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From opinion to faith

by Gabriel Marcel.

Those who are acquainted with my work know that the paramount task of philosophy as I conceive it lies in the analysis of certain spiritual situations; these situations must first be circumscribed as carefully as possible and reflection must be induced to revive them for our inner inspection. I wish to adopt this same procedure in approaching the problem which is raised by the coexistence in our society of believers and non-believers.

It is not difficult to see why this problem has remained and will continue to remain in the forefront of my interests. I came to the catholic faith at a late date; my deepest sentiments still ally me with the non-believer; I can understand his difficulties better than others. Hence a personal and somewhat incongruous situation which is fraught with difficulties, but which at least serves to stimulate reflection.

I shall begin with an observation that I owe perhaps to my friend Father Fessard—although I am not altogether sure of this —, one which he has in any case admirably developed in one of his recent works.[1] We shall understand nothing of the relation between the believer and the non-believer and there is danger of giving the most harmfully pharisaic interpretation of it if we fail to perceive something else which is even more mysterious, namely the symbiosis of belief and disbelief in the same soul. If the believer has any duty at all, it is to became aware of all that is within him of the non-believer.

This observation actually occurred to my mind in an anguished form during the past few months when the pressure of external events had become almost intolerable; I sensed the approach of a disaster in which everything we loved would founder; I said to myself: there is no reason why our worst presentiments should not be realized. Then I took to asking myself: what is becoming of my faith? I did not possess it any longer; to me it seemed devitalized to the point of degenerating into a certain *opinion* that I recognized as part of my mental furniture, nothing more. I debated with myself: I still cannot blind myself to the facts, I said; there is a kind of facile optimism which I cannot compel myself to adopt; God's purposes are inscrutable, there is no guarantee that everything I love will not be destroyed. At that period I had some conversations with a catholic friend of mine who had an extremely lucid mind which did not overlook any of the dangers of the present time. His calm at first irritated me; I was inclined to take his composure for indifference; then I suddenly thought: this is a real faith because it brings peace. Peace and faith are inseparable. I shall revert to this relationship later; it seems to me to be of central importance. I also realized at the same moment that if I was able to recognize his faith for what it was, it was because such faith inhabited me as well; this reflection was a source of encouragement. But the memory of this inner crisis has not left me—in particular, the awareness of the unbridgeable gulf between opinion and faith.

As a matter of fact, I should like to draw the attention of the reader to something which requires considerable development in its own right: it seems clear to me that certain developments in contemporary thought exhibit a tendency to confuse belief with opinion. To someone who does not share my belief, it in fact tends

to appear as an opinion; through a commonly known optical illusion, I myself tend to consider it from the point of view of the other person, hence to treat it in turn as an opinion. Thus a strange, disturbing dualism is established within me; to the extent that I in fact live my belief, it is in no way an opinion; to the extent that I describe it to myself, I espouse the point of view of the person who represents it to his mind but does not live it; it then becomes external to me—and, to that degree, I cease to understand myself.

The fact is that if we wish to understand this clearly, we must pay particular attention to the question of what is—and above all what is not—an opinion.

Needless to say, a large part of the following reflections are directly related to the analyses of Plato which are still unrivaled; I note this here to avoid reverting to it again in what follows. My own orientation, however, will be somewhat different; for I am particularly concerned with describing the relation of opinion to belief and faith, not to science; confusion is most to be feared in this connection.

Let us put aside those opinions which are conjectures bearing on some undetermined fact; these will teach us nothing; it may be immediately noted, however, that the proposition with which we shall begin our analysis is perfectly applicable to these "conjectures." This proposition is as follows.

In general, we only have an opinion of what we do not know; but this lack of knowledge is not discerned, is not avowed. Here, the best example we can take is an opinion of a person. It should be noted at once that we do not have an opinion, strictly speaking, of those beings with whom we are intimately acquainted; this observation is also applicable to artistic works, etc. If someone asks me my opinion about Mozart or Wagner, I do not know what to reply; it is as though my experience were too dense, my cohabitation with Mozart or Wagner too close. I think it can be confirmed in every instance that an opinion can only be established from a certain distance, that it is essentially far-sighted. It remains to be seen whether this far-sightedness is not myopic in certain respects. These metaphors, of course, are always faulty. Nevertheless it is always the case that to the extent that an experience is enriched, perfected, it tends to eliminate those elements of opinion at first hidden within it which were merely stop-gaps.

