cancellation, erasure of the debt, destruction, which Hegel distinguishes from Aufhebung, from the subsumption that erases while preserving becomes interminable. And in addition, the effects which an upheaval in any State produces upon all the others in our continent, where all are so closely linked by trade, are so perceptible that these other States are forced by their own insecurity to offer themselves as arbiters, albeit without legal authority, so that they indirectly prepare the way for a great political body of the future, without precedent in the past. [This parenthesis not only raises the important question of the debt in its geopolitical determinants today for the future of the world, it opens the way to a reading that is less, let us say teleologist of Kant than the one I sketched out earlier.] Although this political body exists for the present only in the roughest of outlines, it nonetheless seems as if a feeling is beginning to stir in all its members each of which has an interest in maintaining the whole [Erhaltung des Ganzen]. And this encourages the hope that, after many revolutions, with all their transforming effects, the highest purpose of nature, a universal cosmopolitan State, will at last be realized as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop.³

Perhaps the right to philosophy passes henceforth through a distinction between several regimes of the debt, between a finite debt and an infinite debt, an internal debt and an “external” debt, between debt and duty, a certain erasure and a certain reaffirmation of the debt—and sometimes a certain erasure in the name of reaffirmation.

As If It Were Possible, “Within Such Limits” . . .

In spite of the delay of what begins here, this will not, as one might suspect, be about the last word. A reader should certainly not expect any last word. It is excluded, all but impossible that I, for one, should dare to lay claim to a last word. Indeed, it would be necessary, another protocol of the contract, not to lay claim to a last word or to expect one.

Perhaps, the Impossible (Aphoristic I)

I no longer know how the declaration I have just ventured in very ordinary language can be read. Is it a sign of modesty or an expression of presumptuousness? “Does he mean, modestly, and perhaps with affected timidity, that he will be unable to propose, by way of an answer, anything at all that is certain and definitive, not even the least last word?” a reader might query. “Would he be so arrogant as to suggest that he still has so many answers in reserve that, instead of a last word and in place of a last word, is simply a foreword?” another might add. “But then, how does one interpret the possibility of these two interpretations of the last word?” a third might sigh. Then the fourth, sententiously: “Have you read Austin on “the crux of the Last Word” about ordinary language, in “A Plea for Excuses”? Or three times Blanchot,¹ in “Le dernier mot,” “Le tout dernier mot,” “Le dernier mot,” about a certain il y a that resembles Levinas’s il y a and that absolutely cannot be translated without remainder into irreducible ordinary language? Especially not as there is or es gibt?
Dare I add my voice to this concert of hypotheses and virtual utterances? I would perhaps, then, orient things otherwise. For example, toward an irreducible modality of the "perhaps." Which would cause the authority [instance] of the "last word" to tremble. Have I not tried elsewhere to analyze both the possibility and the necessity of this "perhaps"?2 Its promise and its fatality, its implication in every experience, at the approach of that which arrives [ce qui vient], of (that, the other) who arrives [qui vient] from the future and gives place to what is called an event? But this experience of the "perhaps" would be that of the possible and the impossible at the same time, of the possible as impossible. If only what is already possible arrives, what can be thus anticipated and expected, it does not make an event. An event is only possible when it comes from the impossible. It arrives as the coming of the impossible, where a "perhaps" deprives us of all assurance and leaves the future to the future. This "perhaps" is necessarily allied to a "yes": yes, yes to whatever (whomever) arrives [(ce) qui vient]. This "yes" would be common to the affirmation and the response; it would even come before any question. A peut-être like "perhaps" (it may happen, rather than the insubstantial vielleicht, rather than the call to being or the ontological insinuation, the to be or not to be of a maybe) is perhaps that which, exposed to an event like the "yes," that is, to the experience of what arrives (happens) and of who then arrives, far from interrupting the question, allows it to breathe. How is one not to forsake the question, its urgency or its interminable necessity, without also turning the question, or still more the response, into a "last word"? This lies close to my heart and to my thinking, but it is perhaps no longer a question or a response. Perhaps something else entirely, we will get to this. The "perhaps" keeps the question alive, and perhaps ensures its surv-vial [sur-vie]. What does "perhaps" mean, then, at the disarticulated juncture of the possible and the impossible? Of the possible as impossible?

Of Ordinary Language: Excuses (Aphoristic II)

It has taken me too long to respond to the studies that we have read, as the authors are well aware. Is this forgivable?

And yet I ask forgiveness for it. Sincerely. Not without committing myself once again, however, to respond. Thus I promise to do something that is called responding and to do it as it is believed a response should always be done: by speaking. Not by joining the gesture to the speech, as one says in ordinary language, but by doing something with words, according to Austin’s formulation. Why mention here the well-known inventor of a now familiar distinction? Although the pair of concepts performative/conative may have a relatively recent origin, it has become canonical. In spite of its author’s bemused insistence on following only the model of “ordinary language,” this pair will have changed a great many things in the less-ordinary language of philosophy and theory in this century. But—first paradox—this is a distinction in whose purity Austin himself often said he did not believe.3 He even declared it at the moment of giving a talk (irrefutable in my eyes) on ordinary language and, precisely, as in my case, on the subject of excuses and forgiveness: “Certainly, then, ordinary language is not the last word [an expression he had used a little earlier, not without irony, but as a quotation from ordinary language, in capital letters: “Then, for the Last Word”]; in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it [ordinary language] is the first word.”4

At this point, at this allusion to the “first word,” Austin adds a footnote. We recognize the singularity and effectiveness of his philosophical style: “And forget, for once and for a while, that other curious question ‘Is it true? May we?’ I thought, for a moment, as a manner of excuse and by way of a response to all the magnificent texts I have read here, of proposing a sort of interpretation or close reading of “A Plea for Excuses.”

I will not do this. But “for once and for a while”: what prudence! what cunning! what wisdom! “For a while,” this means “for the moment,” a rather brief moment, and sometimes “for a rather long time,” or even “for a very long time,” perhaps forever, but not necessarily once and for all. For how much time, then? Perhaps the time of a talk or an article, for example of an article on excuses or forgiveness, “A Plea for Excuses.” Without asking forgiveness and without making excuses, at least without doing it explicitly but nonetheless without forgetting to apologize for it, Austin begins his article by announcing with irony that he is not going to treat his subject. He is not going to answer the question, and what he is going to say will not correspond to the subject as previously announced: excuses. He may perhaps respond to his readers and his listeners, since he is addressing them, but perhaps without answering the question, their questions, or to their expectations. The first sentence:
“The subject of this paper, Excuses, is one not to be treated, but only to be introduced, within such limits.” He excuses himself, thus, for not taking the excuse seriously and for remaining, or leaving his audience, ignorant on the subject of what it means to excuse oneself. And this at the moment when (performative contradiction?) he begins by excusing himself—by pretending to do it, rather, by excusing himself for not treating the subject of the excuse. Will he have treated it? Perhaps. It is for the reader to judge, for the addressee to decide. It is like a postcard whose virtual addressee will have to decide whether or not he will receive it and whether it is indeed to him that the card is addressed. The signature is left to the initiative, to the responsibility, to the discretion of the other. To work itself [au travail]. One will sign, if one signs, at the moment of the arrival at destination, not at the origin. (As for the hypothesis according to which Austin might have let himself be caught in a “performative contradiction,” he too, already he, the one without whom we would not even be able to formulate such a suspicion, let us smile at this hypothesis along with the specter of Austin. As if it were possible to escape from every performative contradiction! As if it were possible to exclude the notion that Austin may have played at illustrating this inevitable trap!)

Would a great philosopher of tradition have dared to do this? Can one imagine Kant or Hegel admitting that he will not treat the proposed subject? Can one see them, for example excusing themselves for not doing justice to the excuse, to the subject, or to the proposed title, “A Plea for Excuses,” “within such limits”?

