

THE STATUS OF THE FUTURE AND THE INVISIBLE WORLD

THE LAND OF THE FUTURE AND THE PROPHETS

The primitive conception is that the future already exists like a *terra incognita* which one can dimly make out with or without the help of the gods. This idea is at the basis of fatalism and of belief in prophets, oracles and astrologers. This ancient concept was replaced in the nineteenth century by the vocabulary of scientific determinism which said that actual beings can only function. If one knew in detail their structures and their movements, one could calculate the results of their functioning with perfect precision.

The new physics of the twentieth century, since Max Planck, has abandoned this idea. A machine, in general, functions, but an atom or a series of particles are not machines whose parts can be localized. Hence these do not function. They are “made” in space and time. A living creature, and similarly a group of living creatures, can function, but only inasmuch as they resemble a machine. But they, too, are “made,” first as seed and embryo, and then in their own resourceful behavior, in their actions as such.

Translated by R. Scott Walker.

However, the old idea of the future already there like a foreign land to be discovered reappears in the prestigious theory, attributed to Einstein, of a fourdimensional world where time can be traversed either longitudinally or latitudinally. If we had a sufficiently rapid vehicle, we could take off from our "today" and fly over the "tomorrow" of another being, see the paths he will take and return to tell him of them.

Einstein never said this. He even said exactly the opposite. We can age less rapidly than our companions by moving at great speed and then returning to see our now older friends, but we cannot tell them their future. Each person sees the other age less rapidly than himself the greater the distance between them. If A, in a super-rapid spaceship, leaves B on earth and travels in straight line, the situation is symmetrical: B distances himself from A as much as A from B. Each thinks the other is aging less rapidly than himself. But if one of them, say A, turns around to come back to earth, he breaks the symmetry. It is then that he sees B age much more rapidly than himself, so much so that B makes up and goes beyond A's apparent lag in aging. When A rejoins B, therefore, he has nothing to reveal to his earth-bound companion which the latter does not already know, having lived it all in time normally. B, the one who stayed on earth, could inform spaceman A about his experiences and bring him up-to-date about what had happened on earth since he (B) and the entire earth had aged more than A. But he could not tell A what his future held. A can learn of past history by reading old newspapers, like Robinson Crusoe coming back to England after his lonely period on the island. A, the spaceman, is transported over a "short-cut" into a world which still holds for him an unknown future. Even "tachyons," particles supposedly more rapid than light, if they existed, could not explore the future but only the absolute beyond. Exploring the "beyond" which is unknown to more ordinary beings can always be an advantage in vital competition, like visiting the U.S.A. for a European industrialist. But to visit a "futurist" country is not the same thing as to explore the future. However, the future-as-a-country-to-be-explored is a stubborn illusion which hangs on and on.

Since physics is a severe and difficult science, we prefer to speak of divine revelation, of premonitory dreams, communication transcending all laws of nature. With some retrospective illusions, false memories, vague coincidences and much bad faith, one can always invent pseudo-success in one's prophetic career. "I dreamt before the examination exactly the question the professor asked." "I had the premonition of a shipwreck before embarkin."

In my prisoner-of-war camp there were a certain number of prophets of this kind who first told us in great and even exaggerated detail their impressive past successes, and then, when eagerly questioned by us about the date of our liberation, announced without hesitation a date which made us all sigh in despair, so far off it seemed at the beginning of our imprisonment. But they were all wrong. The announced dates came, and we were still prisoners. At the very end some of the prophets sinned by their pessimism, and the Americans deftly sent us home in advance of the date generally indicated: 14 July, 1945.

If premonition were possible, there would be prophets and not hard workers who succeed at examinations and competitions. Prophets and not the skilled practitioners would make fortunes in the stock market or at the race track, succeed in politics, become government leaders or counsellors to royalty. The very existence of national lotteries and football pools proves the non-existence of a power of premonition.