Let us turn now to the structure of opinion; this in fact is essentially fluctuating; for basically, opinion always glides—in essence—between two limits, one of which is an impression, the other an affirmation; when it is nothing more than an impression, however, it is not really an opinion. In a case of this kind everybody will say when asked: "I only have an impression of him, not an opinion." (To be sure an uncritical mind is sometimes unable to make this distinction). To my mind, opinion, properly speaking, invariably involves a certain implicit reference for which I cannot find a name in french, a reference to a part of the sentence that is understood: *I maintain that. . . .* However, it can, and in fact generally does, happen, that the latter remains implicit. Opinions are expressed in propositions which refer to a reality whose roots remain buried; it is just these roots that reflection must expose. It must explain the expression, "I maintain that . . . ." The best way to exasperate a discussant is to supply such an explanation as is implied in the simple remark: "You are the one who said so." In general, when someone spontaneously affirms of his own opinion: "That is my opinion, I give it to you for what it is worth," this is a proof of the fact that he does not have too much confidence in it. Language here is wonderfully expressive: "hold," "maintain." The manner in which one adheres to something and the manner in which one upholds something are interdependent. To maintain an opinion is to maintain it before someone else, even if this someone be oneself; an opinion which is not maintained or is not capable of being so, on the other hand, is not really an opinion. Personally, I am convinced that opinion is impossible without a reference to another. There is an imperceptible transition from "maintain" to "claim," and I am not using "claim" in its pejorative sense, although here too there is or can be a continuous transition in meaning.

Thus we arrive at another proposition which this time is a definition: in general, an opinion is *an appearing to be which tends to*

change into a claim; and it should be at once added that this occurs because of an absence of reflection; to put it differently, the initial appearing to be is not understood as such—and it is because of this that it can be mobilized into an opinion. Examples of this are plentiful: I might take as a favorite example the sort of opinion which refers to nationalities of which most of us have only the barest outlines of an experience. "The English are hypocrites, the Russians unreliable." The implied reference is immediately understood: "I maintain to you that the English are hypocrites, etc." If we take the trouble to ask ourselves what its, so to speak, gold-backing may be when we have uttered an opinion of this kind, what its cash value is, we would be horrified. Suppose that I have made two or three statements each of which, taken alone, has clearly not been confirmed; let us assume moreover, that no inferences have been drawn from any of them; everything takes place basically on the affective level, the level of impressions; and it is at this moment that the "change" has taken place, that I have converted the impression into an opinion. I have given my opinion, and it is strengthened in the utterance, just as a muscle is strengthened by being exercised. We have to consider what sort of life it will lead in the future, however. It will tend to nourish itself on everything that is capable of making it stronger. The extent to which we can talk here of a mental biology and of a biology of opinion in particular, is never adequately appreciated. Opinion tends to behave like an autonomous organism which admits into itself whatever is able to strengthen it and which avoids whatever threatens to weaken it.

Up to now we have merely scratched the surface, however; and the reason for this is that we have proceeeded in a completely abstract way, as though the subject was isolated, as though it had only its own experience to deal with. Unfortunately, this is not so. Each of us is *immersed*—and opinion can be understood only if we take account of such *immersion.* If reflection concentrates on the implicit reference, it will observe how it changes its form. The fact is that in the great majority of cases, it is not I who "maintains that. . . ." If someone presses me when I have just uttered an

opinion, I will usually resort to flight, sheltering myself behind "it is said that" or "everyone says." "Everyone knows that the English are a nation of hypocrites." Here again we must pause, for a very important feature comes to light. I am afraid that opinion usually has a false basis. I treat something which is not mine as though it were mine, something that I have somehow inhaled without realizing it. We are dealing with a reality which is of an even greater complexity than this, however. The more an opinion is offered as an evaluation, the more we find inextricably mixed in with it both the factor I have just described and another of a different sort that we should now try to grasp.