“A Plea for Excuses” may always (perhaps) have been but the title naming this one singular gesture of Austin, that day, or the scene, in a word, that he, and no other, created, when he asked to be excused for not treating the subject. A title is always a name. Here, the referent of this name is what Austin does (he apologizes) and not what he is talking about, since he excuses himself for not talking about it. All he did, perhaps, was to introduce the subject by giving an example, his own, here and now: namely, that he excuses himself for not treating the subject. But as soon as he makes this introduction, he knows what he should be talking about, and he has thus already begun to talk about it, even as he says he is incapable of doing it “within such limits.” I would very much like to take him as a model, that is to say, as an example, or as a pretext—or as an excuse. Let us remember Rousseau, who, in the famous episode of the stolen ribbon in his Confessions (Book II), says: “Je m’excusai sur le premier objet qui s’offrit [I took the first thing that offered itself for my excuse].”

To Respond—Analogies (Aphoristic III)

Moreover, if one responded without failing the other, if one responded precisely, fully, adequately, if one adjusted the response perfectly to fit the question, the demand or the expectation, would one still be responding? Would anything happen? Would an event arrive? Or only the accomplishment of a program, a calculable operation? To be worthy of this name, must a response not surprise us by some irruptive novelty? And thus by an anachronistic dis-adjustment? Must it not respond “beside the question [à côté de la question],” in short? Precisely and right [justement et juste] beside the question? Not just anywhere, or anyhow, or anything, but right and just [juste et justement] beside the question—but at the very moment that the response does everything to address the other, truly, to the expectation of the other, in conditions that have been consensually defined (contract, rules, norms, concepts, language, code, etc.) with the utmost directness [droiture]? These two conditions of the response are incompatible, yet equally incontestable, it seems to me. This is, perhaps, the impasse in which I find myself paralyzed. This is the aporia in which I have placed myself. I find myself placed here, in truth, even before installing myself here.

Were I able to discuss my subject and respond to so many virtual questions, I would perhaps be tempted to retranslate, at great risk, all the problems that have been so powerfully elaborated as the essays that preceded me here. I would be tempted to reformulate them as the question of ordinary language. To take just two examples, in the direction of the fine analyses of John Sallis and Karel Thein, who help us to rethink—differently but with equal force and necessity—our philosophical memory, where it is indebted to the Greek idiom: where is the border within a so-called natural language, one that is thus not totally formalizable, between ordinary usage and philosophical usage? How do we constitute it, for example, when words like pharmakon (poison and/or remedy, sometimes undecidably) or khora (ordinary place, locality, village, etc.) are used in everyday life in Greece, but also in Plato’s works, versus the
unique khora of the Timaeus, which, in spite of its many appearances, no longer bears any relation, even by analogy, to the other. (The question of analogy awaits us precisely in the place where Thein speaks of the “limits of analogy”; I will have to return to this, because it will undoubtedly govern all of my remarks; it will provide me with the most general form of my address to the authors of the articles collected here.) In a word, which will not be the last: how—according to what economy, what transaction—does one treat analogy? The analogy (1) between relations of analogy, and (2) between relations of heterology, between the maintenance and the breakdown of an analogy? Is the first analogy possible or impossible, legitimate or abusive? How does one explain that the relation (logos) of analogy is named by one of the terms of the relation of proportionality, for example, between logos and soul, pharmakon and body? This question has been remarkably elaborated by Thein. It will run through this whole discussion, more or less visibly. An analogous question seems to impose itself on the subject of the different uses of the word khora, in daily life and in philosophical discourse but also in philosophical contexts (for example, the Republic and the Timaeus) that are both common and heterogeneous. There seem to be relations of articulable analogy and of irreducible dissociation—aphoristic or diaphoristic, one might say—between these contexts; they remain radically untranslatable into one another, at least if one holds to the stability of what is called here a discursive context. In particular, in certain passages that have been discovered and rigorously analyzed by Sallis, where the word “khora” seems to have a different meaning from the one it has in the Timaeus (without relation to the Good and the epekeina tes ousias) but designates, rather, the place of the sun itself, “where the good and the khora are brought into a very remarkable proximity.”

And here already, caught in the ordinary language of several natural languages, lies the syntax of a first question, of a first problem. It is the supplementary problem a priori of a complement. The complement of a word that, in our language, is a verb: to respond, yes, it should be done, here now. Yes, one could attempt it, be tempted to attempt it, certainly, but to respond [répondre] to whom [à qui] before whom [devant qui]? to answer [répondre] for what [de quoi] and what [et quoi]? As for “responding,” for the grammar of the verb and the pragmatism of the act, we must acknowledge four complements and four syntaxes.

1. Thus, the first response that is perhaps possible on the subject of response, beginning with the first two complements (to whom? before whom?): to respond to whoever, then, and before whoever has at least read—this is the first condition—read, and, of course, understood, analyzed, or even written the texts that precede my own here—that is to say a number of earlier works that they themselves discuss, for example, and please excuse the few, those of the great canonical tradition, from Plato and Aristotle to Kant, Hegel, Husserl, or Heidegger, etc., in their relation to science, but also the works that inherit from these today more or less legitimately and in a minor key, including my own, hypothetically: all of us here are bound by the contract that the director of the Revue Internationale de Philosophie proposed to us. Any reader is supposed to accept such a contract, as have those whose names appear in the table of contents.

2. The second response that is perhaps possible on the subject of the response, the one I believe I must choose in any case, this time concerning the last two complements (for what and what?): not to answer for what I have written (could I answer for it in any responsible way? do others not discuss it more clearly than I?) but perhaps to respond (and here is the what) by saying a few words, within such limits, about the questions, the difficulties, the aporias, the impasses—I no longer dare say “problems”—in the midst of which I am presently struggling and which will no doubt continue to occupy me for some time. I will borrow (to beg forgiveness or to present my apologies) one of the economic formulas of this predicament from a seminar I am currently giving on forgiveness, excuse, and perjury. Here it is, bare and very simple in appearance: one only forgives the unforgivable. By only forgiving what is already forgivable, one forgives nothing. Consequently, forgiveness is only possible, as such, where, faced with the unforgivable, it seems thus impossible. As I attempt to show elsewhere more concretely, in a manner that is less formal but more consequential, this enjoins us to think the possible (the possibility of forgiveness, but also of the gift, of hospitality—and the list is not contained, by definition; it is that of all the unconditional) as the impossible itself. If the possible “is” the impossible here, if, as I have so often ventured to say along different lines but in a way that is thus relatively formalizable, the “condition of possibility” is a “condition of impossibility,” how then must we rethink the thinking of the possible, the thinking that
comes to us from the depths of our tradition (Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant, Bergson, etc., as well as Heidegger, whose use of the words mögen and Vermögen, notably in The Letter on Humanism, would call for a separate discussion here, etc.)?

How are we to understand or hear the word possible? How are we to read what affects it with negation around the verb “to be” such that the three words of this proposition “the possible is the impossible” are no longer associated by a simple word game, a playful paradox or dialectical facility? But how are we to understand that these words undermine, in a serious and necessary way, the very propositionality of this proposition of the S is P type (the possible “is” the impossible)? Furthermore, is this a question or a problem? And what kind of complicity is there between this thinking of the impossible possible and the instance of the “perhaps” that I was discussing earlier? Since it seems I have already put forward the distinction between “who” and “what” (respond to whom? before whom? but also for what? and what?), to make it tremble a little, allow me to say that, in my current work, and especially in my teaching (for example, in the last several years, on the subject of the gift, the secret, testimony, hospitality, forgiveness, the excuse, the oath, and perjury), I try to reach a place from which this distinction between “who” and “what” begins to appear and determine itself, in other words, a place “prior” to this distinction, a place “older” or “younger” than this distinction, also a place that at once compels determination but also makes possible the terribly reversible translation of “who” into “what.” Why call this a place, a location, a spacing, an interval, a sort of khorā?