THE PRE-EXISTING FUTURE

If the future, the time to come, were pre-existent and to be explored like a *terra incognita* (or even *cognita* by premonition), then there would have to be another kind of time, a "conveying" time for moving through the "pre-existent future time" and for connecting the events for which we might have had an eventual premonition. This is the theory of J.W. Dunne.¹

However, this is absurd. If I have a collision with my auto-

¹ *The Serial Universe*, London, Faber and Faber, 1934. Each "pre-existent" time would require a "conveying" time and so forth to infinity.

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mobile, it is the other car which I encounter with force. I do not encounter the accident, foreseen perhaps by a fortune-teller or astrologer or a premonitory dream. The accident is an "unfortunate encounter." But you cannot encounter an encounter in which you yourself are one of the encountering parties.

A policeman flying over the highway in a helicopter could, perhaps, have foreseen the accident, the catastrophic encounter, by noticing, for example, that one of the drivers, distracted or drunk, was driving his car on the left side of the road going round a curve. Similar to Laplace, he could have predicted the collision according to the laws of the mechanical functioning of moving machines. Astronomers can also foretell by their calculations that the earth will pass through the tail of a comet or even collide with the comet itself on a certain date. Mechanical functioning is always theoretically predictable precisely because all functioning as such exists in the pseudo-time of cinematic articulation where the possible movements are determined by the present disposition of the gears, levers and cams or by the connecting or disconnecting of electrical or pneumatic conductors in circuits.

In the nineteenth century science thought it could prove that the entire universe was in this pseudo-time and functioned only in the manner of an automaton. Cybernetic theories and the application of cybernetics to human societies, which is called the theory of systems, prolongs this idea still. When the automaton is set according to pre-determined auto-regulations like a furnace set at a certain temperature or an electrical or chemical homeostat or like a vehicle on automatic pilot, it seems to seek out a certain final state which is desirable and not catastrophic, if not for itself at least for its user. It even seems to use accidents in its functioning to reach its goal. It seems to avoid obstacles and maintain its course, the constancy of its internal or external milieu.

The future, according to fatalism, resembles very much the

pseudo-future of an automaton programmed in advance; even accidents are used (by the will of Allah or by magic power) as a means to the inevitable end. The man whose imminent death had been foretold to him encountered Death at Baghdad, and he took the surprised expression of Death to be a look of menace. He fled to Samarkand to escape, but that was the very place where Death was to take him. According to fatalism or providentialism there are in the future, or in the land of the future, no pre-existing events, but kinds of centers of attraction which use even accidents, just like a control of oscillations or fluctuations in a cybernetic machine.

Philosophers of history are all more or less fatalists in this sense, from Saint Augustine to Bossuet, to Hegel, to Marx. Accidents and mistakes work in man's favor or in the favor of the system willed by the transcendent will, either as idea or as the sense of history: the "happy fault" of Adam, the "happy crime" of Tarquinius, the "happy destruction" by the *bourgeoisie* of the ancient Mores. Inversely the philosopher of history aloft in his mental helicopter does not fly over earthly highways like the police, but the paths of programmed systems, and from there he can foresee the inevitable disasters of a prestigious conqueror, a Napoleon or a Hitler, when he goes against the nature of things or against the great under-lying balance of nature.

"The fact that chance seems repeatedly to cause the failure of a given undertaking is the best proof that the undertaking does not fail by chance," said Cournot. But here we leave fatalism or even providentialism behind and arrive at the veritable attraction of true time and reality.

There are in present systems "programmed controls," but these are ideal controls and not mechanical ones.

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It is time and particularly the status of the future which allows us to perceive how nature is united to the supernatural as one continuous creation. If everything functioned, forced itself to function, with or without mechanical programming, nothing

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would change or the only changes would be the wear of usage and blending until uniformity was achieved. On the other hand if existing things did not continue to exist except by freely causing the future and by disrupting their normal functioning, time would be disjointed and the future would no longer be *their* future.