In these critical years[2] when people are so badly divided in their convictions, it is impossible to avoid being not only preoccupied with, but really haunted by the hybrid mystery concealed behind the word "opinion." I was recently prompted to say a few words to an audience composed entirely of communists or at least persons inspired by communism. I found it possible to refrain from uttering any words which would offend the audience. But while I also felt a certain *basic sympathy* for my audience, I at the same time recognized how completely impossible it was to reach them on the level of opinion. Now it is precisely here that we find this complex of factors which are in fact indissociable, but which we must nevertheless analyze with the greatest care. I accept it as a fact that if we try to understand what an adherent of the popular front (evidently assumed to be sincere) thinks, we will find for the most part an acute awareness of certain injustices together with the fundamental evaluations presupposed by this awareness. This does not have the character of an opinion; the injustices are perceived, are flagrant, even if the individual who denounces them has not personally been a victim of them, and particularly so in his case, perhaps. Every assertion of the form: *such-and-such cannot be condoned* to my mind transcends the plane of opinion. On the other hand, however, as soon as a judgment is uttered on "those really responsible" for this state of affairs, all the observations I have made above, hold; with what authority do I assert that such-and-such a person or even such-and-such a corporation is responsible?

What I am doing here is mirroring something else. This involves a transition from "I maintain that" to "Everybody knows"—meaning here "my newspaper said"—without my being able to discern the roots of the statement. Generally, we can say that for the man in the street, "my paper" is something that can no more be transcended than can "my consciousness" for the idealist; in fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that from a certain point of view "my consciousness" *is* "my paper." Yet this is a somewhat unwarranted simplification, because in the first place, I have chosen my paper. A great deal can be said about the meaning and implications of this choice, but it is particularly necessary that "my paper" conforms to a certain mute exigence within me which finds its satisfaction in the paper and which ratifies *a posteriori* the latter's statements; and this mute exigence is the basic and irreducible element in my way of evaluating. Here again, however, we have to guard against excessive simplification. We do not have to do with a single exigence, but with a bundle, a skein of exigences. Only a rigorous examination of consciousness can enlighten us in this respect; we must indeed begin with ourselves if we are to discern the role played in our opinion by our own personal interest or by some emotional bias for or against someone. Here again, we shall discover a spectrum of meanings. At the one extreme, opinion is only the expression of a desire or aversion, or of a complex of factors in which desire and aversion are indissolubly mixed; at the opposite extreme, opinion implies inversely, a kind of ideal claim having value in itself, which disregards the interests of the empirical subject who expresses it. The significant point about this, however, is that hypocrisy too often enters in, and allows me to express in terms of an ideal and impersonal claim what in fact is only an appetite—but one which does not dare reveal itself in all its nudity. We have to recognize, nevertheless, that opinion is located just between the two, in this penumbra receptive to mirages and phantoms. Indeed how can we speak of opinion when appetite reveals itself without disguise? Where an intrinsic value is defended, on the other hand, we are in the realm of what I shall call the *hyperdoxical.*

It follows from the above that if we wish to consider the value of an opinion, a political opinion, for example, a series of preliminary distinctions are required.

First of all we may ask about the meaning or import of the experience underlying an opinion although we cannot establish any equivalence or measure between the two.

On the other hand, and on a wholly different level, we must assign to any opinion whatever, a certain existential significance, insofar as an opinion expresses, whether adequately or not, a set of needs from which we cannot abstract.

Finally, the ideal and depersonalized claim which can be concealed in an opinion is a factor which must be treated separately. What must be clearly granted, however, is that the coexistence of such distinct and irreducible factors at the core of opinion compels us to proclaim its essential lack of reality. The mode of relation established by consciousness between these diverse elements will in fact always remain unverifiable.

