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Discourse of power – power of discourse: Pascalian notes

The intention of this volume lies in the directions laid down by its editor: that a number of French writers should explain to an English-speaking audience what they are doing (thinking, saying, writing) in the sphere of discourse which is called philosophy. These directions carry certain assumptions, the most significant of which amounts to the presupposition that, within or beyond differences of language, the field is divided by a national or cultural difference, a difference traced by a divergent history or histories of philosophy. Such a difference would suggest, as does the project itself, that the field of discourse called 'philosophy' is not singular but rather twofold, or again, that what they call 'philosophy' on the other side of the Channel (or elsewhere) is not the same as what we call 'philosophy' on this side. Here Pascal's formula finds a philosophical variation: truth on one side of (the Pyrenees) a frontier, error beyond; truth which is error, error which is truth according to the geographical, national, historical and cultural position, on one side of the frontier or on the other, occupied by the speaker of the formula: two philosophies or two ways of philosophizing, two truths or two ways of speaking the truth.

At the same time, the project and its guidelines carry the assumption that this frontier can be crossed. Translation, in more than one sense of the word, is seen as both possible and desirable, and indeed at present realizable – a translation at once of philosophy from one national and cultural location into the other, of (philosophical) discourse from one sphere into the other, and of

language from one philosophical currency into the other. And it is precisely inasmuch as this translation is understood to be desired and desirable that it is seen as both possible and realizable. Equally, such an assumption involves a wager which, while it may pay off, carries stakes of the greatest concern to philosophy itself: for example, the claim that the difference between languages is not irrelevant to philosophy, or that this 'translation' may provide an opportunity to explore in philosophical terms the relationship between languages and language, or, again, that this relationship has a bearing on truth and on the manifestation of truth.

The directions request each contributor to 'write about what you are doing in the sphere of discourse which is called philosophy'; but they comprise a further directive in the form of a warning:

Write about your work in philosophy for an audience of English readers; that is, bear in mind as you go along that your contribution is to be translated and that it is intended – and this is the whole point of the project – to cross the frontier. It will not be doing so by way of a supplementary bonus, over and above its having been written for the hithermost side; on the contrary, your contribution is to be made for this purpose and is commissioned under that condition. To cross the border of national, historical, cultural and linguistic difference, the border of the philosophical difference between philosophies and of different discourses of truth – this is to be its whole *raison d'être*.

The directions add:

Write about what you are writing in philosophy for (with a view to, for the sake of) this translation. Rewrite from the standpoint of difference (national, historical, cultural, linguistic) in philosophy and in truth. Rewrite, and as you do so supervise your writing as if from that other site – from the place, the sphere, the space (of thought, of language and of writing idiom) – which is not your own. Rewrite what you write as from the position of your addressee. Rewrite the same (that which you write in philosophy) from the site of the other.

By the same token the addressee is to supervise my rewriting before he has even read what I write. Let me put it another way: my instructions are to write about what I am doing (what I am writing in philosophy), but having placed myself in the position of a reader who is all the more limiting in that I do not know him

or what he expects from a text whose be-all and end-all is that it be addressed to him; all the more threatening in that his image is blurred and indeterminate to me, and all the more perturbing in that I am ignorant of his criteria of judgement. In other words, the regulation of my philosophical discourse – that is, of the rewriting of that discourse – is to be under the control and supervision of an addressee whose expectations and standards are entirely unknown to me.

Insofar, then, as I understand the initial request which impelled this work, one immediate form of response would be to set down a kind of intellectual 'autobiography', a record of my own itinerary – but viewed with a degree of generality – in the field that we seem here to have agreed (although by virtue of none but an implicit convention) to call philosophy. But where exactly is this 'here'? Is it to be located in the text which I am writing now, in its relationship to and differences from the other texts contained in this volume? (It should then be noted that my text is not yet written, and that I have not yet seen the others.) Or in this text as against other works of mine, whether already written or that I should wish eventually to write? Or is 'here' simply a reference to the geographical location in which I write, namely Paris, a response which would be far from innocent given the positive and negative determinations inherent in it? For it is well known, after all, that Paris is not the provinces, and that there is a certain Parisian 'fashion' of philosophizing, that there are certain styles of writing in philosophy which, according to one's inclination, conviction or interest, may be characterized as *avant-garde*, fashionable, etc. . . . Or is 'here' France? Appropriate reading in this case would include Vincent Descombes's *Modern French Philosophy*. Or is it the continent of Europe perhaps, as in the recurring phrase 'philosophy in the continental sense'? This expression may have a meaning, although I doubt it. At all events, its effect on the discourse of the contexts in which it is used is first and foremost once again to mark out the frontier which I mentioned earlier and which divides the field of discourses which on either side are labelled philosophical, and which the text I am now in the process of writing is intended to cross by means of translation.