The future is neither completely ready-made nor completely to be made. The future is to be made, but it conceals a necessity to be respected, a dimly perceived form to be made clear and completed, a still vague idea to be expressed, a problem to be resolved, a question posed by a muttering examiner whom we hear badly and at whose words we are forced to guess. Necessity is the mother of invention, but very often invention is also the mother of necessity, whence the illusion of libertarians who do not recognize the existence of necessity in any detail.

However, this necessity is never one of mechanical functioning. If I decide to go to China, I am forced to organize my trip according to certain geographical and political necessities and according to the calendar. To take on a certain task implies accepting a certain obligatory itinerary.

Geneticists say that man, like other animals, is programmed. Nevertheless, man is not an automaton, and he creates programs for himself. To act or to behave in a certain manner is not just a matter of functioning, but means always to have a concern for the outcome. The goal, be this chosen or imposed, directs the work; the future makes the present. Great political goals or programs (“Down with the Austrian dynasty”; “Ruín England with a continental blockade”; “Destroy Capitalism”) were not inscribed in the genes of Richelieu, Napoleon or Lenin. Nor are they simple images present in the brain which would control thinking like the perforated strip of a hurdy-gurdy controls the music of that instrument or like the program fed into a computer. They are really not even actual ideas which work according to an actual dialectic or rather an immanent dialectic as scholars call it. They are shadows cast on actual brains by large ideal objects situated in a beyond which for us is the future. These large objects are difficult for us to discern, quite deformed to our eyes, and their shadows can be illusory (which they usually are as well as being deceptive). But they are nonetheless “before

us,” like principles attracting all our actions and like super-actual controls.

Nothing is more false than the old metaphor, taken from the Greeks, which says we back into the future. Psychologically at least we enter the future head-on, eyes open wide in an effort to make out the ideal objects through their dim shadows, and we react in consequence of this.

Theologians have trouble in attempting to define God (or whatever may be the source of all existence). This is true both for those theologians who define God as the infinite degree of all qualities (a positive theology) as well as for those who define God, or the ultimate source, negatively (negative theology): God is not this or that but the absolute other.

It is the future in its virtual, but also constraining and dynamizing, necessity which is the only true guide for the only possible theology, just as it is the only true guide for all action.

God, if we hold to this word, is the future itself, or rather the eternal reservoir beyond time and creating time, who constantly projects himself or pours himself into the present and who transforms the functioning of already created beings into sensible behavior and actions in order to cause the world to evolve in a living manner and not like a great machine which could only finish at a stable equilibrium or with irremedial wear and degradation.

The great machine, or this aspect of the world, is always quite apparent with its rotations and its movements which lead nowhere, its threats of jamming or of collapse of worn-out pieces. This is the source of the temptation to atheism, for God is imperceptible and apparently unpowerful, just like the future, whose dynamism seems quite weak beside the great masses blindly forced into brutal movements. God, or the future-as-ideal-control, can only produce minute shifts in direction. His “ideas” steer and guide through ultra-weak interactions. Nevertheless the universe finally obeys this imperceptible future, but not without enormous failures and catastrophes.

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ACTUAL LIVING BEINGS ARE IN AN "IMPLORING PRESENT"

Every conscious living being is a claimant. He demands his material from the visible world, the environment. He is starved or an imperialist or a colonizer. He demands also from the invisible world, the unseen environment, ideas and forms to conquer and develop this material. First he forms his own body. He draws on the mnemonic capital of his species for this. Then he forms his exterior body, developing his milieu, his biological and psychological niche. Here again he draws especially on the mnemonic capital of his species, on behavioural instincts which prolong formative instincts. But when he cannot imitate or copy his fellow creatures, he draws also from a more mysterious reservoir of ideas or forms not yet converted into memories by his ancestors.

When he thinks he is creating something from nothing or discovering in a vacuum, as a matter of fact he is drawing on this reservoir of possibilities. After birth and the euphoria of embryo-genesis which is almost purely mnemonic, his consciousness is always tormented by "How to do it; how to complete, to close, to dispose, to accommodate the materials before me which relate badly among themselves, which have gaps and which collide together; how to resolve this gigantic 'cross-word puzzle'?" An animal, just as man, invents in an intelligent manner. Man, moreover, prays to and implores a divinity or providence when he is not seeking the aid of a neighbor, a king or the state.