Rules for the Impossible (Aphoristic IV)

I have taken off at top speed [démarrage sur les chapeaux de roue], as they say. I ask once more for forgiveness and begin again, otherwise.

To respond—if this is the right word—this is what Michel Meyer had generously asked me, or offered me, to do. I was imprudent enough to promise to do it and thus to risk perjuring myself. After several appreciative readings of these strong, lucid, and generous texts, my delay will only have been that of an anxious, feverish race, both slower and slower and faster and faster. Slower and faster at the same time: try to understand this. A haste then took over, and, as they say, I was heading for failure. I was headed for disaster, which I could see coming more and more clearly without being able to do anything about it. Quite obviously, I did not want the silence of a simple nonresponse to be interpreted—wrongly, of course—as haughtiness or ingratitude. But, as is also quite obvious, I could not, with a limited amount of time and such a proportionally reduced number of pages, “within such limits” (Austin), hope to respond to so many different texts, texts so different in their approach, in their style, in the works they discuss, the problematics they elaborate; to respond to so many addresses as demanding in the force and acuity [acribie] of their questions, the richness of their propositions and the depth of the concerns for which they assume responsibility. A philosophical irresponsibility of sorts would have added further to the insufficient sufficiency of a rapid or brief response.

Certainly I will escape neither the one nor the other. At least, perhaps, I will have begun by admitting the failure and the fault—and by asking for forgiveness. If only better to uphold—precisely on the subject of forgiveness—the statement I made a moment ago. From the moment that the possibility of forgiveness, if there is one, consists in a certain impossibility, must one conclude that it is necessary to do the impossible? And to do it with words, only with words? Must one do the impossible for forgiveness to arrive as such? Perhaps, but this could never be established as a law, a norm, a rule, or a duty. There should not be any il faut for forgiveness. Forgiveness “must” always remain unmotivated and unpredictable. One never gives or forgives “in accordance with duty” (pflächmässig), or even “from duty” (eigentlich aus Pflicht), to use the good Kantian distinction. One forgives, if one forgives, beyond any categorical imperative, beyond debt and obligation. And yet one should, if needed, forgive. What is, in fact, presupposed by infinite forgiveness, a hyperbolic thus unconditional forgiveness, the forgiveness from which the “commandment” seems to come to us, by inheritance from the Abrahamic tradition and taken up in different ways by Saint Paul and by the Koran? Does it presuppose as its condition (the condition of unconditionality itself, thus) that forgiveness be asked for and the fault avowed, as Jankelevitch so forcefully reminds us? But then it would no longer be unconditional. Conditional once again, it would no longer be pure forgiveness, it would become impossible again, otherwise impossible. Or perhaps it cannot be unconditional and thus possible as
impossible)? Can it be what it must be—unconditional—if and only when it no longer requires this avowal or this repentance, this exchange, this identification, this economic horizon of reconciliation, redemption, and salvation? I would be tempted to think this, both within and against this powerful tradition. What would it mean to "inherit" a tradition under these conditions, from the moment one thinks on the basis of this tradition, in its name, certainly, but precisely against it in its name, against the very thing that tradition believed had to be saved to survive while losing itself? Again the possibility of the impossible: a legacy would only be possible where it becomes impossible. This is one of the possible definitions of deconstruction—precisely as legacy. I once suggested as much: deconstruction might perhaps be "the experience of the impossible."  

I must now—without deferring any further, without devoting any more space and time to introducing so many subjects that I will not discuss—present and justify, as much as possible, the rule that I thought I must choose to limit the seriousness of this long failure. I would not know how "within such limits" to respond in a detailed manner to each of the texts that we have read; it would require at least an article per page. But I cannot, nor do I wish to, organize my responses according to general themes, which would risk erasing the signed originality of each of the texts that I have read here. Finally, in none of the texts did I find anything to object to or anything that might make me want to defend my past work (this is another way of saying that these texts are not only courteous and generous, but, in my opinion, impeccable in their reading and the discussions they open). I therefore decided, finally, to put myself forward, me, in other words, to put forward, by following several rules, a more or less disconnected series of quasi propositions. Concerning my work in progress and the difficulties I am up against, these quasi propositions will resonate or reason "on the side [à côté]"; they correspond, by slightly displacing the consonance, to the anxieties, concerns, and questions of those who do me the honor of being interested in what I have written. Which is to say, as may already be clear, that these quasi propositions, limited as they are to a few rigorous pages, will remain, at least at a first glance, aphoristic. But can an argument ever be spared all discontinuity? It is true that there are leaps and that there are leaps. Certain hiatuses can be defended: some are worth more than others.

Such aphoristic quasi propositions are, and will remain, on the other hand, oblique in their relation to the texts to which I will always, nonetheless, try to keep them attuned. While doing everything to respond precisely on the side [justement à côté]. But this does not mean that I will yield to some oratio obliqua or that I will try to sidestep the issue. Even where it seems impossible, and there precisely, directness [droiture], as I said earlier, remains de rigueur. Inflexibly. If I have multiplied the detours and the contortions, including when I humbly asked for forgiveness and commiseration, it is because I am here, I am placed, I have placed myself, in an untenable position and before an impossible task. Forgiveness and pity: mercy.

Yes to Hospitality: (Aphoristic V)

The problems of the response and the delay have thus just presented themselves. Having read Michel Meyer, do I still have the right to refer to them in this way, to call them problems? And an instant ago I spoke imprudently of "propositions." To further call them, as I have, "quasi propositions," certainly draws attention to the problem of propositionalism underlined precisely by Meyer. But this quasi, all by itself, does not get us very far. Another concept is needed. I have never found a concept that could hold in a word. Should we be surprised by this? Has there ever been a concept that is truly namable? I mean namable in one name or in one word? The concept always requires sentences, discourses, work, and process: text, in a word. For example, khora certainly does not designate the same concept in the Timaeus and in the Republic (516b, passage cited by Sallis). One could say that it is only a homonym, another word, almost. The consequences of this necessity (of what I take to be an irreducible experience in any case) seem to me formidable yet inescapable. I sometimes have the impression of having done nothing else, ever, but try to be coherent in this regard. Perhaps I have simply wanted to take account of this necessity and to testify to it.

But it is certainly not fortuitous that the modality of "quasi" (or the logical-rhetorical fiction of "as if") has so often forced me to turn a word into a sentence, and initially, especially, as has often been noted and commented on, around the word transcendental. A question of problematic context and strategy, no doubt: one must unceasingly reaffirm here the
question of the transcendental kind, and one must, almost simultaneously, also wonder there about the history and limits of what we call *transcendental*. But above all else, the essential possibility of an "as if" had to be taken into account, an "as if" that affects all language and all experience with possible fictionality, phantasmaticism, spectrum. The word *transcendental* is not merely an example among others. The category of the "quasi transcendental" has played a deliberately equivocal, yet determinative, role in a number of my essays. Rodolphe Gasché has proposed a powerful interpretation in this direction. Of course, the use of "quasi" and of "ultra-transcendental" to which I resigned myself, is still—it was already—a way of saving, even as I betrayed it, the legacy of philosophy, namely, the demand for the condition of possibility (for the a priori, for what is originary or the foundation, so many different forms of the same radical exigency of every philosophical "question"); to use these terms was also to engage in the task, without concealing the difficulty from oneself, of rethinking the meaning of the "possible," as well as that of the "impossible," and to do so in terms of the so-called condition of possibility, often shown to be the "condition of impossibility." Thus, what can be said about the condition of possibility is also valid, by analogy, for the "foundation," the "origins," the "root" of "radicality," etc.