In the light of all this, what is required may consist in the first place of an answer to the following question: how have people come to be philosophers, in France, in Paris, here, between 1945

and 1980? If such an approach to the original question/direction presents itself as the simplest and most direct, it nonetheless raises a number of questions that may – tentatively at any rate – be ranked as philosophical. For instance: What is to be understood by the term 'philosopher' as used on the continent, in France, in Paris, in certain Parisian circles, between 1945 and 1980? What entitles me to such a name? (Indeed, is it a name, a title, a designation?) Would English-speaking philosophers, or more broadly an English-speaking public, concur without further preparation or ado in calling this philosophy? Perhaps the whole purpose of this volume is to seduce the English-speaking public into accepting such a designation, or to enable it to sort out the contributions which it will read in the light of its own presuppositions, admitting some into the category of philosophy while excluding others as ineligible. Some, no doubt, will be held up as borderline cases pending a more detailed investigation on the frontier of which I have spoken; such tolerance, liberalism or reservations as may become apparent in the process will be a function, so it seems to me, of an English assessment of contributions on a sliding scale of exoticism.

It is well known that to cross a frontier raises some delicate problems, even when the traveller's passport is in order and he possesses the relevant tourist visa or work permit. I even wonder whether the real issue behind the directions for this project might not be that of granting either a tourist visa or a work permit for the translation (traversal) of the frontier. In other words, will *that* which, *here*, bestows the right to the name or title of philosopher qualify one only for a pleasure trip over *there* or will it entitle one to a (philosophical) work permit? There have been precedents in both directions – Hobbes, Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau . . . Does 'that' – meaning an education, examinations sat and degrees awarded, all characterized as being in 'philosophy', but also a teaching activity, the writing of articles, the publishing of books – does that bestow a right to the name, title or quality of philosopher? And will this term, as accorded to all that over *here*, merit a tourist visa or a work permit over *there*? This question forces itself upon me with peculiar urgency in view of the fact that I myself wonder – only for myself, needless to say – whether what I am doing (thinking, saying, writing) *still* belongs to the realm of philosophy (in the continental, the French, even the Parisian

sense), if only because I have belonged professionally for the past several years to an institution from which the word 'philosophy' has been outlawed, where it has a bad name – perhaps because it had a bad name outside – and where the terms 'human science' or, better still, 'social science' have been substituted for it. But does this really amount to a substitution? And if a substitution has indeed taken place, what does that mean? Is it not rather that the field of discourse called philosophy has shifted, and reconstituted itself in a different way? Such a question is not merely a semantic or an epistemological one; it has institutional, professional, social, political and ethical significance. Or to invert the issue and to reformulate it in terms of that intellectual autobiography which may well be what has been asked of me and which has led me to question myself (or rather, to question the very project of such an autobiography, its intentions and its aims): might not what I am doing today be philosophy under the label of science (human/social)? A positive answer to this question might constitute a modern or post-modern variation on the theme of the philosopher in the mask, such as Descartes, or on that of the philosopher of the enlightenment, such as Voltaire or Diderot.

In a bid to stem this proliferation of queries diverting me from my beginning – as I write this here – let me suppose (speaking for no one but myself and in my own name, as one says) that what I have been *doing* for the last fifteen or twenty years is in a sense to question the institution of philosophy. More specifically, I realize, as I write this here, that philosophy is inseparable from an institution (or indeed several institutions). It is itself an institution, and a philosopher is such only inasmuch as he thinks, speaks and writes within and from these institutions that philosophy is and from which it cannot be separated; but also inasmuch as he does all these things so that he may question them. In the very act of so doing, the philosopher signifies that philosophy is after all separable from them, if only to a limited extent; that there is a degree to which it may step back from the institution that it is and from those within or out of which its discourse comes into being. This idea may be given any number of formulations; as a result there may be great variation in the issues at stake. Is philosophy perhaps this to-ing and fro-ing between the institutions in which it is practised and the institution (the 'discipline') that it is? Is it the questioning itself, in institutionalized form, of these institutions

or of institution in general? Might it be the meditation of institution in general upon itself? Or alternatively the movement of thought, discourse and writing towards the exterior of institution in general and of the philosophical institution in particular, the exterior of those institutions from which philosophy is inseparable, but from which it must of necessity succeed in some way in separating itself in order to be philosophy – insofar, that is, as any institution whatsoever, and particularly the institution of philosophy, can ever be said to have an exterior?