Civilized man reflects, calculates, tries, makes mental experiments and trial-and-error tests. He asks himself if..., or rather seeks an answer from a self wiser than his actual consciousness. There is no great difference between imploring providence or the Holy Spirit and asking oneself how to do something, except that the self-questioning is usually more fruitful than a superstitious prayer.

In any event we must suppose an ocean of superactual possibilities, an invisible world which passes through the narrow opening of an imploring present if it is called to do so and comes

to complete and enrich the “already realized.” This already realized, if left to itself, could only function mechanically towards self-destruction. Thanks to the invisible world, organisms learn how to act, to adapt; in a word, to live. Actual consciousness in its superficial aspects is the foam on the tidal wave created by the unceasing arrival of the waters of the invisible ocean on rivers already individualized and channeled which seem, falsely, to carry everything to the ocean, but which in fact have received everything in the past and which continue to receive everything still today.

Can we give the name “Creator-God” to this invisible world thanks to which organic and cultural forms appear if duly called to action by existing beings? Even less can we attribute everything to chance, for then we would have to attribute to chance not only the technical inventions of man but the technical inventions of the organism as well. They are too similar in their manner and their results for organic formations to be attributed only to a roll of the dice of genetic mutations and for the formations of technical equipment to be attributed only to a laborious discovery in a laboratory where researchers scratch their heads and think of their scientific careers at M.I.T. or C.N.R.S.

Moreover, “laborious discoveries” are ultimately also organic inventions since the technical idea springs up in the brain cells of the inventor by coming to complete or transfigure the matrix, the “cross-word puzzle” which is contained in the brain cells exactly like the organic form derives from the protoplasm of incompletely differentiated cells of the embryonic mass according to an energizing already realized when it is mnemonically recalled.

All Nobel Prizes should be given to the nerve cells and tissues of the candidates and not to Mr. X or Mr. Y, social persons whose photographs show only superficially their satisfied smiles.

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This nerve tissue has swallowed and digested a paradox which has appeared in the scientific system just as a protozoa swallows and digests an unaccustomed particle of nourishment becoming both mouth and stomach.

GOD CONSIDERED AS AN AUTHOR OF RIDDLES

When we imagine, our imagination depends especially on our memory. But there is also a tiny proportion of creativity, of something pulled from nothing. Memory and heredity (which is a kind of memory) allow us to store up experiences to form of them a consistent and subsistent whole in the visible world and to preserve successes with the approval of "heaven."

The growth which occurs with each generation, and even with each generation of acts, cannot come from memory and heredity. It is due in part to chance, or rather to chances, fortunate ones relative to our intentions, and to the need we sense for filling a lack. It is due to chance but also to the skill with which we use chance. Even one who considers memory to be the essential attribute of living beings would not say that we (or any other living being) can do nothing which we cannot remember having done already. We cannot create totally, but we create little by little because imagination and skill surpass pure memory, complete the incomplete, order the disordered.

The example of cross-word puzzles, both their creation and their solution, is the best possible here. A good puzzle worker uses his memory as well as his skill to guess at all the possibilities of a definition and to reconstruct the correct word despite its missing letters. As to the creator of cross-word puzzles, he plays the role of God or of the invisible world relative to the newspaper reader who solves the puzzles.

Actual organisms of all living species are cross-word puzzles in the course of being filled in, sometimes finished or almost (in species which no longer evolve) and sometimes in the midst of a laborious completion (in species whose "grid" is modified by a new environment). Moreover, each individual's behavior, even if it is dominated by instinctive memory, must be somewhat invented and adjusted according to the circumstances.

The visible world, the macrocosm, is the sum of all growth

and of all that is added to memory. It survives by memory; memory is its accumulated capital. But the visible world is created only by inventive financing which comes from the invisible world, from the original grid of the primordial cross-word puzzle whose coming into being we cannot conceive.

