

## 2. *The A Priori and the Philosophy of Nature*

The reflections I am proposing here form the guidelines of a book I am working on, which undertakes to make an inventory of the a priori. The book will again take up the themes sketched in *The Notion of the A Priori*, but proceed further along the same line, harmonizing those themes with the idea of Nature that impressed me while I was writing *Le Poétique*. Hence the title of this communication.

Why speak of the a priori? The notion of the a priori can be used for quite different purposes. Kant used it to give a foundation to the Copernican revolution, to establish the prerogative and the function of the transcendental subject. Logical positivism calls on it to specify the nature of certain expressions. My purpose is again different. I should like to have this notion express a certain accord between man and the world, an accord whose agreement, which has long served, quite legitimately, to define truth, is a secondary and derived form. For this accord must not be limited to the phenomena of knowledge. And perhaps there is good reason to denounce the imperialism of knowledge, which is so patent today in positivism, structuralism, and the philosophies of the concept or system. Husserl also, while reviving a philosophy of consciousness, gave a place of privilege to "representative acts" as "objectifying"; but Merleau-Ponty questions whether that position is maintained in the unedited manuscripts where "for example the sexual instinct is considered from the transcendental point of view."<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that if we are to speak of knowledge here, it must be in the biblical sense of the word: the accord between man and the world is a carnal one, which attests to their co-naturality, their common belonging to Nature. We know how subtly Merleau-Ponty has shown how the flesh of man is joined to the flesh of the world.

How can we express this pact? There is no doubt that it is tacitly experienced by all men, at least at times. I would even see in it the surest criterion of good health, for if it is more common to define health by a predominant normality, it should not be forgotten that normality requires for its exercise a certain trust at the heart of "perceptive faith," the feeling that the young Parca regains after having traversed the hell of narcissism,

of being at home in the world, in agreement with the situation and with the spirit of the times. Unhappiness (or sickness) weighs upon those who cannot experience this trust, either because the world withdraws from their gaze and offers them only an inhuman face, or because they make themselves responsible for their distress by closing themselves off from the beauty of the world by glorying in their importance, allowing themselves to be fascinated by the folly within which nihilism finds its realization. But how can we express that feeling? The arts—particularly song, architecture, and music—find in it the source of their inspiration. The archaic religions do likewise when they celebrate the cult of the Earth Mother. But philosophies have also recognized and approved it under different names: the love of fate, Spinozist joy, Nietzschean jubilation, *élan vital* . . .

Much more prosaically, and without immediately involving an ethic (or the counterethic found in Nietzsche), a theory of the a priori can also express the alliance of man and the world. In fact, such a theory teaches us, already under the form that Kant gave it, that man is capable of certain judgments whose content experience has not taught him and whose validity is not subject to the verdict of experience, that from the first he possesses certain kinds of knowledge that can very well be called innate. Now it turns out that these kinds of knowledge are true; or more exactly, they constitute the powers that place man in contact with the world, that open up and articulate his experience, by which man is a transcendental subject. Does that mean that experience lends itself to the a priori only because the subject, sovereignly constituting, orders experience to this a priori? On the contrary, it is possible to consider that the given is of itself informed by the form—that it responds of itself to the expectation—of the subject. This mutual preordination of man to the world and of the world to man can express itself by making correspond to the subjective a priori, which is a virtual knowledge of the world in man, an objective a priori, which is a virtually known structure in the world. This implies, of course, that the a priori be not only formal but also material: that it be constitutive of the object without being introduced there by a constituting consciousness. But this requires also that the a priori within the object must have something corresponding to it in the subject. Where the a priori is only objective, as when Canguilhem speaks of a morphogenetic a priori to designate a meaning inscribed in matter as a system of instructions for the development of the organism, it does not merit the name of a priori. In fact, it is not only in things but always stands in relation to knowledge. If it is defined as an “innate pattern of behavior,” it is not only that which structures the living organism but also that which anticipates and structures the *Umwelt* for the living organism.