Perhaps philosophy is no more than a certain way of trying to cross the frontier of institution in general without either a tourist visa or a work permit – or a kind of attempted desertion from the institution of philosophy.

My next step, then, should be to examine what I mean by institution, examine the institution of philosophy (philosophy as a discipline among other disciplines of knowledge) as it exists today and in its relationship to, for instance, French university institutions, and more generally to other social and political institutions. Only then will I be in a position to embark upon the sort of intellectual autobiography that is (so I suppose) required of me. This is, as one knows, a highly topical question, at any rate in France. Indeed, the various queries outlined earlier could all be regarded as so many political strategies – route, interrogation, reflection, sally – for countering the threat that hangs over the institution of philosophy in France, as a counter-threat to that represented by philosophy to political and social institutions in general. Or to take a no less topical example: has a lecture on Aristotle, given in Prague, in the flat of a professor of philosophy expelled from the University for political and ideological reasons been so analysed, in France, as to convey a thorough understanding of the threat it posed to the political establishment? Such an analysis strikes me as being no less philosophical an enterprise, *here*, than the lecture on Aristotle itself may have been in its own context, over there beyond another frontier. However, to remain within the bounds of the exercise that I suppose to be required of me, one might well ask whether it can still be called doing philosophy to inquire into the history of French philosophy since 1945 or into the sociology of those 'intellectuals' known as 'philosophers' during that period and, in the area of overlap of that history and sociology, to try to bring out and reflect on the

position of a philosopher in all its successive displacements – the position, that is, of an individual, in this particular case myself, who feels himself to be a philosopher. This enterprise may well be of a philosophical nature; once carried out, however, it will certainly not represent what I have been doing for the last fifteen or twenty years, nor what I am doing at present. It might quite possibly be of interest to an English audience as an individual intellectual history, as both a history and a sociology of contemporary thought in France, or even as a social history of philosophy; but the question will remain of the philosophical credentials of this history. Perhaps it might achieve philosophical status at the precise point at which it enabled me to raise the issue of the historical and sociological determinants, not to say determinisms, of work (whether of thoughts, discourse or writings) which rightly or wrongly I hold to be philosophical; that is to say, at the point where I would pose the question of the conditions of philosophical discourse in general. I come back to my point of departure.

Question: 'So what are you doing now?' Underlying implication: 'Once you have explained it to us, allow us to judge whether or not your work is of a philosophical nature.' But precondition: 'Rewrite what you normally write from your own point of view, only this time from the position of the addressee of this volume' (even though I am ignorant of the expectations and criteria of judgement of this addressee, given that he comes from beyond the frontier of which I have already spoken).

To return to my starting-point, then, let me recount a short anecdote. During an official luncheon held in the sixties at All Souls, Oxford, in honour of the visit of a renowned French philosopher, the highly renowned English philosopher at my side inquired of me what I *did* – the very same question posed twenty years later by the project for this collection, to which I replied 'I am a philosopher'. This answer (which I know now, as I should always have known, to be both naive and presumptuous) led him to ask my specialization in the field of philosophy. 'French philosophy of the seventeenth century,' said I, only to find myself reproved with the very proper correction: 'I see: you are a historian of ideas.' To have corrected him in my turn, in order to rejoin the realm of philosophy from which I had been so summarily expelled, would have called for an analysis of French institutions

of philosophy from the two angles indicated above: the institution of the teaching of philosophy, in its various sites, norms and standards, and the institution of the discipline known in France under the name of philosophy, in all its codes, rules and incumbent modes of discourse. This analysis might have shown how the discourses of philosophy and history (and indeed sociology) had come to stake out then and here – and no doubt even now – a space or field of problems named then and here ‘philosophy’.

Of course, such a history or sociology becomes somewhat suspect to the extent that they are conceived and executed by someone partially or totally formed by them, or who has participated, however modestly, in their development. My correction would also have shown the need for an inquiry into the historical sub-discipline known as ‘the history of ideas’ in order to assess the extent of the shifts and the depth of the transformations which have affected at once its scope, its limits and its methods.