We must now closely examine the "religious opinions" of the free thinker in the light of the foregoing observations. We shall have hardly any difficulty in rediscovering here the incongruous elements I just now attempted to catalogue. The simplest approach is to consider the case of the atheist who candidly affirms his atheism. The characteristic feature of opinion as such is nowhere more in evidence then here: "I maintain that" God does not exist. Atheism, on the other hand, is something that is affirmed essentially before another, or before oneself insofar as one is another. It is not and cannot be lived as faith. It is essentially a riposte—or what amounts to the same thing, an objection. That this *I* now conceals a *one*, that it inevitably refers to a "general opinion" conveyed by conversation, the press, books, is so obvious that I believe it unnecessary to pursue the subject any further. What is here of greater moment is to discern the respective contributions made by experience, the existential affirmation, and the ideal claim. To make such a discrimination, moreover, is much more difficult; and nuances of meaning which I cannot introduce here have to be presented.

First of all, the empirical contribution; the "I maintain that" of

the atheist implies a "my experience shows me that." Here an important observation should be made. It seems to me that the atheist claims to conjoin two kinds of observations: one is negative, the other positive (or one he believes to be so—wrongly, in all likelihood).

On the one hand he asserts that he has had no experience of God. "If God existed, I would have experienced him." This is more or less what a person who occupied an important position in the state system of education once affirmed to me.

There is, however, a complement to the above: "On the other hand, I have experienced certain facts which would not have occurred if God existed." There is absolutely no doubt that the stumbling block of evil in all its guises is one of the bases of atheism. However, we have to analyze this judgment of inconsistency. In fact, if we examine it closely, we will find a paradox. When in talking about a certain person, I say: "if she had been there, such a thing would not have happened," I base my remark on an exact knowledge or on a knowledge I claim is exact, of the person in question; for example, she would have prevented the child from playing with the matches. This means: she is prudent, careful, good: hence she would not have allowed the child to play with the matches. However, this assumes not only that the person exists, but also that we know his manner of existing. But we can see at once that we are dealing with something different in the case of God. The atheist bases his view on a certain idea of God (not on an experience, clearly). If God existed, he would have such-and-such properties; possessing these properties, he would not allow that . . . etc. . . . The judgment of inconsistency is based on a judgment involving an implication. Possibly the term "implication" is not strong enough. What is really meant is that to think of God is not to think of anything at all, to limit oneself to the mere utterance of the word "God," if our affirmation does not involve the existence of a being who is sovereignly good and sovereignly powerful. Now this is justified. But in all likelihood the transition to the conclusion is not justified. Let us consider the example I took from the finite or created order. If Jane had been there she would not have allowed the child to play with the matches. The ground for my statement is either certain analogous cases in which Jane has in fact demonstrated her prudence, or, if such cases have not occurred, the consciousness of what I would have done in her place. Is this applicable to the case where we claim to reason about the behavior of God? Clearly not. If I base myself on the consideration of what in fact has been the action of God in such or such a particular circumstance, I put myself in a position where it is impossible to arrive at an atheistic conclusion. Is the second alternative more acceptable? Can I put myself in God's place in order to affirm that in such-and-such a case I would have acted in such a way, would or would not have allowed such an event to take place, etc.? Something odd takes place here. Whenever we are dealing with an influential person who is responsible for taking the initiative in a difficult situation, we readily recognize that we cannot put ourselves "in his place," that we do not know ourselves what we would do if we were "in his place." The politician, however, always seems to be at grips with a situation he has not created, but which he should nevertheless try to control. On the other hand, it can be conceded that God, being thought of as a creator, does not confront an infinitely complex series of data; he is rather viewed as a privileged being who has only to will that things be so,—so that the atheist does not have the least hesitation or scruple in pronouncing what we may call a verdict of non-existence.

Now it is here that the characteristic features of opinion appear in all their nakedness, in particular, the externality of opinion relative to the very thing to which it refers. The more a state of affairs concerns me, the less I can say in the strict sense of the term that I have an opinion about it. Hence the justice of the remark which is wholly negative but still helps advance our inquiry, that commitment and opinion are mutually exclusive. This entails the metaphysical conclusion that I have an opinion about the universe only to the extent that I actually disengage myself from it (where I withdraw from the venture without loss). The pessimism of a modern disciple of Voltaire or of an Anatole France, for example, lies precisely in this: he is tied to a non-participation—to be sure we

must note that this is not true of all pessimisms, and is not true of the pessimism of Schopenhauer, for example, to the extent that *it is lived*.