If it is defined at a higher level of generality as that which specifies the living organism, the incorruptible form in which the whole is present in the parts (or as that which specifies the thing, the technical object, or my fellow man), then there corresponds to it in man a virtual knowledge of the ontological realm. In the language of Canguilhem, even though he speaks only of the concept in living organisms, it could be said that there is an a priori when for the concept in the object there is at once a corresponding concept of the concept in man, again on condition that this concept of the concept be conceived, not on the model of scientific knowledge that conceptualizes empirical data, but rather on the model of the instinct, as a foreknowledge that prepares man to encounter the object, harmonizing man with the world.

Carried out in this way, reflection on the a priori preserves dualism. It defines a pact formed between two contracting parties. It supposes, therefore, a man who, while facing the world, already exists separately by himself, man presented as correlative to the world, who claims the autonomy of the *cogito* and the liberty of the for-itself at the same time as he affirms the reality of the “external” world, so that what is to be considered is not so much his rupture with the world as his reconciliation with it. Furthermore, this reflection introduces dualism into the a priori itself, since it distinguishes there the known and the knower, an objective aspect by which the a priori constitutes the object and a subjective aspect by which it constitutes the subject. Here the reflection remains encamped on the frontiers of a philosophy of knowledge. Without doubt, dualism is so insistent only because it yields to the aspiration of man: every birth is the rupture of the umbilical cord, and the vocation of man is to affirm his autonomy and to establish his sovereignty. But at the height of his glory can he ever deny his origins and forget the Mother? From whatever height he surveys his empire, can he bring it about that he is not present to the world? Then the problem arises that has haunted many philosophies: Can reflection return to this side of dualism? Within the perspective I have chosen this means: Can one not reascend to this side of the idea of an accord? To the idea of an alliance between man and the world, can we not add the idea of consanguinity, and perhaps of filiation? In other words, can we not clarify and ground the accord by a genesis that would show how duality arises from prior unity? Such an investigation requires a twofold procedure. On the one hand, we must proceed from the two distinct moments, man and the world, to a prior moment that engenders them, which can be called Nature. On the other hand, we must proceed from the two states of the a priori, the subjective and the objective, to a prior state, a primitive state of the a priori in nature, which would also engender them. The accord of man and the world, sanctioned by the

correspondence of the two a priori, would then appear as a result, produced by Nature and metaphorically desired, if it is true that unity desires duality in order to know itself, at the risk of being misunderstood as unity.

It seems to me that this endeavor is close to that of Merleau-Ponty. His unserving aim is to think man's being-in-the-world, to the point of extracting a new ontology from it, and he refuses to construct it in terms of accord or adequation. This refusal is not expressly motivated by the requirement of monism, but is rather the result of an anxiety to stay away from idealism and realism at the same time, as well as from intellectualism and empiricism.<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty sustains the transcendental subject in its rights, but he inscribes the transcendental in the body (the living, speaking, cultivated body). Within the body is produced the chiasm, the interchange of consciousness and the world, so that the world is known in "that continual questioning" that we are. Thus if there is no adequation, it is because no one has the initiative or control over it, because it is always already realized, because man and the world are the same race and of the same flesh. This flesh, "this common tissue from which we are made,"<sup>3</sup> is Nature. And if Merleau-Ponty always returns to the beginning, to the beginnings of philosophy and the beginnings of man, to that perceptive faith in which is consummated to the point of identity the accord of the sentient and the sensed, of the seer and the visible, is it not because with all his might he puts himself into the originating unity, so resolutely that now his problem is rather one of engendering duality, of conceiving the advent of man as distinct and of vindicating the Sartrean *pour-soi*? We shall not be confronted with the opposite difficulty of resisting the fascination of dualism in order to think monism. Merleau-Ponty does not ignore this difficulty: the "description of savage Being" is an impossible ontology.