Even before I began naming them to acknowledge my guilt, the joint *problems* of response and delay *retard* were discussed by at least three of my colleagues: by Michel Meyer (who returns to the question of the question, and therefore the question of the answer, of *answerhood* which is equated with *propositionality*—"answerhood, i.e., propositionality"—but also of "problematical difference" as "difference . . . when we leave propositionalism"—and difference is also a sort of originary delay); by Daniel Giovannangeli (who recalls everything that follows from belatedness or Nachträglichkeit, where this "anachrony," the "anachrony of time itself . . . encloses and exceeds philosophy"); finally by John Sallis (for whom the question or the answer of the return to things themselves, to philosophy itself, presupposes, like "the very opening in question," the opening of an interval that delays (and lags behind) *retarde (sur)* imminence itself: "to intend to begin, to be about to begin, is also to delay, to defer the very beginning that one is about to make"—which, as you might have suspected for some time now, I have been doing here, without complacency).

Response and delay, then: a response, at least according to good sense, is always second and secondary. It lags behind *retarde sur* the question or the demand, behind the expectation *attente*, in any case. And yet everything begins with a response. If I had to summarize, using an elliptical paradox, the thinking that has unceasingly permeated everything that I say and write, I would speak of an *originary response*: The "yes," wherever this indispensable acquiescence is implied (in other words, wherever one speaks and addresses oneself to the other, were it to deny, to argue, to oppose, etc.), this "yes" is first of all a response. To say *yes* is to respond. But nothing precedes this response. Nothing precedes its belatedness *retard*—and therefore its anachrony.

Coming after them, after the texts and the authors that have just been read, and without judging it possible or necessary to do anything other than listen to them, and ask that they be read and reread, I will simply describe the movement in which I feel myself engaged in this respect. Although I never limit the question to the propositional form (whose necessity I also believe in, of course), I have never felt that I had to (not that anyone ever could or should be able to) give up the question, any form of question, a certain "primacy of questioning" (Michel Meyer), or that which ties the question to the problem, to a *problematization*. Could there ever be a problem-free question, that is to say, a question free of all elaboration, of all syntax, of all articulable differentiability, on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, of all self-protection? For *problematization* is indeed the only *consequential* organization of a question, its grammar and its semantics, but *problematization* is also a first *apotropaic* measure used to protect oneself against the question that is the barest, at once the most intractable and the most powerless *démunie*, the question of the other when it calls me into question the moment it is addressed to me. I have tried elsewhere to take into account this "shield" of the *problema*. The *problema* also designates "the substitute, the replacement, the prosthesis, the thing or the person that one *puts forward* in order to protect oneself by hiding, the thing (or person) *ce(lui)* that comes in the place or in the name of the other."13

*Problematization* is already an articulated organization of the response. This is the case everywhere, in particular in the history of philosophical or scientific configurations. By whatever name they go by, and
Why unbreachable? Because the impossible has already occurred . . . there is a history of the question . . . the question has already begun . . . A founded dwelling, a realized tradition of the question remaining a question . . . correspondence of the question with itself.16

Please forgive me this long quotation from an old text. Will I say, once more, that I am excusing myself for it? Beyond the weakness of which I might stand accused, I wanted first to acknowledge a trajectory that at least cuts across—as it has for such a long time—many of the "problematical" motives that have been elaborated by Michel Meyer, in particular when he writes that "problematicity is historicity." But, surprised myself (can I acknowledge it without seeming too naive or foolishly reassured in the face of what could be nothing but immobility and monotony?) by the insistence or the constancy of my remarks, and by the continuity of their displacement, I especially wanted to locate the new themes that—without interruption, because they have not ceased to occupy me in my seminars for the last few years—have not yet been roused on here in this collection of texts. Indeed, I had announced my wish—rather than to respond to all the essays in this volume—to correspond with them by situating certain difficulties of my work in progress. The words I just emphasized in the above quotation are, first of all, indications of this sort and paths for me. They point to the themes and problems that beset me today: another way of thinking the limit of the philosophical in the face of questions like hospitality (invitation/visitation), and a whole chain of associated topics: the promise, testimony, the gift, forgiveness, etc.), but also capable of withstanding [à l'épreuve de] an impossible that would not be negative. Such a test implies another thinking of the event, of the avoir-lieu: only the impossible takes place. The deployment of a potentiality or a possibility that is already there will never make an event or an invention. What is true of the event is also true of the decision, therefore of responsibility: a decision that I am able to make, the decision that is in my power and that indicates the passage to the act or the deployment of what is already possible for me, the actualization of my possible, a decision that only depends on me: would this still be a decision? Whence the paradox without paradox that I am trying to accept: the responsible decision must be this impossible possibility of a "passive" decision, a decision of the other-in-me who will not acquit me [qui ne m'exonère] of any freedom or any responsibility.
The Necessity of the Impossible (Aphoristic VI)

I have devoted many analyses of the aporetic kind to "the singular modality of this 'impossible.'" Of the gift, in particular, in Given Time.

One can think, desire, and say only the impossible, according to the measureless measure [mesure sans mesure] of the impossible. If one wants to recapture the proper element of thinking, naming, desiring, it is perhaps according to the measureless measure of this limit that it is possible, possible as relation without relation to the impossible. One can desire, name, think in the proper sense of these words, if there is one, only to the immeasurable extent [que dans la mesure démesurante] that one desires, names, thinks still or already, that one still lets announce itself what nevertheless cannot present itself as experience, to knowing: in short, here a gift that cannot make itself (a) present [un don qui ne peut se faire présent].

The figure of "given time" had been invoked long before this, and emphasized. It followed upon the development of the "possibility of the impossible," which was at the time another name for time: "But it has already been remarked that this impossibility, when barely formulated, contradicts itself, is experienced as the possibility of the impossible. . . . Time is a name for this impossible possibility." Later, the concept of the invention obeyed the same "logic":

Invention is always possible, it is the invention of the possible. . . . Thus it is that invention would be in conformity with its concept, with the dominant feature of the word and concept "invention," only insofar as, paradoxically, invention invents nothing, when in invention the other does not come, and when nothing comes to the other or from the other. For the other is not the possible. So it would be necessary to say that the only possible invention would be the invention of the impossible. But an invention of the impossible is impossible, the other would say. Indeed. But it is the only possible invention: an invention has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible; otherwise, it only makes explicit a program of possibilities within the economy of the same.

In the interval, The Post Card . . . carries the same necessity in the direction of destination [à destination de la destination], of the very concept of destination. From the moment that a letter cannot arrive at its destination, it is impossible for it to arrive fully, or simply, at a single destination. The impossibility, the possible as impossible, is always bound to an irreducible divisibility that affects the very essence of the possible. Whence the insistence on the divisibility of the letter and of its destination:

The divisibility of the letter—this is why we have insisted on this key or theoretical safety lock of the Seminar [of Lacan]: the atomistic of the letter—is what chances and sets off course, without guarantee of return, the remaining [restance] of anything whatsoever: a letter does not always arrive at its destination, and from the moment that this possibility belongs to its structure one can say that it never truly arrives, that when it does arrive its capacity not to arrive torments it with an internal drifting.

Why this allusion to torment? It names a suffering or a passion, an affect that is both sad and joyous, the instability of an anxiety proper to all possibilization. Possibilization allows itself to be haunted by the specter of its impossibility, by its mourning for itself: a self-mourning carried within itself that also gives it its life or its survival, its very possibility. This impossibility opens its possibility, it leaves a trace—chance and threat—within that which it makes possible. Torment signs this scar, the trace of this trace. But the same is also said in The Post Card of the "impossible decision," the decision that appears to be impossible insofar as it only falls to the other. (This topic was largely elaborated in Politics of Friendship). We find it again in terms of Freud and the concept of Bemächtigung, of the limit or the paradoxes of the possible as power.