Atheism, however, can be based not so much on an experience or the lack of an experience as on a claim, or more precisely, on a willing. A number of variable relations between this will and this experience or non-experience can be established.

"God," writes Maritain,[3] "is completely rejected in principle, as the result of an absolute metaphysical dogmatism . . . in the name of the social community, the collective or collectivised man. . . . The social communist ideal shows up as the conclusion of an initial atheism which has been postulated in principle." I believe this to be quite true. But wouldn't it be well to note that a kind of identity of attitude is realized here—paradoxically—between the collectivised man and the anarchist as Stirner, for example, has conceived him? It may be said by the way that we are touching here at the root of a paradox in which anarchism and communism tend to become identified in the minds of many people today. Here and there we encounter the same affirmation that man can only realize his full stature in a world devoid of God; and this, too, is why the idea or pseudo-idea of a communist humanism today tends to attract the attention of many minds whose principal talent, moreover, does not appear to be the gift of reflection. As I have indicated, it is clear that this humanism is based not on an experience but on a claim. The hyperdoxical characteristic which we tried to exhibit earlier, fully reveals itself here. The more it grows, however, the more it becomes aware of itself—the more we tend to pass from the sphere of opinion into the sphere of faith.

However, someone may inquire whether it would not be appropriate to intercalate between opinion and faith an intermediate link, namely conviction.

Here again we have to make a careful examination of certain realities that ordinary language—which is so loose—tends to conceal. "I have paraded my convictions right and left," a vaudeville character once said; "and they have remained unshakeable." In this case there is no doubt that opinion and conviction coincide. On the other hand, consider the case of a man who has arrived at a conviction on a specific question after patient effort and persistent inquiry: Scheurer-Kestner or Zola arriving at the conviction that Dreyfus was innocent. Conviction here refers to a limit, an end, a bar that has been drawn. My investigations can reveal nothing more. This means: the cause is known to me; it is useless to talk about it further. Thus conviction in principle refers to the past; if it does refer to the future, it is an anticipated future, hence a future treated as though it were already past; there is in this respect a fundamental and also extremely subtle difference between conviction and prophetic certitude. Can we apply this observation to political or religious conviction? I believe we can. The person who professes his republican convictions thereby affirms that he has attained something which for him has a definitive character. The curious thing about this which is worth notice, however, is that the affirmation referring to the invariability of an inner disposition inevitably tends to become converted into a judgment asserting the immutability of its object. If I have republican convictions, I shall not be satisfied to say: "I shall always be convinced that a republic is the most rational political form"; I will go further and affirm: "a republic will always fulfill the desires of the most rational minds." This is actually an irrational and unjustified inference, the psychological mechanism of which, however, instantly leaps to the eye.

Here I wish to strongly emphasize the word "definitive," which I have just used. It is a word which embodies a claim to arrest time. Whatever you may say, whatever happens, my conviction is unshakeable. It is worth the trouble to reflect a moment on the extravagant nature of this *pretension,* for it *is* one and eminently so. The individual does not confine himself to saying in effect: "Starting now, I am going to close my eyes and stop up my ears": this would be a decision, not a pretension. No; what is affirmed is that "Whatever happens or whatever may be said cannot alter what I think." Now we have either one of two alternatives:

either I want to affirm by this that I have already anticipated in detail and refuted all the objections my questioners or the events themselves might confront me with;

or I affirm that these objections, whatever they may be—and this is tantamount to saying that I have *not* anticipated them, have *not* examined them in detail—cannot shake my conviction.

Let us consider the first alternative; it involves an absurdity. How can I be sure that I have anticipated all objections? The cases in which all the possibilities are enumerable are infinitely rare; one scarcely finds them except in pure logic or mathematics; and when I refer particularly to events which are by nature unpredictable, such an enumeration seems strictly inconceivable.