We see the difficulties that confront us. In the first place, are we able to think Nature? We think world precisely because it is our correlate, our *Umwelt* (the difference between the *Welt* and animal *Umwelt* is that the former embraces and "comprehends" the latter: man shifts far enough to put himself in the place of animals, while the converse is not true). This implies not that we constitute the world, but that we are equipped to communicate with it, to live in it and to live it. The world is Nature lived by man, naturalized by man, as its environment is naturalized by the animal; not that man is, we repeat, the naturalizing universal, but that he is "measuring" because he bears within him certain measures of Being and because through him Being arrives at consciousness. The world is then always a world for man. But then how can one think of a Nature that would be a world without man, before man, and consequently a world before the world, from which would proceed the world and man, but

which would have to be conceived first without reference to the world and to man? How can one think with no thought there to think? Strictly speaking, it is impossible, and that is why philosophy sometimes has recourse to mythical or artistic expressions.

Of course one can pursue history, but that is altogether different. The prehuman universe is still the correlate of a consciousness, that of the scholar who reconstructs it. Yet if that consciousness cannot be forgotten, if it is consciousness of the world and not of Nature, perhaps through the image of the world it can have at least a presentiment of the dynamism of Nature: the force of the inexhaustible ground, the power of engendering man and the world that is for man. Surely every genesis that science describes is recounted by the scientist, and the scientist cannot recount his own genesis, for it is always a scientist who narrates it. These geneses are empirical; they appeal to a knowledge already constituted; they are never radically the genesis of the genesis, that is, of the transcendental. But they can suggest the idea of it. Science, true in its own order, is then at the same time the index of an ontology. An impossible ontology, however, because only a speaking subject, already distinct, who plays the game of dualism, who presupposes a dualism at least already set into motion, can speak of monism. At least this subject can try to situate itself at the origin of speech, where the thing and the word, the object and the consciousness of the object, still adhere to each other.

This leads us to a second difficulty. How can one think, even in Nature, of a first state of the a priori anterior to the rupture of the knower and the known? What must be conceived then is the identity of being knowing. Parmenides, Spinoza . . . A Philosophy of Nature invites us to think a being that aspires to knowing, as a god who creates in order to be mirrored in the adoring gaze of his creature, as a painter who desires to see himself in his canvas, and perhaps be seen by it. That may be, but what is required of us here is more difficult: to identify knowing and being, exclusive of any reference to a knowing subject or demiurgic action, is to place preknowledge in prethings. We cannot resort to the services of dialectic here. True, we can think, metaphorically, that Nature engenders man as consciousness, but we can hardly think that a preconsciousness would be gestating in the very heart of still invisible being, in the night of the depths of being. Undoubtedly, if we implicitly presuppose dualism, we can place knowledge in the thing, in this sense at least that the concept is in the object, since we have just said that a logos is inscribed in the living organism. This means that the object lends itself to knowledge, and that knowledge seizes the object, but in saying this we do not go much further than the idea of adequation; and we do not assert that knowledge as such, the act of knowing, is a thing or is in the thing: we retain as understood the

difference between knowing and the known. Can we then soften this difference to the point of thinking of an original identity of being and knowing, or, modifying the formula of Aristotle, a state common to the sensing and the sensed? For that it is necessary to conceive another form of knowing and the known that preserves between them a fundamental proximity and whose description avoids the distinction of object and subject. Such is indeed the aim of Merleau-Ponty, who constantly returns to the analysis of perception. If he is not trying to capture the first state of the a priori, he is at least exploring the place where it can be found.

