity, life plunges into the power that posits it and does not cease to posit it.

The reflections that I have come to develop do not fail to appear metaphysical and therefore outmoded, foreign in any case to the world that we see around us, that science thematizes and which objectivity seems to constitute and guarantee the reality of. Is a philosophy of life not suspect, on the other hand, to this science, does it not turn its back on the effort of rationality belonging to our culture? Can it be dismissed so easily? But what would happen if it could be demonstrated that reason itself has its foundation in life? That its concrete categories cannot be deduced *a priori* from pure thought but are only the expression and representation of the categories of life, that causality, for example, of which reason, even if it constantly utilizes it, is incapable of explaining, is no other than our original corporeity and this fundamental "I Can" that we are? That the supreme proof that one can finally give, the ultimate "it is true that," presupposed by all knowledge and

to which all statements refer, is the original revelation that resides in life and properly constitutes its essence?

As for this objective world the objectivity of which seems guaranteed, what happens to it in its turn, could it rest longer on this foundation if the phenomena which form its woof and offer themselves to perception do not explain themselves neither by themselves nor by the milieu from which they derive their own phenomenality, if for example a radical critique of political economy established that the ensemble of economic determinations, their variations as well as their simple maintenance, do not arise from an economic causality but from the power of life and find in it their true naturant? In such a way that this economic universe, where everything occurs on the surface and in broad daylight, is in fact only the unreal, arbitrary, impotent and, when all is said and done, fantastic double of what occurs elsewhere, in "the secret laboratory of production" as Marx said,(6) in the invisible subjectivity of living individuals. These then are the properties of this subjectivity, the laws of life which explain the laws of economy and it is initially starting from this living subjectivity that the economic realities that serve equivalent objectives are constructed, without this equivalence and the rationality that it finds being able to stop them from being illusory. The great malaise suffusing the world will not be dissipated by a progress of scientific knowledge but by the arisal of new forms of life. A philosophy of life is not the survival of a metaphysics now without object, it alone can guide the transcendental gaze to the inner comprehension of this world – without its being enigmatic – in the midst of which it is given us to live, as it alone can also open to each of us the path leading to itself.

1. Journal intime, Grasset, Paris 1945. Pg. 309
2. Fichte, Initiation to the Happy Life, Aubier , Paris 1944 p. 141
3. *Being and Time*, [fr. Pg. 329]
4. My translation.
5. Descartes, *Second Meditation* Paragraph 9
6. Karl Marx, *Œuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, 1963, I. P. 725

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