We must therefore fall back on the second alternative. Whatever objections there may be—I do not claim to predict them all in detail—I am determined not to take them into account. We fall from the level of pretension to that of decision. It is not certain, however, that we can remain there. I indicated that I am determined not to take them into account; but can I actually do this? Isn't there a part of myself which is in danger of being influenced in certain ways, which surrenders to a certain pressure? a part of myself which is relatively refractory to the power of control or domination that my will claims to exercise over the totality of myself? At the moment when I profess my unshakeable conviction, a concord, a harmony happens to be realized between the different parts of myself; will this harmony continue? it is impossible for me to affirm that it will in good faith; I cannot be responsible for what my state of feeling will be tomorrow. What then? If I were fully aware of these possibilities, these perils, I would say:

either: my conviction is unshakeable—except for the change in those parts of myself for which I cannot truly say I am responsible because they are in an immediate contact with the event; which is tantamount to saying that my conviction is *not* unshakeable, that I cannot sincerely state that it is so;

or: my conviction is unshakeable, whatever the changes that might occur in those areas of my inner realm which are not completely submissive; I decide once and for all that if inconsistencies should occur, they will have no repercussions on my conviction itself. However, the justification or the validity of this attitude is extremely doubtful. To be sure, if only my subsequent acts were involved, I could say: "Whatever happens, I will act as if. . . . But the zone of conviction is intermediary between that of feeling and that of action: and it is quite clear that between it and the zone of feeling there neither is nor can be any precise boundary. I must guard against the fact that at the moment I affirm my conviction, basing it on the harmony now realized within me, I cannot really envisage a different feeling, or better, dissonance, which I will experience tomorrow; I only have an abstract idea of it which I can juggle. Nothing more.

These reflections lead to the inference that the apposition of the terms *definitive* or *unshakeable* with the utterance of a conviction always implies a claim at the basis of which we can discern either a delusion or the consent to an inner lie. All I really have the right to say is: "given the constellation of my present inner dispositions and the set of events of which I am now cognizant, I am inclined to think that. . . ." Moreover, I should guard against affirming the immutability of this constellation of factors on which my conviction is based, one which therefore seems to me to be essentially capable of being modified.

Doubtless this relativism will seem singularly cold to many readers, particularly prudent and timorous, and therefore incapable of giving that tonus, *élan,* or dynamic value to life in which we set so much store. What has happened all this time to belief? it will be asked. Isn't it, too, infected by relativism? I do not think that it is, but the greatest care must be taken in showing this.

For the sake of clarifying the following remarks, I can say that the temporal orientation of belief is, in a way, the inverse of that of conviction. The latter refers to an arrest, to a bar that has been drawn; it implies a kind of inner closure. With belief, just the inverse is true. I am convinced that the bergsonian opposition between the open and the closed has a significantly novel application here.

However, we must guard against the pitfalls of language. The

word *believe* is often used with the most fluctuating meanings; it sometimes means quite simply: "I assume that," or even, "it seems to me that." I do not believe we will succeed in extricating its essential characteristic unless we resolutely put to one side what is expressed by *believing that*. (although there are some rare cases where this expression can be preserved). I shall concentrate first of all on what is implied in the act of belief *in* or *about* something or someone.

I think that the notion of *credit* can guide us in this context. To give, or better yet, open a credit account to someone. . . . This to my mind is the most essential and constitutive aspect of belief. We have to uncover its meaning. We must not be misled by the fact that to agree to extend credit is to place at the disposal of someone else a certain sum, a certain quantity of something, with the expectation that it will be returned to us together with an additional sum, a certain profit. We must unburden the meaning of extending credit of this material weight. I am in no way separable from *that which* I place at the disposal of this X (whose nature we must explore later). Actually, the credit that I extend is, in a way, myself. I lend myself to X. We should note at once that this is an essentially mysterious act.