If man today can not only fill in the squares of the puzzles in his newspaper, but even become the editor of the puzzle page and invent new puzzles, he is in this respect only a pale imitator of the creator God. A professor of mathematics invents problems to be solved by students on an exam, but he uses mathematics already known and taught. As for mathematicians who create and enlarge the field of mathematics “made by man,” they too are working in the broader field of mathematics possible in the *sensorium Dei*.

GOD AS AN UNDERGROUND BODY OF WATER

By way of another comparison, the invisible world, or the unknown God, is like an immense body of underground water. This water is under a certain pressure. When those on the surface of the visible world—living creatures—dig wells or install pumping machinery, the water never fails to rise and fill the reservoirs, large and small. Moreover, there are pockets of water very near the surface which communicate with the larger body of water and which developed of themselves during the course of previous pumping activities (memories).

But the pressure is weak. If those on the surface neglect the maintenance of the wells and allow them to become stopped up, or if their pumping machinery breaks down, the underground water seems to disappear. It moves to another place where the pumps still function.

In other words God proposes and man disposes. And this gives men, those on the surface, the impression of having to work things out alone in the visible world. Nevertheless their entire “substance” is made up of the underground water.

Sometimes too, according to the devout, misfortunes which

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strike individuals or even their own failures (in sum, accidental breakings of the surface) can be the occasion for allowing the underground water to rise up—a path to the unknown God. According to anarchists and prophets, a massive disintegration of all of society or a chaotic revolution could be the occasion for a regenerative explosion which could transform all life. The experience of history hardly favors this fanatical optimism.

Natura Naturans IS ALSO PASSIVE

Let us come back to the status of the future. If we look at the past, biological and historical, an unknown force, the “*natura naturans*” (naturing nature) of Spinoza, *sive Deus*, appears to have been active and to have created the visible and tangible “*natura naturata*” (natured nature). But if we turn to the future, we men, like all living beings, have a strong and even overpowering feeling that we have to do this ourselves, or at least that we have to apply our own work to its elaboration, to fill in the correct words in the grid of the cross-word puzzle or to invent efficient pumps to draw the subterranean water.

With regard to the future, Spinoza’s vocabulary is curiously transposed. It is the “*natura naturata*” which is active and “*natura naturans*” which is passive despite the grammatical constructions. We sense and we experience the truth of the inverted proverb: God proposes, man disposes. Only later, a long time afterwards, when we look at the biological and historical past, do we have the opposite impression. Then we speak of a created nature, created by God or by “*natura naturans*.” Which of these two impressions is the correct one? Both are true. There is no land of the future where we could arrive and simply walk around and explore; we must make the future. But on the other hand, our activity must be in accordance with what is possible as well as respect great vital tendencies and biological and historical memories. It must conform itself to an order existing well beyond our own wills.

Natural selection eliminates in organic species not only whatever does not conform to the present state of the species but also whatever does not respect the past trajectory of the species. Historical selection in the same way eliminates social forms,

customs, beliefs or institutions which are incompatible with the long term existence of peoples.²

The correct solution to the cross-word puzzle is contained implicitly in the grid itself as it is presented to us—or which we present to ourselves.

Here we are faced with a contradiction of terms which perhaps proves (let us be optimistic!) that we have reached the heart of the question.

AN IMAGE OF SAMUEL BUTLER: THE KNOWN GOD AND THE UNKNOWN GOD

Here is how Butler solves this problem, or rather cuts the Gordian knot. (*Unconscious Memory*, and *God the Known and God the Unknown*). He begins with a provisional dualism.