What is that place, then? What is there to say of Nature, of that *Grund* of which the very idea forbids all discourse, of that Night that not even the natural light of a gaze lights up, and that no language can name in order to contrast it with Day? To have a presentiment of it, it may be necessary to put oneself in the moment when speech is silent or the gaze extinct, at the hour of death. We have to die to the world for the reign of raw being to come again, for Nature to be restored to itself; and that is why every authentic word is haunted by death and every work of art contains a core illegibility. There a muted murmuring is heard, the tireless murmur of "there is," the inarticulate voice of the desert. The work of art speaks only to be given over to that silence. The exegesis of Blanchot is recognizable here. But there are all kinds of silence. Why mention only the silence of death? Why place oneself after death rather than before birth? For my part, calling on Nature, I prefer to speak of life, and science can serve as a guide here. According to Claude Bernard, science unites two formulas: life is death, and life is creation. Since we can speak only in images, I would oppose the desolate images of inertness and repetition with images of the stirring of life, of rustling and variegated reality, enlivened by the power of the possible. The mineral order itself may be movement, merely slowed down to the point of seeming to be fixed: think of the Sainte-Victoire of Cézanne. What is inexhaustible is this movement without return, this tireless force, the swelling up of a silence that will culminate in a voice, the deepening of the night when dawn is gathering.

What does the a priori signify here? Does it retain any meaning in the absence of a transcendental subject? Perhaps, if Nature itself is transcendental; if the transcendental designates not a condition for the possibility of experience but the power of the possible, which prepares within the real the advent of experience, when the inertia of the in-itself in the real is animated by a movement that prefigures the for-itself.<sup>4</sup> The a priori here is that beginning organization that must be supposed in embryo within the ground: "the flesh is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself," writes Merleau-Ponty.<sup>5</sup> Or again it is that point of light that heralds the human gaze: "at the juncture of the body

and the opaque world there is a ray of generality and of light."<sup>6</sup> However, if we wish a tighter grasp of this notion of an a priori that still mingles being and knowing, we must isolate and present one or the other of the terms in order to speak of it, without having to try to abolish its difference immediately. We can start with thought, but with thought that is not yet thinking, since it is not the thought of anyone, but rather the object of thought, an idea that is not yet *idea-ideae*. The a priori will then be conceived as a logos immanent in Nature, a formal framework, a lattice of logical possibilities, a *mathesis universalis* at work within the ground, miming and calling for the thought that will explicate it. Here we come back to some ideas of Ladrière: not only that mathematical thought is less invention than discovery, but also that this objective mathematics is naturalizing, for from it sensible being proceeds by a Plotinian procession, as if blind thought, thought that is already a thing, were present within reality to produce and regulate it. At the same time, there is a guarantee here for the idea of a formal a priori that already constitutes the object inasmuch as it allows the experience of it. One can also start with that unthought, unnameable, in-itself, which is another name for nature. The a priori will then be identified as a structure of the thing that is already thought, or from which proceeds the thought that will explain it in turn. Thus one would guarantee the idea of a material a priori, and rejoin the vocabulary of an epistemology that shows that things, or at least living things, are structured because certain information moves about inside them, and that "life has always been doing without writing, long before writing, and without reference to writing what humanity has tried to do by drawing, engraving, writing, and printing: namely, transmitting messages."<sup>7</sup> But we have said often enough that we must not confuse transmission and comprehension, execution and intelligence. We cannot bypass the distinction between the concept, and the concept of the concept.

This means that we cannot grasp a primitive state of the a priori any more than we can describe Nature. Every path that leads toward a radical indistinctness of subjective and objective soon fades out. The identity of being and knowing can only be thought of as unknowable. But this very recognition of failure vindicates the notion of the a priori. The a priori as subjective sticks to our skin, and we cannot think without it. It compels us to think of the world with a thought that can only be ours, but that is no less truly ours if an a priori in the object corresponds to the a priori in us, if Nature, so to speak, has willed that man and the world be solidary. This duality of the a priori, which installs us in the truth, prevents us from thinking of the truth of the a priori, the primordial truth of its primordial state. That is why the inventory of the a priori compels us to renounce an ontology of Nature and to take our hold at a point where dualism is