It is not at all fortuitous that this discourse on the conditions of possibility—even where its claim is obsessed with the impossibility of overcoming its own performativity—can be extended to all the places where some performative force occurs or makes occur (the event, the invention, the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, friendship, the promise, the experience of death—the possibility of the impossible, the impossibility of the possible, experience in general, etc. Et cetera, because the contagion is without limit; it eventually leads to all concepts and no doubt the concept of the concept, etc.).

Promising to respond in all rightness [dans la droiture], thus right beside [juste à côté] the question: the impossible possible. Recalling that everything I have written in the name of destinary has been written on the untenable line of this impossible possible and that it has always been at the crossing of many of the trajectories that have been sketched out and reinterpreted by the texts assembled here. The risk of misunderstandings, the errancy of a response beside the question: this is what must
always remain possible in the exercise of rightness [droiture]. There would be no rightness [droiture], no ethics of discussion otherwise. (But what I am proposing here is not meant to suggest—any more than were my earlier allusions to responsibility, hospitality, the gift, forgiveness, testimony, etc.—some “ethical turn,” as some have said. I am simply trying to pursue with some consequence the thinking that for years has been engaged with the same aporias. The question of ethics, of rights and politics has not sprung forth unexpectedly, as from a bend in the road. Furthermore, the way in which this question is discussed is not always reassuring as far the “moral” is concerned—perhaps because it asks too much of it.

The possibility of this evil (the misunderstanding, the miscomprehension, the mistake) is, in its own way, a chance. It gives time. Thus there must be the il faut of the fault [Il faut donc le “il faut” du défaut], and adequation must remain impossible. But there is nothing negative, ontologically, in this “il faut du défaut [there must be fault].” There must be [il faut], or if one prefers—inadequation must always remain possible for interpretation in general, and the response in turn, to be possible. This is an example of the law that binds the possible to the impossible. An interpretation that was without flaw, a self-comprehension that was completely adequate would only mark the end of a history exhausted by its very transparency. By prohibiting the future, it would make everything impossible, both the event and the coming of the other, the coming to the other—and thus the response, the “yes” of the response, the “yes” as response. The response can only be adjusted in exceptional fashion, and we still have no preliminary and objective criterion to assure ourselves of it, to assure us that the exception does indeed take place as exception.

Perhaps the haunting of the exception indicates the passage, if not the way out. I say haunting, because the spectral structure is the law here, both of the possible and the impossible, and of their strange intertwining. The exception is always de rigueur. This applies, perhaps, to the stubbornness of the “perhaps,” in its ungraspable modality that is irreducible to any other, fragile and yet indestructible. “Quasi” or “as if,” “perhaps,” “spectrality” of the phantasma (which also means ghost): these are the components of another thinking of the virtual, of a virtuality that is no longer organized according to the traditional notion of the possible (dynamis, potencia, possibilitas). When the impossible makes itself possible, the event takes place (possibility of the impossible). This is, irrecusably,
syncope, the beating of the impossible possible, of the impossible as condition of the possible. From the very heart of the impossible, one hears, thus, the pulsion or the pulse of a “deconstruction.”

Hence, the condition of possibility gives the possible a chance but by depriving it of its purity. The law of this spectral contamination, the impure law of this impurity, this is what must be constantly re-elaborated. For example, the possibility of failure is not only inscribed as a preliminary risk in the condition of the possibility of the success of a performative (a promise must be able not to be kept, it must risk not being kept or becoming a threat to be a promise that is freely given, and even to succeed; whence the originary inscription of guilt, of confession, of the excuse and of forgiveness in the promise). The possibility of failure must continue to mark the event, even when it succeeds, as the trace of an impossibility, at times its memory and always its haunting. This impossibility is therefore not the simple opposite of the possible. It only seems opposed to it but it also gives itself over to possibility: it runs through possibility and leaves in it the trace of its withdrawal [enlevement]. An event would not be worthy of its name; it would not make anything arrive, if it did nothing but deploy, explain, actualize what was already possible, that is to say, in short, if all it did was to implement a program or apply a general rule to a specific case. For there to be an event, the event has to be possible, of course, but there must also be an exceptional, absolutely singular interruption in the regime of possibility; the event must not simply be possible, it must not reduce itself to the explanation, the unfolding, the acting out of a possible. The event, if there is one, is not the actualization of a possible, a simple acting out, a realization, an effectuation, the teleological accomplishment of a power, the process of a dynamic that depends on “conditions of possibility.” The event has nothing to do with history, if by history one means a teleological process. The event must interrupt in a certain manner this kind of history. It is according to these premises that I spoke, particularly in Specters of Marx, of messianicity without messianism. It is imperative [il faut], thus, that the event also announce itself as impossible or that its possibility be threatened.

But then why this il faut, one may ask? What is the status of this necessity, of this apparently contradictory yet doubly obligatory law? What is the double bind on the basis of which the possible must still be rethought as impossible?

Perhaps it is a necessity that escapes from the habitual regime of necessity (ananké, Notwendigkeit), from necessity understood as natural law or law of freedom. For one cannot think the possibility of the impossible otherwise without rethinking necessity. I have attempted analyses of the event or the performative, the scope of which has been recalled here, in an analogous manner over the course of the last fifteen years, in particular in terms of destination, testimony, invention, the gift, forgiveness, which is also that which binds hospitality to the impossible promise, to the pervertibility of the performative in general, etc.—and above all, in terms of death, the aporia of the aporia in general. This pervertibility is less transcendental in that it does not affect the classical reflection on the transcendental, on the transcendental “condition of possibility” in all of its forms: medieval ontotheology, criticism or phenomenology. It does not delegitimize transcendental questioning, it de-limits and questions its original historicity. For nothing can discredit the right to the transcendental or ontological question. This question is the only force that resists empiricism and relativism. In spite of appearances, and the hasty philosophers who often rush to them, nothing is less empiricist or relativist than a certain attention to the multiplicity of contexts and discursive strategies that they govern: a certain insistence on the fact that a context is always open and cannot be saturated; a taking into account of the “perhaps” and the “quasi” in a thinking of the event, etc.

Transaction and Event (Aphoristic VII)