Like many other contributors to this volume, no doubt, I have frequently resorted in my text to the word ‘discours’. I wonder whether it is really translatable. It will need to be translated nonetheless, since discourses constitute the field of my research. Let us take them to be linguistic sets of a higher order than the sentence (while often reducible to a sentence) and *carried out* or *actualized* in or by means of texts. My own preoccupation with discourses revolves around the problems exposed above concerning the discourse which I am in the course of writing for this volume: how do discourses develop into institutions? What is the nature of the remarkable relationship between power and discourse, whose locus is the institution as discourse or the discourse as institution?

Discourse of power – power of discourse: the chiasmus affecting the two terms, power and discourse, points to a problematic in order to elicit a demonstration. However, simply to posit a definition of power and a definition of discourse, on which to base a subsequent examination of the double and inverted relationship linking them in this chiasmus would be the surest way to overlook, forget or misread this problematic. I would suggest a contrary procedure: to find out – or to invent – what happens to power and to discourse within the chiasmus that joins them. What happens to discourse when it is the discourse of power, or

when it is itself power? What happens to power when it is spoken by discourse, or when it defines discourse itself? Is there, in the universe of forms of discourse, a discourse specific to power, when discourse in general possesses in and through itself a power ‘peculiar’ to itself? And what is the relationship between *this* power, ‘peculiar’ to discourse in general and power in general, with its taking over of an existent discourse and its enunciation within a discourse ‘peculiar’ to itself?

Two propositions:

- I Discourse is the ideological mode of existence of force, an imaginary known as power.
- II Power is the imaginary of force at the moment that it is enunciated as the discourse of justice.

In order for discourse, power and the chiasmus linking them in my original formulation to come into play, I have introduced into these two propositions the terms ‘force’ and ‘justice’, terms that produce a shift in those of power and discourse. The momentum of this displacement, its driving force, is imagination.

How does force turn into power? How can it survive as power except by *taking over* a discourse of justice? How does this discourse of justice then turn into power, *taking the place* of the effects of force? How does discourse in general produce effects of force which are *taken* to be just, to be justice itself?

Taking over the discourse of . . . taking the place of . . . to be taken for . . . these are the three stages by which the imagination has transformed discourse into power, that is to say, discourse strong of itself.

It was from this angle that I came to Pascal, and in particular to this *pensée* (on which the rest of my text is no more than a commentary):

Justice, force. It is just that what is just should be followed; it is necessary that what is the strongest should be followed. Justice without force is impotent; force without justice is tyrannical. Justice without force is contradicted, because there are always wicked men; force without justice is denounced. Justice and force must therefore be brought together, and to that end let us make it the case that that which is just be strong, and that which is strong be just.

Justice is open to dispute; force is easily recognizable and beyond dispute. Thus was force bestowed upon justice; because force has contra-

dicted justice, and has said that it was unjust, and that it was force itself which was just. Thus, being unable to make what is just to be strong, we have made what is strong to be just. (103)

The text which follows is to be taken as a 'philosophical' parable – or rather, since it is not a narrative but a discourse, as an allegory: at first sight a mere contemporary gloss of another man's thought of more than three centuries ago. Yet it could well be that for those with ears to hear, the thought of 1658 as it appears through this commentary speaks essentially of the present day. There is, to my mind, no way of speaking of and with both justice and force *today*, or of fortifying justice *now*, other than by the detour or distantiation here called allegory (elsewhere known as the history of philosophy, history of ideas, critique . . .). Otherwise, to speak in such a way will, *volens nolens*, always turn out to be the speaking of the discourse of power, and he who speaks it, the spokesman of a tyrant.

'It is just that what is just should be followed'; this is a categorical imperative, since justice prescribes its decrees by no other authority than itself. A just prescription is not deduced from the nature of Being, or of the Good, or from some theoretical or speculative proposition. A just prescription is just, without reference to considerations of utility or what is agreeable. There are no degrees of justice, no more or less just: it is a matter of all or nothing. 'Justice and truth are two points so fine that our instruments are too blunt to touch them exactly. If ever they succeed, they flatten the point and press all around, covering more of what is false than of what is true' (82). Whatever does not coincide with the fine point of justice is unjust. Indiscernible though it may be, it admits of no gradual shading from the just to the unjust.