already established to locate the a priori in the discourse or behavior of a subject. As soon as the subject arises, the original unity is lost. All that reflection can do to preserve the idea of an inconceivable origin, whose very memory is forbidden us, is explore the signs of the strict proximity, of the native familiarity, between man and the world. The a priori then appears as the means for man to be present to the world, to enter into communication with it and to reveal it to itself. It is—and man is by means of it—that natural light that unites the gaze to the thing seen, so closely that the theories of perspective from the Greeks to the Renaissance never stopped asking whether like a visual ray it came from the eye or from the thing seen. Forever incomplete is the analysis of that being present to the world about which every man, as soon as he becomes conscious of himself, never ceases to question, sometimes to the point of despair. “No more than facts are the necessities of essence the answer which philosophy calls for. The answer is higher than facts, lower than essences, in the savage Being where they were undivided, and where, behind or beneath the cleavages of our acquired culture, they continue to exist.”<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty adds, however, that reflection cannot return to the immediate, where all consciousness would annul itself in “an effective fusion with the existent.” “The moment my perception is to become pure perception, thing, Being, it is extinguished; the moment it lights up, already I am no longer the thing.”<sup>9</sup> The immediate can be only on the horizon, and it is never simply immediate: “the originating breaks up, and philosophy must accompany this breakup.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, Nature, to be conceived at all, must be thought of as dynamism. It carries within it, at the heart of its inconceivable unity, the principle of openness, the germ of the mediation by which it will yield to daylight and to language. It is already articulating itself, preparing to be spoken. It allows a distance to be hollowed out within itself that will be that of a gaze. The a priori will be that mediation with which the immediate is pregnant. It will separate the subject and the object, but in order to bring them into accord with each other, since it will bring them into accord on condition of separating them. We cannot think without taking up our distance from the world, and the division of the a priori expresses that distance; but that distancing is still a means of being present to the world, and it is measured only on the ground of an inconceivable coincidence. Reflection on the a priori cannot avoid being lured by the inaccessible horizon of the origin and led to the threshold of that philosophy of Nature which thought spans only on the uncertain and lofty wings of poetry.

This turning of the a priori toward a theory of Nature has some consequences for a philosophy of man about which I should like to make some observations. But first, what man do we speak of, man in

general, or the individual? Reflection on the a priori can enlighten us here. For the very idea of man is an a priori (which an inventory must be able to place). On the one hand, we are always capable of recognizing man, thanks to a virtual knowledge, and it matters little that in fact, as for so many other a priori, we are unable to make that knowledge explicit. The a priori within us can have both the sureness and the opaqueness of instinct. On the other hand, in man as an object this a priori is constitutive: in all men are found the essential traits of which we have the virtual knowledge. This means that we can handle very well the concept of man—and who dispenses with it?—even if that concept has not been hallowed by a rational interpretation. And perhaps the consciousness that we have of our ego derives from the primary comprehension of the alterego. This other is given to us as an ego, and when we say we, this “we” does not efface the characteristics of the “I.” It belongs to the concept of man to teach us, at least implicitly, that each man is an ego, a singular being in a singular relationship with the world. In other words, man exists as an individual, irreplaceable and inalienable, consequently as a person. In this sense the concept of man is not a general idea: we can speak of man, even in the third person, only as a being who expresses himself in the first person. Every man is an *apax*, a one-time being, and every man is the correlate of the world. No man is ever a human being. To think so would be to do man a deep wrong, something violence can do but not discourse. Only violence can write on a railway car: forty men, eight horses.

That the thought of Nature is a limit-thought is due to the fact that the law of man is irreducible, his ipseity unimpeachable. There is no thought whatsoever, even that of the origin, that does not find its beginning in him. There is thought of man, of anything, or of Nature, only if there is a man to form it. Every genesis is a genesis that man narrates, he is already there to narrate. In this sense he is unengenderable. The a priori within him attests to this, and it can be said that he is all a priori. In fact the philosophies today that noisily proclaim the death of man are all written in the first person. It is always a man who says, “It is thought,” or “that says,” and that which can die is just a content of thought, a certain idea of man, not at all the man who forms that idea. Yet this man is mortal and he had to be born at some time in order to go on to death. Perhaps the species will disappear some day, as each individual disappears. This true death, just as unforeseeable on the horizon of the future as the memory of birth is shrouded on the horizon of the past, what is its significance for the species and for the individual? It is that man can exercise the powers of the cogito by which he is raised up to be the correlate of the world only on condition of coming into the world and of being in the world. By doing so he comes under the jurisdiction of science, with its patient investigation of