There is something like a transaction in this insistent displacement of the strategy and the non-strategy (that is, of the vulnerable exposure to what arrives). One negotiates, one compromises with, and on, the limit of philosophy as such. This limit takes the double form of a differential logic of analogy: on one hand, the “quasi,” the “as if,” of a difference that maintains the delay, the relay, the return or the term in the economy of the same; and on the other hand, the rupture, the event of the impossible, différence as diaphora, the aphoristic experience of absolute heterogeneity. On one hand, the concatenation of syllogistic sequences, on the other—but “at the same time”—the seriality of aphoristic sequences.
Karel Thein is therefore correct to guide his rich analysis of the analogy in "Plato's Pharmacy" to the point where the question refers—precisely with the insistence [instance] of the decision—to what he calls the conditions and the limits of the analogy as such. The interpretation that I am proposing of the khora disturbs the regime of the analogy. As John Sallis so rightly notes (in our ongoing dialogue that has meant so much to me over the years around this text of Plato, a text whose power of implosion we both feel to be kept in reserve), this is also true of what, in the definition of Good and the epokeina tes ousias as what-is-beyond-being, would remain in a sort of ana-onto-logy. It is about another excess. The “other time” that Sallis notes is also what carries all the trials of which I spoke earlier (the impossible, the passive decision, the “perhaps,” the event as absolute interruption of the possible, etc.). All of Sallis’s questions certainly seem legitimate to me, as do the answers he brings to them (“Can there be, then, a metaphorizing of the khora? If not, then how is one to read the passage of the khora of the sun . . . ? How is the khora itself—if there be a khora itself—to be beheld? What is the difference marked by the as [in the hypothesis in which khora is perceived ‘as in a dream’]?”) But these legitimate responses fall under the law of the philosophical; the latter is dominated by the necessity of the ana-onto-logy (which are that of ontology but also of phenomenology, that is, of the appearance as such of the as such of the as). Yet the rupture that is important to me in the reading of the khora, the reading that I have ventured, is that khora becomes the name of that which never allows itself to be metaphorized, in spite the fact that khora both can and cannot not give rise to so many analogical figures. It does not seem to me that the khora of the sun in the Republic could be a metaphorical value of the khora of the Timaeus. Nor, for that matter, could the reverse be true. Although the word clearly designates a “site” or a “locality” in both cases, there is no analogy, no possible commensurability, it seems to me, between these two places. The word place itself has such a different semantic value in the two cases that what we are dealing with—I believe this and I suggested it earlier—would be a relation of homonymy rather than one of figurality or synonymy. It is on the basis of this conviction that, rightly or wrongly, I treated khora in the Timaeus as a quasi proper noun. If khora eludes all metaphors, it is not to remain inaccessible in its proper properness [sa propre propriété], in its isipity, in the itself of what it is. Rather, earlier [plutôt, plus tôt], because what is there is not the khora itself. There is no khora itself (as John Sallis rightly supposes when he writes “if there be a khora itself”). I will concede that this seems very disconcerting. This unity without property initiates a crisis, for example, here and not necessarily elsewhere, in any distinction between figure and non-figure, and therefore in this distinction between literal reading and figural reading, which Michel Meyer is certainly correct, in other cases, to dissociate into two steps. There is, here, in the singular case of khora (but also in the case of its analogs that still remain absolutely singular and different), a name without a referent, without a referent that would be a thing or a being [étant] or even a phenomenon appearing as such. Thus this possibility disorganizes the whole regime of the philosophical kind of question (ontological or transcendental) without giving in to a pre-philosophical empiricism. It only announces itself in the figure of the impossible that is no longer a figure and that, as I have tried to show, never appears as such.25 It throws the “as such” off track and deprives it of its status as a phenomeno-ontological criterion. I am trying to get at the necessity of this singular naming, as well as at its contingency, and at what we inherit here: a noun from a natural language in its ordinary usage (khora), a noun both replaceable and irreplaceable. To be replaceable in its very irreplaceability, this is what happens to every singularity, to every proper noun, even and especially when what it names “properly” has no relation of indivisible properness [propriété] to itself, to some self that would properly be what it is as such, to some intact isipity. Prosthesis of the proper noun that comes to signify (without any ontic referent, without anything that appears as such, without corresponding object or being, without a meaning in the world or out of the world), to call forth some “thing” that is not a thing and entertains no relation of analogy to anything at all. This naming is an event (at once impossible and decisive, which we may or may not decide to inherit). But is every inaugural naming not an event? Is the giving of a name not the performative par excellence?


Without being a “program” in the least, what does différence “say” or “do”? (It “is” neither a word nor a concept, I once said26 in obvious denegation, but whose traces remain, in some sense—to the point of making denegation of denegation as legitimate as it is inoperative, as if
there were many of us who suspected that this untenable denegation must have wanted to affirm, through its very inconsistency, "something" that still deserved to be taken seriously. What announced itself thus as "differance" had this singular quality: that it simultaneously welcomed, but without dialectical facility, the same and the other, the economy of analogy—the same only deferred, relayed, delayed—and the rupture of all analogy, absolute heterology. Yet one could also, in this context, re-train this question of differance as a question of legacy. The legacy would consist here in remaining faithful to what is received (and khora is also that which receives, it is the enigma of what "receptacle," enekekhomenon, might mean and do in the place where khora says nothing and does nothing), while breaking with the particular figure of what is received. One must always break out of faithfulness—and in the name of a legacy that is fatally contradictory in its injunctions. For example, in what concerns the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, etc., in the name of the Abrahamic legacy that requires of me a certain hyperbolic unconditionality, I must be ready to break with all the economic and conditional reappropriations that constantly compromise the said legacy. But this break itself will still have to conduct transactions and define the necessary conditions—history, law, politics, economics (and economics means economics in the strict sense but also the economy among these different fields)—to make this legacy of hyperbole as effective as possible. On the basis of this paradoxical yet largely formalizable necessity, from this break (that is still economic) with economy, from this heterogeneity that interrupts analogy (though still lending itself to analogy to be understood), I would be tempted to interpret all of the gestures that, even here, elaborate so clearly and against so many prejudices, the engagement of deconstruction, insofar at least as I try to practice and interpret it, from the point of view of science, of technology, of reason and the Enlightenment. I am thinking here in particular of the demonstrations of Christopher Johnson, Christopher Norris, and Arkady Plonitisky.

For a long time, now, we have been able to follow Norris's work—so original, so persistent and so incisive—against countless misunderstandings and a host of prejudices as tenacious as they are crudely polemical (deconstruction as "relativist," "skeptical," "nihilist," "irrationalist," "the enemy of the Enlightenment," "the prisoner of verbal language and rhetoric," "ignorant of the difference between logic and rhetoric, philosophy and literature," etc.). It is no accident that Norris so often calls for a reexamination of the status of the analogy in my work, as he does here again, and for the recollection of the problem concept/metaphor. I find particularly judicious a strategy that is often privileged in his texts, and here again (a certain passage through "White Mythology"—in its relation to Nietzsche, but also to Canguilhem and to Bachelard—and "The Supplement of the Copula"); and particularly effective the re-situation of the demonstrative levers that he proposes with respect to the Anglo-American developments that he has for a long time helped me to read and to understand (Davidson, for example). I am not shocked, even if it makes me smile, to see myself defined by Norris in a deliberately provocative and ironic way as a "transcendental realist." Earlier, I explained why I did not believe it was necessary to give up the transcendental motif. The deconstruction of logocentrism, of linguistics, of economism (of the proper, of the at-home [chez-soi], oikos, of the same), etc., as well as the affirmation of the impossible are always put forward in the name of the real, of the irreducible reality of the real—not of the real as attribute of the objective, present, perceptible or intelligible thing (res), but of the real as the coming or event of the other, where the other resists all reappropriation, be it ana-onto-phenomenological appropriation. The real is this non-negative impossible, this impossible coming or invention of the event the thinking of which is not an ontology, nor phenomenology. It is a thinking of the event (singularity of the other, in its unanticipatable coming, hic et nunc) that resists reappropriation by an ontology or a phenomenology of presence as such. I am attempting to dissociate the concept of event and the value of presence. This is not easy, but I am trying to demonstrate this necessity, like the necessity of thinking the event-without-being. Nothing is more "realist," in this sense, than a deconstruction. It is (what-/who-)ever arrives [(ce) qui arrive]. And there is no fatality about the fait accompli: neither empiricism nor relativism. Is it empiricist or relativist to seriously take into account what arrives—differences of every order, beginning with the difference of contexts?