'It is necessary that what is the strongest should be followed.' Force is a matter of necessity. It is impossible to do otherwise than to follow the strong, by virtue of a necessity at once material, mechanical and physical. Force does not carry any imperative – it generates no obligation. Force is absolute constraint and violence (or else we are dreaming, imagining, fantasizing). There are, however, degrees of force: only the strongest is necessarily followed, and even then he must first manifest his strength. How shall he do this other than by confronting the other forces and annihilating them? Thus the strongest demonstrates, without

words, that he is, necessarily, the strongest. He achieves this position only at the close of the war of forces that leaves him sole force in the field, having reduced all other forces to naught. The strongest is only the strongest at the pure point of the actual manifestation of his strength, the abstract moment of the annihilation of all the other forces. Such would be the moment of the genesis of society, at once originary and instantaneous, according to the fiction of a state of nature.

The bonds securing the respect of men for one another in general are bonds of necessity: there must be varying degrees of respect, since all men seek to dominate while not all, but only a few, are able to. Imagine, then, that we can see them beginning to take shape. It is certain that men will fight one another until the strongest party has subdued the weakest . . . (304)

'Justice without force is impotent; force without justice is tyrannical.' It is just that what is just should be followed. But whence comes the obligation – how, indeed, can one make it obligatory even for oneself, by some act of autonomous self-obligation – to follow justice? For a just prescription has no authority to prescribe other than that inherent in its own justice. Justice is essentially impotent, for of and in itself it lacks any force that would be its own enforcement, outside the utopia of a justice whose force lay precisely in the absence of force. Such a utopia was realized *once* by someone:

It would have been superfluous for Our Lord Jesus Christ to descend as a King in order to be revealed in the splendour of His kingdom of holiness; but He came in the splendour of His own order. It is ridiculous to be outraged by the lowliness of Jesus Christ, as if His lowliness were of the same order as the greatness which He had come to show forth. (793)

'Force without justice is tyrannical.' Justice is devoid of force, in and of itself it is impotent – the degree zero of force. Tyranny is an excess of force; without justice, mere strength is *overstrong*. Here, more accurately, is the point at which the essence of all force emerges as a fantastical desire to be the greatest force of all or, what amounts to the same thing, as a desire for the destruction of all other forces.

Tyranny consists in a desire for universal domination, unrestricted to its rightful order. There are separate chambers for the strong, the handsome, the intelligent, or the God-fearing, each with a master in his own

house. But occasionally they meet, whereupon the strong and the handsome contend for mastery over one another – foolishly, for their mastery is of different kinds. They cannot understand one another; the fault of each is that he seeks to reign over all. Nothing can do this, not even force, which is indeed as nothing in the kingdom of the learned, having mastery only over external action . . . Tyranny is the desire to obtain by one means that which one may have only by another . . . (332)

Two definitions of tyranny, that is, of that force without justice which is *pure* force; absolute violence. The boundless desire of the strong to be the absolute degree of force – a paradox itself as infinite as that desire – amounts to the desire for pure homogeneity, that is, the desire for the destruction of all heterogeneity. Thus all force is by its essence tyrannical, a movement towards universal entropy (or death). 'Justice without force is contradicted, because there are always wicked men; force without justice is denounced.' This is the key moment of the reversal of the apparent symmetries between force and justice – the negative moment of a leap into the domain of discourse. Justice, which is non-violent and devoid of force, which is the degree zero of force, is *contra-dicted* (*contre-dite*). Discourse states the opposite of what the just prescription, which has no foundation to its prescriptive authority other than itself, prescribes. In a single phrase, it says that what is just is unjust. Fact, accident or event: the just prescription is reversed in and through the enunciation of this newly apparent discourse. And why? Because *there are always* wicked men. The accident or event of this singular discourse has always already occurred. It has always already happened, without explanation or justification. There have always been wicked men. A discourse of evil, a *de facto* presence of evil in its discourse is always already *there*. This is no speculative or theoretical fable, such as that of Descartes's Evil Spirit, which would permit of a foundation for justice and its prescriptions. The discourse of evil has always been in existence. But evil is merely a discourse, and powerless as such to damage the just prescription or its innate justice. Evil is that discourse which gainsays or contradicts justice.

Force without justice is denounced. Another, parallel, discourse exists to match that of the wicked who contradict: a discourse through which the strongest are charged with their crimes, a discourse of accusation of tyranny. Two discourses,

then, which confront one another: that which contradicts justice and that which denounces force. But if we know who, from time immemorial, has contradicted justice without force – the wicked, we yet do not know who denounces force without justice. The just man who is crucified before a tyrant on his throne – could it be him? Or perhaps the only possible denunciation of tyranny is lodged in the silence of the accuser . . . perhaps this silence in the act of denunciation is actually the secret, inaudible sign of a just man?