the positivities, as Foucault calls them, that sustain and dominate him at the same time. And so he is an object of an empirical genesis. But as soon as reflection understands that this genesis is the work of an irreducible subjectivity and cannot be duplicated in a transcendental genesis (just as the formal, as Wittgenstein showed, cannot formalize itself), it is to a philosophy of Nature that it dreams of confiding that impossible task of engendering the unengenderable.

The philosophy of Nature can undertake this task only if it is conscious of its limits and limits to a phenomenology of lived experience, which in turn is nourished by the positive sciences. What does it say of man? It cannot describe his birth or prophesy his death. It begins with him as well as with the world whose correlate he is. But at least it seeks to clarify his most primitive relation with that world, and to describe the most natural face of that world. Let us say at once that this return of thought to nature—a nature always already naturalized—does not encourage the reactionary nostalgia for a return to the earth or to primitive life. Everyone knows, for that matter, that the *Natur-Völker* are cultured peoples and that simplicity and degeneracy should not be confused. The return to nature, in nature camps or in solitary ways, is still a cultural phenomenon initiated by a leisure civilization. This nature, even if not manipulated, is perceived by man, and that is enough to denaturalize it; that is, to turn it into a world. But conversely, in whatever thought or practice does to humanize the world, there still breathes the great unknown. If something of the power of the ground is revealed to us, *per speculum et in enigmate*, it is across the technological environment as much as the natural, through the city as well as the country, through culture as much as nature. In man even language and culture are as natural as nature; and the a priori that assign him a nature vary in their coverage according to history. If we prefer certain images because we believe that art and artifice are arbitrary and artificial, let us not be duped by our choice. There is no more innocence in the infant than in the old man, or in the artist than in the artisan, and if we try to go back to the source, we do not come any closer by seeking it in the heart of the forest than by maneuvering a derrick on industrial terrain. *Logos* and *techné* still bear witness to the *physis* that, carrying man along, moves and inspires them.

It is necessary then to understand being in culture and being in language according to the model of, and as an expression of, being present to the world. We should really take hold of this being present to the world at its coming, but we can only describe it after the fact, for there is no way for us to come up on the emergence of man by surprise—outside of animality, perhaps, but that adventure takes place in the world of science. More radically, from what might does man emerge? From what silence?

And why images of the void rather than of plenitude, of inertia rather than of the void? Why call on Chaos rather than Harmony? We can choose our myths. We have nothing to guide us except this warning: careful, this option expresses us and involves us. To be truthful, there is no option. For everyone the choice has already been made. Since we cannot examine the beginnings of man, we can at least describe a primal promiscuity. The prereflective cogito is the flesh, my body at grips with the world, not at all sovereign but rather participating; not at all a thing among things, if the thing is already a concept and if its idea supposes an already constituted knowledge. That is why Merleau-Ponty speaks of a flesh of the world, of which my body is a part. For if there is not yet an autonomous subject, neither is there an object. There is rather a "field," and it can be said indifferently that the world is that field as in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, or that the subject is that field, as in *The Visible and the Invisible*.<sup>11</sup> This field, where sensible and sentient are still indistinct, is the milieu of a reciprocal genesis that modern painters have helped us to grasp. The viewer is not in an abstract place where his eye, all by itself, ceases to be an eye and becomes a zero point around which the spectacle is arranged; the painting invites the spectator to put himself into it. To accomplish this the painter identifies himself with his body, which is everywhere, which is in turn identified with the landscape, so that the mountain Sainte-Victoire itself comes into the world under the brush of Cézanne. And the mountain looks back at him who turns his gaze upon it. The viewer is visible, and the visible is the viewer. This exchange takes place everywhere. The tool that man invents serves him at first not so much to master the world as to communicate with it. It is at once of the body and of the world. It is still the hand, and the motion of the hand is needed to make use of it. It gives rise to a new familiarity with the real. Since the domestication of animals requires that affectionate and tender knowledge of which Lévi-Strauss speaks so well, this complicity based on symbiosis makes man the most splendid conquest of the horse. It is the same with the elaboration of a cosmology. It can, of course, establish a taxonomy that will spawn logical games and a whole system, but first it is the expression of a certain intimacy with the images of the world. Again consider language. It is not surprising that Merleau-Ponty gives the same destiny to speech and to the flesh: both are the common denominator of man and the world. If language can be understood as a system, it is because it is nature, like an organic system or even a system of probabilities, but language must also be understood in terms of speech, which reactivates it at every moment, and speech itself is not the product of a sovereign thought already constituted; it is words that speak, that bear within themselves a referential meaning; and perhaps they only assume that function because things