Without wanting to reduce the richness and the many paths of his demonstrations, I also find it rather remarkable that, when he, too, follows the thread of the analogy without analogy, Christopher Johnson first sets the word metaphor apart. ("The metaphor of writing, as it is articulated with the genetic and the biological in Derrida's texts, is not simply metaphor.") Having proposed "a more discriminating vocabulary"—here
the word isomorphism—he reorients in a way that I find very clear and very confident the very premise of this choice toward another logic or toward another structure, that of the "metaphorical catastrophe" that changes the entire scene and forces us to reconsider the structure of a semantic inversion or of a conceptual classification. For example: "not only is the term a germ, but the germ is, in the most general sense, a term" (an analysis it might perhaps be fruitful to cross with Karel Thelen's discussion of "strong" and "weak" "germs" and of the sperma athenaton). One should certainly take into account the fact that this remarkable analysis finds its privileged horizon in the so-called life sciences, biology and cybernetics (without, however, yielding to vitalism, as Johnson rightly points out). But is this merely Johnson's choice (which did not prevent him from opening a rich and diversified field of questioning)? Or else, taking account of what he says at the end of his discussion about the "open" system and its limit, about the necessity of including his own discourse as an example of the system described ("and more than an example," he adds, and I would have liked to ask him to help me think this "more than an example"), could one, then, extend what he demonstrates to other sciences, to sciences that would no longer be sciences of the living? For example, in the direction indicated by the article and so many other decisive works of Arkady Plotnitsky on the subject of the relations between deconstruction and the physical or mathematical sciences? (In the course of this impressive reflection on the folds, positions, points, and counterpoints of a certain Hegelian "legacy" of deconstruction, we will indeed have noted Plotnitsky's insistence on what he has long held to be a "conceptual" proximity between quantum mechanics—such, in particular, as it has been interpreted by Niels Bohr—and a certain theoretical strategy, a certain relation to calculated risk in deconstructive practice. The attention paid to the notion of "strategy" here is, I believe, justified and determinate.)

I also wonder—without making any objection to it—how one can determine the "outside" of science about which Johnson talks, and what name one is to give to that which he calls a "position outside of science." When he recognizes, and rightly attributes to me, the intention of taking a step beyond a certain boundary of scientific discourse "by taking the notion of the open system to its logical limit, including his own discourse as an example, and more than an example, of the system he describes," is this still a philosophical gesture, as Johnson seems to think, "the critical mission of philosophy?" Or is this a gesture that also passes beyond the closure of philosophy, such that philosophical discourse would find itself on the same side as scientific discourse? I admit that I have no simple, stable answer to this question. And this is also due to the somewhat invaginated structure of this limit, of this form of boundary that includes without integrating, so to speak, the outside in the inside. Plotnitsky nicely sets out the paradoxes of the limit in this respect. At times it is in the name of classical philosophical exigencies (transcendental, phenomenological, ontological) that I find it necessary to determine certain limits to scientific discourse. More often, it is in the name of something that, for the sake of convenience, I call the thinking [la pensée] (at the same time distinct from knowledge, from philosophy, and from faith) that I search for this position of exteriority. But the word thinking does not satisfy me completely, for several reasons. In the first place, it recalls a Heideggerian gesture (Das Denken is neither philosophy nor science nor faith) that certainly interests me very much and whose necessity I clearly see but to which I do not completely subscribe, in particular when he makes such declarations as "science does not think." Neither does the traditional semiotics of the word thinking [pensée], its figure or its etymological values (la pesée [weighing], l'examen [examining] etc.) satisfy me without reservation. Finally, I attempted long ago to justify, in a way that was less simple than certain hasty readers may have believed, the statement according to which "in a certain manner, 'la pensée' does not mean anything... This thinking [pensée] has no weight. It is, in the play of the system, the very thing that never has weight." Yes, "in a certain manner," at least.

As one might suspect, it is not simply a matter of a label, a title, or a terminology here. When Johnson is forced to use three words (thought, philosophy, science) to situate the most obscure border difficulties, he clearly designates the burdensome effort I insist on imposing on myself to mark and pass over these borders: pass over them in the sense that to pass is to exceed and pass to the other side, to exceed the limit by confirming it, by taking it into account, but also in the sense that to pass is not to let oneself be detained at a border, not to take a border for a border, for an impassable opposition between two heterogeneous domains. This double "logic" of the limit is what I wanted to try to formalize here by way of the "responses" sketched out, from one aphoristic sequence to the other. Thus, I believe that the orders of thought and philosophy, even
if they cannot be reduced to the order of scientific knowledge, are not simply external to it either, both because they receive from it what is essential and because they can, from the other side of the limit, have effects on the inside of the scientific field (elsewhere I have tried to articulate the order of “faith” here, as well). Scientific progress or inventions also respond to questions of the philosophical “type.” This is why these differential limits never signify oppositional limits or exclusions. This is why I will never say that “science does not think.” How can we not be extremely grateful to Johnson, Norris, and Plotnitsky, for having not simply understood, argued, elaborated, but for having deployed this gesture in a way that is novel every time? As all the authors of this collection have done, they have carried and explored the necessity of this gesture well beyond any point that I could ever lay claim to myself.

Globalization, Peace, and Cosmopolitanism

I want to begin by expressing my profound gratitude to Mr. Federico Mayor and to my friends at UNESCO for the invitation with which they have honored me. Jérôme Bindé can testify to the many hesitations I had to overcome. To address the enormous, formidable, and urgent task—under the three concepts that are on the program for this session, “globalization [mondialisation],” “peace,” and “cosmopolitanism,” and in twenty minutes (seven for globalization, seven for peace, no more than six for cosmopolitanism)—to expose oneself thus before a large, diverse, and demanding audience is a wager, not to say a torture, that, out of respect for the rights of man, should not be imposed on any human being, and especially not within these confines. On this point, at least, it would be easy to find consensus between, on the one hand, the believers in the natural universality of the rights of man and, on the other, those who would be tempted, with or without cultural relativism, with or without historicism, to see the rights of man and international law in general, as still marked by their European or Greco-Roman-Abrahamic (by which I mean their Greek, Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic) origin, insofar as they are rooted in a history, in particular languages and archives, even where their uprooting is the constitutive law of their history, their vocation, and their structure.

As you see, I have already gained a little time. And even gained a certain angle on my topic. For, although one must never impose on a human being, and especially one whose profession is philosophy, an exercise such as this one and thus the failure he must inevitably face . . . well then, my
certain of my essays, for example, Du droit à la philosophie (Galilée, 1990), and L'Autre Cap: La démocratie ajoutée (Minuit, 1991).


AS IF IT WERE POSSIBLE “WITHIN SUCH LIMITS” . . .

“Comme si c'était possible ‘within such limits’...” first appeared in the Revue Internationale de Philosophie 3/1998, number 205, 497–529, an issue devoted to the work of Jacques Derrida. It appears here in English for the first time.

1. See “The Last Word” and then “The Very Last Word” on Kafka in Friendship, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and “Le dernier mot” (1935–36) in Après coup (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983): “...the echo of the word il y a. There, without a doubt, is the last word I thought as I listened to them” (66).

2. See in particular chapters 2 and 3 of Politics of Friendship, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), following this “dangerous perhaps” that Nietzsche said was the thinking of the philosophers of the future [de l'à-venir]. For example (and I will underline certain words although I will take the following precaution from the outset: the quotations that I may happen to make from certain of my texts are intended only to open the space of a discussion here. I want only to extend this discussion beyond certain limits in which it must—for lack of space—remain contained and constrained. I quote myself although I find it distasteful and at the risk, a risk that is deliberately run, of being accused of complacency; these quotations are to my mind neither arguments of authority nor abusive exhibitions, nor are they reminders for the authors of the articles published here. These authors are in no need of reminders. I would simply like, in a brief and economical way, to address myself, by means of these quotations or references, to the reader who, interested in pursuing the exchange that is begun here, would like to consult the texts in question):

“No the thought of the ‘perhaps’ perhaps engages the only possible thought of the event—of friendship to come and friendship for the future. For to love friendship, it is not enough to know how to bear the other in mourning; one must love the future. And there is no more just category for the future than that of the ‘perhaps’. Such a thought conjoins friendship, the future, and the perhaps to open up to the coming of what comes—that is to say, necessarily in the regime of a possible whose possible must prevail over the impossible. For a possible that would only be possible (non-impossible), a possible surely and certainly possible, accessible in advance, would be a poor possible, a futureless possible, a possible already set aside, so to speak, life-assured. This would be a program or a causality, a development, a process without an event. The possible must remain at one and the same time as undecidable—and therefore as decisive—as the future itself” (29).