And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying 'Art thou the King of the Jews?' And Jesus said unto him 'Thou sayest.' And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, 'Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee?' And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. (Matt. 27, 11–14)

'Justice and force must therefore be brought together, and to that end let us make it the case that that which is just be strong, and that which is strong be just.' Conclusion. Up to this point, the two themes of strength and justice have been developed independently of one another out of the two original propositions that 'It is just that what is just should be followed; it is necessary that what is the strongest should be followed', that is to say, out of the opposition between justice and necessity, the consequences of which were twice formulated in two propositions through the double exclusion of justice by force and force by justice. This double exclusion, however, which conforms to the general principles of Pascal's method of reasoning via the negation of what is not the truth to be demonstrated, has led us to the perception of a double displacement. In the first place, whilst as regards justice (lacking or exclusive of force) we came up against the fact that it is absolutely devoid of force, we found that force (which excludes justice) is a universal desire for domination in every respect. In other words, justice without force *cannot* make justice manifest – it is impotent – whereas force without justice manifests itself as force outside its own 'proper' domain as constituted by external actions. In the second place, we have entered the realm of discourses, that which contradicts justice and that which denounces force, two discourses which work a remarkable reversal of each other's modalities. For the discourse of contradiction inverts the

original prescriptive proposition 'One must follow what is just, because it is just' into a descriptive one 'The just is non-just', 'The just is unjust', whose implicit consequence would be the negation of the original prescription: 'That what is just should be followed, is unjust (since the just has been called not just)', or 'The just must not be followed, for it is unjust (or non-just)'. Likewise and conversely, the discourse of denunciation performs a reversal in the opposite direction, implicitly transforming the original statement of the necessity of following the strongest into a negative prescription: 'That the strongest should be followed, is unjust.'

Hence Pascal's conclusion (in the form of a pragmatic principle and consequence) designed to dispel the confusion and disorder inherent in the discourses of contradiction and denunciation. For to contradict the just is in itself *contradictory* ('It is unjust that the just should be followed'), and the denunciation of the strongest is itself – *qua discourse* – a transgression of order, perfectly homologous to the tyrannical transgression committed by force. When it converts the statement of a necessity into a negative prescription ('It is unjust that what is necessary should be followed'), the discourse of denunciation becomes, to borrow Pascal's word, *ridiculous*. 'Justice and force must therefore be brought together', since reasoning along the lines of contraries has shown that justice without force and force without justice end up either in contradiction (in the case of the discourse of contradiction) or in the ridiculous (in the case of the discourse of denunciation). Both necessary force and categorical justice are silent. Once they have been displaced into discourse in general – that of force without justice and that of justice without force – then this absurdity is revealed: in the contradiction of a discourse of force and in the ridiculousness of a discourse of justice. The bringing together of justice and force should thus make it possible to avoid both these absurdities.

It is noteworthy, however, that in the Pascalian discourse this conclusion is voiced as a prescription: 'Justice and force must therefore be brought together . . .', a prescription which is to be accomplished by means of an act, a 'making': 'and to that end let us make . . .'

What is the nature of this prescription? It is both ambivalent in its presentation and weak in what is presented. Ambivalent, because it represents at once a rational, epistemic demand aimed

at resolving the contradictoriness of the discourse of contradiction (whose subject is force without justice), and a moral or ethical obligation to seek to rescue from the ridiculous the negative prescription of the discourse of denunciation on the subject of tyrannical force. Weak in what it presents, for it does no more than to bring together force and justice, while leaving them, in their very conjunction, as terms external to one another.

Nevertheless, it is equally noteworthy that it is in the act of realization, the 'making' which is at once the consequence of the principle that 'justice and force must therefore be brought together' and the means of its accomplishment, that both the reason behind the ambivalence and the force behind the weakness become apparent. Let us reread the passage: 'Justice and force must therefore be brought together, and to that end let us make it the case that that which is just be strong, and that which is strong be just.' This is indeed a pure principle, which, thanks to the ellipse of the grammatical form of obligation in French (*il faut*), belongs both to the realm of ethics and to that of operational instruction; it is an imperative command which contains within itself the cognitive conditions for the success of the task, undertaking or action which it demands. And this task, undertaking or action aims at nothing less than an identification of the two terms which the principle had placed in juxtaposition to each other while yet maintaining them in their relations of mutual exteriority. It is at this point, however, that the original opposition between the categorical imperative of the just man and the mechanical necessity of the strongest reappears. It reappears in the shape of two propositions which are mutually and exclusively disjunctive of the process of identifying force and justice. The identity to be forged is not inert, the conjunction is not static; ' $x = y$ ' is not equivalent to ' $y = x$ '. The identification of force and justice is a dynamic process which can work from either of two mutually exclusive orientations, two contrary directions; either force becomes an attribute of justice, or justice becomes a determining quality of force. Yet even this may be misleading, for, in the operation called for both by an ethical command and by a technical instruction, we are no longer dealing with entities or essential notions such as 'force' or 'justice'. The task to be undertaken is concerned with qualities, and the process of identification of 'force' and 'justice' is none other than one of reduction of qualities

or attributes, the existence of whose substance-subjects are in suspense: '... make it the case that that which is just be strong, and that which is strong be just.'