To be sure, conviction, too, refers to something which is external to me; but it implies no commitment on my part towards this X. My conviction refers to X; I indicate my position with respect to X; I do not bind myself to X. I acknowledge that this is a very subtle difference, but it is a very important one to my mind. Believing means, to begin with, following a certain course, but only to the extent that following in no way means *undergoing*, but rather *giving oneself, rallying to*. The image evoked by *rallying* is possibly as instructive as that of credit; it connotes even more adequately the kind of inner gathering together presupposed by belief. It is interesting to note that this gathering together is the more effective to the extent that the belief is *stronger*. It is here that the analyses of Bergson are most clearly applicable. The strongest or most vital belief is one which brings all the powers of our being most completely into play—which does not mean that we can measure it ex-

actly in terms of the consequences it implies on the plane of action. The human situation is infinitely more complex, and here as elsewhere, pragmatism proves to be inadequate.

Let us now consider this X to which we extend credit, to which we rally. What are its characteristics? I am prompted to say that it always is either a personal or a supra-personal reality; but the idea of a supra-personal reality raises difficulties which I can only touch upon. Whatever is on the hither side of the person always participates in *thingness*. But how can I put my trust in a thing—which is inert by definition, i.e., incapable of responding? This is only possible if I personalize this thing, if I make a fetish of it, a talisman, i.e., the incarnation of powers which are in reality those of the person himself. To believe in someone, is to put one's trust in him, i.e.: "I am sure you will not let me down, that you will instead fullfill my expectations, that you will realize them." I expressly use the second person here. One can only trust a "thou," a reality capable of fulfilling the function of a "thou," of being invoked, of becoming something I can fall back on. And it seems to me that this is of the utmost importance. It is clear, however, that this assurance is not a conviction in the sense I have described above; it goes beyond what is given, what I can experience, for it is an extrapolation, a leap, a bet, which like all bets, can be lost. The stakes involved are difficult to define—for the reason that it is I who am the credit which I extend to the other. I am convinced that in this context all our habitual categories of thought are inadequate. In a concrete philosophy we must almost invariably confront the drama concealed by the problem. As long as we think in terms of a problem we will see nothing, understand nothing; in terms of the drama or of mystery, however, the case may be somewhat different: as is so often true, it is negative experience, the experience of disappointment or defeat, which is here the most revealing. I have placed my trust in a certain individual; he betrays me; if I had not established a completely inward relationship with him, or more precisely, with what I took to be him, this disappointment could not have touched me in the strict sense of the term; the fact is, however, that I *am* affected by it. This could result in a collapse for me,

in a real uprooting of my being. What then has happened? that I have identified myself with this X and that I became partly alienated from myself because of him. (We must not forget the extending of credit). The result is that his failure is in a way my own. I find it impossible in this connection to adopt the detached attitude of the person who regrets what has happened but whom it "does not concern" in the final analysis. My disappointment is in a way a partial destruction of myself.

How was it possible to be disappointed, however? because my reliance on X had a conditional character. I counted on him to fulfill a certain task, for example: this task, as it happens, he did not fulfill; I ascribed a certain determinate quality to him; the event seems to demonstrate to me that he did not possess it. In sum, I had formed an idea of him which has now been contradicted and, as it were, nullified. In the light of my previous remarks, however, isn't it plain that this vulnerability of my belief is linked to the residue of opinion still left in it? Here there are two boundary-cases which we must consider.

However strange it may seem to our minds, it is possible for there to be an unconditional love of creature for creature—a gift which will not be revoked. Whatever may occur, whatever disappointment experience inflicts on our hypotheses, our cherished hopes, this love will remain constant, this credit intact. Perhaps it is on data of this sort that the philosopher should first base his meditations when he tries to reflect on the absolute; for the most part these data are hardly ever taken into account. Examples like these, however, involve an anomaly which somehow seems to be suspended in a reality frequently unperceived by those very souls in which it blossoms. . . .

The other boundary-case is this: love is faith itself, an invincible assurance based on Being itself. It is here and here alone that we reach not only an unconditioned fact but a rational unconditional as well; namely that of the absolute Thou, that which is expressed in the *Fiat voluntas tua* of the Lord's Prayer.

I shall not inquire here into the obscure, subterranean relation linking pure *Faith* in its ontological fullness with the unconditional love of creature for creature mentioned above. I deeply believe, however, that this link exists; and that this love is only conceivable, only possible, for a being who is capable of such faith, but a being in whom it has not yet been aroused; such a love is perhaps like a prenatal palpitation of faith.