come to clothe themselves in them, because they name themselves to the one who names them, because they call out to the one who calls to them. Man speaks because language speaks, and language speaks because things speak. Just as the flesh does, speaking joins man to the world. Undoubtedly it also separates him from the world, since the sign is at the same time empty and full, formal and material, but the very distance that it places between things and us, and also between things and themselves, is already in Nature as the principle of a world and as articulated by the a priori: "this operative language . . . called forth by the voices of silence continues an effort of articulation which is the Being of every being."<sup>12</sup>

What then is the function of man thus considered at his beginning? In nature he is the mirror in which Nature is reflected and takes the form of world. Possibly he himself learns to know himself in a mirror, which later may be replaced by a psychoanalyst. But first he is the means by which something of the invisible is converted into the visible, the non-sense into sense; he actualizes a potential of seeing that is prepared within the invisible, just as his freedom actualizes a spontaneity that is prepared within the movement of inertia. He can do it only by being himself naturalized as the mirror; philosophers will say: finite; and he has always known it. The whole burden of the world weighs upon his shoulders, and he may seek refuge in madness or in death. For from the ground of his finiteness he knows that he is responsible for the world, even though no one gave him that responsibility. Paradoxically he is both solitary and responsible. For that reason the will best defines man. We used to say: Nature wills man; we should rather say, Nature desires itself in man. It does not will that man should will; he wills by nature. So it is with everything. But it is in his being as man that he persists, in his being as echo or mirror, by which he has the dignity of being the correlate of the world.

This attempt implies an ethic. A philosophy of man based on a theory of the a priori brings an ethic with it. It is this requirement that leads the structuralist philosophers to reject the philosophy of man. Let us pacify them a little. To say that man is in some way the servant of Nature is not to place him under a transcendent law. To be present to the world is his condition, not a duty or a vocation assigned to him by some transcendent moment. He comes from Nature, he is Nature, and the nature in him is nothing external to him. In other words, he is not created, he is produced; he is a part of nature, that part where nature redoubles itself in some way, remembers and reflects itself. The a priori that he carries within him assigns nature to him through which he participates in the dynamism of Nature. But among the a priori there are values constitutive of certain

objects, which call to him (as I hope to show in the inventory of the a priori). He can elude that call, he can turn values around, but only in the name of other values. This presence of values binds him to the ethical dimension. Finally among those objects of value there is man: the most formal law always has a content, which is the man open to the law, and the most material law, that which is expressed in mores, has the same content: the other as comrade, my fellow and my neighbor; social life is a moral life.