'Justice and truth are two points so fine that our instruments are too blunt to touch them exactly ...' '... could we love the substance of a man's soul, in the abstract, regardless of the qualities it possessed?' Would we have justice to be force, or force justice? 'It cannot be, and would be unjust. Therefore it is never a person we love, but only qualities' (323). Thus we operate never on essences or substances, but only on qualities and by exchange or substitution of qualities. Which of the two exchanges, between what is strong and what is just, is possible? Which substitution is realizable?

Demonstration: 'Justice is open to dispute; force is easily recognizable and beyond dispute.' Justice is interminably arguable. Justice, the idea of justice, is the object of polemical debate. Why is this? Justice is, no doubt, categorically imperative: 'It is just that what is just should be followed'; but what *is* just? It seems that the very nature of the just description as deontic 'tautology' must imply an inquiry into the ontological determination of justice. This inquiry leads in turn, necessarily so it seems, towards a deduction of the just prescription from a theoretical, speculative statement positing the Being of justice as the Good, as Nature, or as God:

Why should I divide my ethics into four parts rather than six? Why should I ascribe four parts to virtue, rather than two, or one? Why as 'desist' and 'resist' rather than by 'following nature' or by 'discharging your private business without injustice', like Plato, or anything else? – But, you will say, here is everything encapsulated in a phrase. – Yes, but that is of no use unless explained, and no sooner does one uncover, to explain it, the precept that encloses all others, than they tumble out in the very confusion that one had sought to avoid. And when they are all enclosed in one, they remain hidden and useless as though in a safe. . .

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Philosophical discourses, polemical discourses: discourses at war and in confusion, interminable dispute as to the ontological determination on which the imperative of justice might depend for its full validity as imperative. Its ought-to-be would find its 'ought' in a Being. But how may this be determined without falling into

dispute? 'Justice and truth are two points so fine that our instruments are too blunt to touch them exactly . . .' Yes, indeed, the just (by its very nature as a value), the just prescription, has no other foundation than itself, granted. But fine and almost indiscernible point that it is, it appears that a discourse will always seek to determine the just as a 'palpable quality', the ontological predicate of the Being of justice. Thus justice can never be exempt from the fray, or avoid becoming the butt of mutually opposed and belligerent philosophical discourses.

Force, on the other hand, is easily recognizable and beyond dispute. It is impossible not to notice it, for it compels recognition by its very manifestation – such is the mechanical necessity of the strongest. By the same token, and of necessity, force cannot be an object of discourse. Force is not a topic of conversation; one either wields it or yields to it. – But, you may object, surely we can denounce the tyranny of force? – No doubt, but such a discourse is ridiculous because it is 'literally' without object, that is, without effect upon that of which it speaks. It is an impotent discourse, forever open to the ultimate threat, the threat of death: 'Silence, or I shall kill you, because I am the strongest.' The argument of the strongest invariably prevails, and the wolves will always carry off into the depths of the forest, there to devour without trial, any lambs who have been too eloquent in denunciation of the tyrant.

'Thus was force bestowed upon justice . . .' A somewhat surprising conclusion is here under way. Lo, rejoice! force has been given unto justice! Men, mankind, societies, have had the power to subjugate force and to deliver it into the hands of justice! Justice is henceforth strengthened; policy has turned into morality and politics has become indistinguishable from ethics. Alas, no . . . We have misread. Once more: 'Justice is open to dispute; force is easily recognizable and beyond dispute.' We expect the conclusion, 'Thus was justice given, delivered unto force . . .' But that would constitute a transgression of order, as Pascal might say. The principal proposition that stands at the beginning of the sentence is in reality only an effect of the subordinate clause of causation that follows; the inversion of the true order is thus reproduced in the syntax. For politics to be identical with ethics implies, by an abrupt, instantaneous inversion, the contrary – a masterstroke of force in a stroke of discourse.