“Without the opening of an absolutely undetermined possible, without the radical abeyance and suspense marking a perhaps, there would never be either event or decision. Certainly. But nothing takes place and nothing is ever decided without suspending the perhaps while keeping its ‘living possibility in living memory. If no decision (ethical, juridical, political) is possible without interrupting determination by engaging oneself in the perhaps, on the other hand, the same decision must interrupt the very thing that is its condition of possibility: the perhaps itself” (67 passim).

The quotation marks around the word living signal the necessary connection between the risky aporetic of the impossible possible and a thinking of specularity (neither living nor dead, but living and dead).

3. For example, in How to Do Thing with Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). On this impurity, understood otherwise, I, too, have attempted to draw some consequences (in Limited Inc. and elsewhere). I could, given the time and space for such an exercise, connect this idea to almost all of my thinking.


5. One would have to reconstitute and problematize the context in which propositions such as the following appear:

“To take charge [annehmen] of a ‘thing’ or a ‘person’ in its essence means to love it; to favor it [sie lieben; sie mögen]. Thought in a more original way this favoring [dieses Mögen] means to bestow essence as a gift [das Wesen schenken]. . . . Being as the enabling-favoring [als Vermögend-Mögendi] is the possible [das Mögliche]. As the element, Being is the ‘quiet power’ of the favoring-enabling [als mögend Vermögendes], that is, of the possible [das heißt, des Möglichen]. Of course, our words möglich and Möglichkeit under the dominance of ‘logic’ and ‘metaphysics,’ are thought solely in contrast to ‘actuality’ [Wirklichkeit]: that is, they are thought on the basis of a definite—the metaphysical—interpretation of Being as actus and potentià, a distinction identified with the one between extensio and essentia.”

hospitality, must thus do the impossible. How would such an impossible be possible? How would it become possible? What is the best transaction—economic and anecononomic—between the logic of invitation and the logic of visitation? Between their analogy and their heterology? What is experience then, if it is this becoming-possible of the impossible as such? I am not sure that I have practiced or preferred invitation, to the waitless-wait [l’attente sans attendre] of visitation, but I will not swear to anything.

2. On the other hand, I emphasize the word radical, namely, the powerful metaphysical notion of radicality, the necessity of which this word recalls. One thinks of the figures of the root, of depth, of the origin said to be radical, etc., from Aristotle (for whom causes are “roots”) to Husserl—and of all the “foundationalsims,” as they say in the world of Anglo-Saxon thought, in the course of debates to which I have never been able, I admit, to adjust my premises. Feeling myself to be both foundationalist and anti-foundationalist, from one problematic context to another, from one interrogative strategy to another, I do not know how to use this “word” in general: in general I am and I remain a “quasi” foundationalist. This notion of radicality, as figure and as irrecusable injunction, is not precisely [justement] what is subject to the turbulence of a deconstruction. Deconstruction has never laid claim to radicalism and in any case has never consisted in raising the stakes of radicality. The fact remains that an excess in this direction can certainly do no harm (indeed radicalism is to be recommended to all philosophy and is no doubt philosophy itself) but it might not change its ground, change the ground that is subject to the seismic turbulence I have just mentioned. This is why, just above, in the place where this note is called for in the text, I underline the cumbersome “quasi” that I take on so often. On deconstruction and radicality, and for the sake of brevity, within such limits, I will allow myself to refer, among my most recent texts, to Spectres de Marx (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 148 ff.


11. Beyond his luminous readings with which, for some years Giovannangeli has recalled me to a Sartrian legacy that I can, thanks to him, reinterpret—see in particular his book La passion de l’origine (Paris: Galilée, 1995) and his articles in Le passage des frontières (Paris: Galilée 1994) and Passions de la littérature (Paris: Galilée 1996)—I would have liked to pursue here, in this connection, the discussion of the impossible-possible as law of desire or love (in Heidegger and in relation to another thinking of Ereignis—whether or not one translates this word by “event”). I would do so, given the time and space, by taking into account what Giovannangeli develops in terms of the possibility of an unconscious effect.

12. To say or to write is at the same time to assume the legacy of natural language and ordina language and to formalize them, by bending them to this formalizing abstraction whose power they carry originally: the use of a word or
phrase, however simple and ordinary they may be, the putting into play of their power, is already, by identification of iterable words, a formalizing idealization. Thus there is no purely ordinary language just as there is no purely philosophical, formal or, in any sense of the word, extraordinary language. In this sense, if it is true, as Austin says, that there is no “last word,” it is hard to say, as he does, that ordinary language is the “first word,” a word that is simply and indivisibly “first.”


14. See in particular De l’esprit, Heidegger et la question and the discussion of the promise, the yes to a priori opposition of yes and no—and especially what comes before any question” (Gallilée: Paris, 1987), 147 ff. See also Politics of Friendship.


23. On this impossible possibility, this impossibility as perversion, as the permanent possibility of the perversion of the promise into a threat, see “Avances,” Preface to Serge Margel, Le tombeau du Dieu artisan (Paris: Minuit, 1995).

24. Some time ago, in the space of Husserlian phenomenology, I analyzed in analogous fashion an apparently negative possibility of form, an impossibility, the impossibility of full and immediate intuition, the “essential possibility of non-intuition,” the “possibility of crisis” as a “crisis of the logos.” But this possibility of the impossibility, as I said at the time, is not simply negative; the trap also becomes a chance: “for Husserl, this possibility of crisis remains connected to the very movement of truth and to the production of ideal objectivity: ideal objectivity has in fact an essential need for writing.” See Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 40; and especially Introduction à l’origine de la géométrie de Husserl (Paris: PUF, 1962).

25. “The ultimate aporia is the impossibility of the aporia as such.” Apories (Paris: Gallilée, 1993), 137. Another way of saying that there is no question with-out a problem, and no problem that does not hide or protect itself behind the possibility of an answer.


27. One could refer here to many of the admirable works of Plottnisky, in particular In the Shadow of Hegel: Complementarity, History and the Unconscious (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1993), Complementarity: Anti-epistemology after Bohr and Derrida (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), as well as to his masterful, most recent interventions around the so-called Sokal Affair. Moreover, Christopher Norris has just published (in the perspective of his article here) an important work in which he devotes a chapter to quantum mechanics; the interested reader will find in this book a friendly discussion of certain aspects of Plottnisky’s interpretation with which Norris is basically in agreement. Norris regrets that Plottnisky’s interpretation is at times, here and there, “more postmodernist than deconstructive,” though he nonetheless pays Plottnisky the homage he is due: Against Relativism, Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction and Critical Theory (London: Blackwell, 1997), 113. Although I do not share Norris’s reservations, the space of this problematic and this discussion, it seems to me, is of great necessity today. As for myself, I always learn a great deal about all of these crossings: between deconstruction and the sciences, certainly, but also between two very different approaches—that of Norris and that of Plottnisky—whom I would like to acknowledge here. No one today has done more or succeeded better than these two philosophers in dispelling the tenacious prejudices (“deconstruction” is foreign or hostile to “science,” to “reason”; deconstruction, as we noted earlier, is “empiricist,” “skeptical,” or “relativist,” “playful” or “nihilist,” “anti-humanist,” etc.). No one demonstrates better than they the necessity and richness of the co-implications between “deconstructive” and “scientific” problematics that are often too separated. Both in discussions and institutions.

28. Of Grammatology, 93.

29. I am underlining the passages that refer here to these three instance—thought, philosophy and science: “Derrida’s work reflects or mediates aspects of contemporary science. It deals of course with only one dimension of his work, but it does show a thinker open to the implications of science.” And Johnson goes on to say the following, which I would like to underline precisely because it suspends the prejudice according to which “science does not think” (Heidegger): “open to the implications of science, of what science gives us to think.” How does science “give” one to think? Beyond “such limits,” I would have liked to develop this analysis in terms of this “give [donne]” and this “gift [donation].”