But the man who bears within himself a virtual knowledge of man, who wills man in himself and in the other, does not cease for all that to invent man, and ethics as well. Ethics is always open. The fact that man acquiesces to the values that he discovers and through them acquiesces to Nature, does not drive him up against the hard choice between consent or refusal. For to be docile to Nature is to be rebellious at the same time, since it is to affirm oneself as distinct. Reciprocally, to will power, or rather to will in order to be powerful, is not to deny Nature as the original power. To be actively the mirror of the world, what man must do is take up his distance and play; the will itself is play rather than obedience. In this respect the will is still in the image of Nature, which is not only ambiguous because it is always interpreted, but which is unpredictable in the development of its powers. And perhaps we come back here to an intuition that Granier finds to be central in Nietzsche: "the intuition of an essential ambiguity of Being which would exalt the conquering ambitions of the will to power even while demanding absolute submission to the 'text.'"<sup>13</sup> In a philosophy of Nature ethics is both necessary and impossible; necessary because human normativeness is invoked by values, and more profoundly because these a priori have their source in Nature; impossible because man can follow Nature only in turning his back upon it, as he can reveal it only by giving it form and thus dissimulating it.

But this paradox of being present to the world must not fill us with guilt. We have lost our innocence innocently, and innocently we have become responsible for the world. And if we are in Nature as distinct from it, we are in accord with the world and capable of happiness as well as unhappiness. The a priori tells us that. We cannot seize it at its source, since it prevents us from thinking nature at the same time that it proposes that we do so. Yet perhaps it is not fruitless to think that there is a source, and this thought can give direction to philosophy just as it can help us to be men.

## Notes

1. *Le visible et l'invisible*, p. 291, note (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968; p. 238, note).
2. "We do not have a consciousness constitutive of the things, as idealism believes, nor a preordination of the things to the consciousness, as realism believes . . . we have with our body, our senses, our look, our power to understand speech and to speak, measures of being for being dimensions to which we can refer it, but not a relation of adequation or of immanence." (Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 140) (*Ibid.*, p. 103).
3. Translator's note: The reference is to *The Visible and the Invisible*, but is missing from the text.
4. The theme is sketched out by Sartre in "Metaphysical Implications" at the end of *Being and Nothingness*. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).
5. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p. 192 (trans., p. 146).
6. *Ibid.*, (trans., p. 146).
7. G. Canguilhem, *Le concept et le vie*, "Revue philosophique de Louvain", 64, May 1966.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 162 (trans., p. 121).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 163. (trans., p. 122).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 165. (trans., p. 124).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 212. (trans., p. 160).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 168. (trans., pp. 126-127).
13. J. Graniér, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p. 532.

### 3. The A Priori of Imagination

In undertaking an inventory of the a priori, we ask the reader to agree that they are locatable and can be categorized according to the discernible functions of consciousness, such as the imagination. But we must at least say how we conceive the a priori.<sup>1</sup> We can summarily define the a priori as testifying to a fundamental affinity, and permitting the communication between subject and object. It is both in the object what makes it a given object, well before the operations of knowledge, and in the subject a virtual knowledge immediately actualized in the presence of the given. In other words, for man, being in the world is being in harmony with the world; and if there is a world only for man, it is somehow with the agreement of Nature, which allows itself to become world for man: a world of which man is the correlate because he is a product of Nature.

Thus the a priori is not merely, as is the case in critical philosophy, a subjective condition of the objectivity of the object. It is also a constituent quality of the object, whose objectivity is acknowledged rather than elaborated by a subject. Reflection on the a priori of imagination, then, calls for a reevaluation of the theory of imagination. It becomes necessary to assume that the imagination, too often considered the subjective part of man, is actually capable of objectivity if it involves a priori. Imagination normally appears in conjunction with perception, thereby revealing some aspect of the world and, through the world, an aspect of Nature. Such is the consequence of attributing a priori to imagination: if the a priori is a principle of truth because it assures communication between man and the world, imagination must be true in its own way. The a priori of imagination undoubtedly mingle those of sensibility, insofar as their faculties cooperate, and with those of affectivity, because feeling and imagining are interdependent. But we think that we can differentiate these various a priori. albeit non rigorously. The study of imagination can throw some light on that.

What then is this power of imagining? To produce or to register images? Is the image fashioned, or is it, at first, also perceived? Indeed, we call image the inconsistent and impalpable product of dream or reverie as well