'Thus was force bestowed upon justice; because force has

contradicted justice, and has said that it was unjust, and that it was force itself which was just.' Force could be given to justice, because force, which simply *is*, and cannot be an object of discourse, has accorded itself the right to speak. It has set itself up as a subject of discourse, producing language, passing into the world of signs. Here is the 'true' degree zero of force: mute violence becomes, at a stroke, mutated into meaning without loss of its polemical character. Force takes possession of signs, language and discourse by way of that universal desire for infinite domination outside the bounds of the order (of external actions, external bodies) that constitutes its tyrannical essence. Seizing language, force becomes mirrored in discourse and represented in signs. It is converted into meaning. And we are left to wonder, with Pascal, whether discourse, all discourse in general, might not already and since time immemorial be force reflected and represented, reactive and reactivated within signs; whether signs themselves and the symbolic function in general might not be the retrodden tracks of force, its delegated representatives or authorized agents. As a subject of discourse, force speaks; and the force which is represented in signs is a force that sets itself up as autonomous and self-instituting – enacting the law (its law) in order to endow itself with legitimacy and authority. Its position is a self-positioning whereby the pure manifestation of force, in this movement of self-reflection, institutes itself as a legitimate and autonomous source of power; power of discourse/discourse of power, identity and mutual appropriation.

This discourse of force – a discourse of self-institution and self-legitimation and which *is* power – comprises a twofold dimension, two facets, one negative and one positive. It is a two-stroke machine, but simultaneously as it were. Force has contradicted justice and decreed it to be unjust. Force does not quibble about what justice, or the just, may consist of – that is the business of the interminable philosophical and speculative discourses. Force contra-dicts and with all the more assurance because it is easily recognizable and beyond dispute; with all the more certitude, since behind its representation or reflection in discourse the absolute threat is always looming, the possibility of a return to silence or to the inarticulate cry of wordless violence: 'Justice is unjust! I speak the truth and you shall acknowledge the immutability of my truth or else I shall kill you.' Force contradicts

justice in the enunciation of a pure contradiction: A is non-A, the just is non-just, justice is unjust. But the contradictoriness of the contradiction is resolved without mediation, *immediately*, and in the absence of any dialectic, for when force asserts that justice is unjust, it is *simultaneously* asserting its own justice. In the act of uttering the contradiction, force takes possession of justice, what is strong appropriates what is just; the strong becomes literally just. And by virtue of this very same move, this single stroke of force which is a stroke of discourse, the strong(est) who calls himself just, *is* just. A happy performative, to be so favoured by its situation of utterance as to be incapable of being contradicted; for to contradict the discourse of force (i.e. power) is not only injustice but also self-exposure to force, to the strongest whom it is necessary to follow. At the degree zero where mute violence or the silence of force cancels itself out, power, the discourse of force, is the force of the discourse which by saying, makes to be; by saying that it is just, makes itself to be just. By the same token we discover who the wicked are who had been contradicting justice (devoid of force); they are the strong who begin to speak, to hold forth in discourse, instead of striking and killing. Evil, the fact of evil, is the discourse of the strongest, or power. Far from policy being transformed into morality, it is rather ethics which, in one stroke, becomes politics. There is no morality: there is only the political.

'Thus being unable to make what is just to be strong, we have made what is strong to be just.' The first conclusion is duplicated and displaced by a second. What the former had envisaged as a possibility (to endow justice with force), because force through its discourse, as ruling power, had become justice, is revealed by the latter as impossible, as a negative necessity. It is impossible to ensure that the just should be strong or to give force to justice other than in mere 'words', other than in an unhappy discourse that says without doing, an impotent and ineffectual, in short a ridiculous discourse. It is impossible to endow justice with force: this negative necessity is simply the obverse of the positive necessity, easily recognizable and beyond dispute, that the strongest be followed. Within power, within the discourse of strength, this necessity has become the power of discourse – the powerful and happy discourse that is the justification of force.

Our original statement of the necessity of following the

strongest has been transformed in and by the discourse of strength, in and by power (discourse of power, power of discourse) into a final prescription as follows: It is just that what is the strongest should be followed; for the strongest has called himself just, and it is just that the just should be followed. 'We have made what is strong to be just': that final 'made' is a performative of language, an act of discourse for which the conditions of success and pragmatic validity are being established throughout Pascal's entire thought. All politics is discourse (discourse of power) and it is very likely that all discourse is political (power of discourse).

Translated by Lorna Scott Fox