There is, however, a further point on which I should like to make some concluding remarks; what are we to think of the secularized expressions of faith of so many of our contemporaries? faith in justice, faith in science, faith in progress, etc.?

Here we enter the realm of the supra-personal; yet in all cases such as these we are in fact clearly concerned with an order which can only be established by persons, and which, while above them in certain respects, nevertheless depends on their good faith.

Consider more specifically what "faith in science" means. I confess to some difficulty in determining what this can be.

The word "science" seems at the very outset to be stamped with a formidable ambiguity. Does the word designate a certain body of truths? If this is the case, it is really meaningless to refer to a faith in science. It is an abuse of language to apply the word "faith" to the mind's adherence to a demonstrated truth. The fact is that those who have faith in science have faith *in the influence exercised* by those who have mastered a science. It is conceded that minds which are completely penetrated by scientific truth cannot but illuminate those other minds in which they in turn instill these truths. Hence if we do not want the sort of dictatorship of scientists as Renan, for example, conceived it, it seems clear that our hope must rest on the idea of an educational science, i.e. one which is endowed with the marvelous power of purifying those whom it illuminates.

I am very much afraid, however, that no worthwhile empirical or rational justification can be offered for this view. If a scientist can exercise a personal influence—this, moreover, is a pleonasm: what act is not personal?—this is not because of the truths that he disseminates, but because of the power of disinterestedness which animates him, or in other words, because he himself leads an exemplary life. It is an arbitrary distortion of meaning to imagine that

the truths discovered by a patient and persevering inquiry somehow preserve a trace of these virtues, that the latter remain embodied in them; *nothing of the sort occurs*. Any truth, whatever it may be, considered apart from the fervor of the person who discovers it, is something ethically neutral, ethically inert. And this is more so to the extent that such a truth has a more positive nature, i.e., to the extent that it is presented to us as more radically independent of those values it is the task of the mind to recognize and acknowledge.

Thus if we concentrate on the analysis of the meaning of this "faith in science" which our rationalists at the Sorbonne and elsewhere profess—and this is an extremely important task—we shall discover within it the most disparate elements.

As the basis of it we can discover a trace, an indistinct survival, as it were, of what another era apprehended as the attributes of Being and their mutual implications: for it is a plane on which the transcendentals are interconnected, where the True is inseparable from both the Good and the Beautiful. This plane, however, can by no means be identified with that of positive science; it is rather like an Atlantis of the mind—a submerged Atlantis.

If we want to describe the psychological mechanisms which make this "faith in science" not only possible but effective, however, we have to turn to opinion and to opinion alone. In general, opinion, as we have noted, is defined as an *appearing to be* which tends to become converted into a *claiming* through an absence of reflection. Indeed I firmly believe that such a shift occurs in the present case. "Faith in science" is only explicable in terms of the phenomenon of prestige, and of an extrapolated prestige, if I may say so. It is appropriate to introduce here some reflections or observations borrowed from the concrete history of ideas. I do not believe that we can separate this scientific prestige which is envisaged by the imagination—not conceived—as liberative, from the corresponding representation of religion as a principle of spiritual slavery—as obscurantism. I do not believe I am mistaken in saying that the more weakened anticlericalism becomes the less we

will be led to view science itself as a power of promethean emancipation.

I shall conclude my observations at this point; for it is not my purpose to continue with an examination of pure Faith. Again, as at the beginning of our discussion, I suggest that we view the foregoing as an indispensable introduction to the act of reflection, permitting us to discern at the core of our own beliefs what part is the truly incorruptible gold of Faith, and what part we must view, whatever the cost, as an unusable mass of slag, the dead weight opinion throws into the infinitely delicate scale of our spiritual acts.

NOTES

1 *Le dialogue catholique-communiste est-il possible?* (Paris: Grasset, 1937).
2 1936.
3 "Le Sens de l'Athéisme Marxiste," *Esprit* (Oct., 1935), p. 93.