A. *The Known God*

There is a known God, visible and tangible, whom we can love and caress, warm, living and present: a beloved wife, a charming child, a favorite dog or cat, a tree, a meadow full of wild flowers. It is the totality of all living things past, present and future, the tree of life with all its old and new species, with all past and present individuals who are all related and who in a certain sense form one great living creature, one single tree with a multitude of branches and limbs. “Imagine a tree whose wooden connectors were invisible; the buds and the leaves seem to hang in mid-air with no support or connection. But the location of the buds and leaves suggests strongly that a common principle of growth unites them. We can easily recognize that sometimes the relationship is closer between some buds, more distant between others. Similarly we regard ivy on an apple tree as foreign to the tree even though it may implant its tendrils in the tree’s branches. The relationship between the branches of the tree of life is more a question of a relation of soul, memory, type of growth than of lateral continuity.”

² See Raymond Ruyer, *Les Cent prochains siècles*, Fayard, 1977.

Evolutionists all attempt to sketch this tree of life, different from the one dreamt of by Booz: "A king sang at the bottom, and at the top a god was dying." In the tree of the evolutionists, one-celled creatures are at the bottom, then social insects, simians, and, at the top, man. At the bottom where the roots are, there is no anthropomorphic God, no intelligent meganthrope. It is the tree itself, everything together, which is the visible God, and we are one of its higher branches (*God the Known and God the Unknown*, p. 58-62).

This unknown God is only half-known by man. As thinker, theoretician and scholar, man tries to reconstruct God in images in books. As living creature he takes part, like all living creatures, in memory, and he is formed from generation to generation by his fascinated participation in the formative memory of his species (of his branch) and by his instincts which he calls his unconscious.³ God is the unique and unifying soul of the tree. He is the universal former and "fascinator," like a kind of hypnotist who forms and directs his creatures by hypnotic and post-hypnotic suggestions.

This "known" God does not have the ordinary attributes of the God of religions. He is not all-powerful. He is subject to chance, failure and set-backs. And especially he is "channeled" by individual memories of his species which he nevertheless nourishes. He is a hypnotized hypnotist who makes a suggestion and then seems to lose himself in his suggestions which bring him frequently into dead-ends and terminal forms with no future.

Man, like all living things but more clearly than the others, has "special desires" for Him as well as for himself.

B. The Unknown God

There must then exist, beyond the known God, an unknown God, planter of the tree as well as the field in which it grows, universal framework of the cosmos, the principle not only of channeled memories, but of all possible types of existences.

The tree of life on the little planet earth does not allow us to understand the origin of atoms and molecules which we can

³ See Raymond Ruyer, *La Gnose de Princeton*, Fayard, Coll. Pluriel, p. 112 and 116.

suppose to be “living” as much as the first cells truly organized for life and reproduction.

Then must we still imagine this unknown God as an engineer with blueprints or as a gardener working the soil of his garden before planting the seeds, the “known gods,” the “trees of life”?

Must we challenge once again the often encountered absurdity of God as a super-watchmaker, creator not of the watch, but of the conditions of existence for all watches and all trees?

Butler was tempted for a moment by the myth of an unknown God who himself learned progressively his profession as God like a bird who learns by hereditary apprenticeship to prepare its nest before laying its eggs. The unknown God prepares the so-called physical cosmos before planting the trees of life in its good spots. The unknown God thus had to learn with memory his art of “star-maker” and to perfect himself in this art (*God the Known and God the Unknown*, p. 86).

But Butler soon realized that this myth led only to empty and indefinite repetitions. The only solution is to abstain from cheating with the word “unknown” or with the expression “unknown God” by underlining “God,” when it is actually the word “unknown” that we should underline. We should not try to act like we know the unknown by personifying it. Instead of the unknown God we should speak rather of the invisible world about which we know nothing except that it is beyond all the continuity of temporalized memory, beyond all place and all time, and that it is more like an ocean of ideas not yet thought and values not yet realized—u-topia and u-chronia—which nevertheless unceasingly create place and time.

The invisible world, which is creative and dynamizing, cannot be conceived on the lines of our visible world, created each instant by the channeled passage of the other world, a passage which is

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known creation. The invisible world is not a memory along the lines of our memories as living beings since it makes our memories by filling them with new things and by filling in our "crossword puzzle."

THE INVISIBLE WORLD

The invisible world is not at all the other world spoken of by religions, not the utopian final Paradise where God reigns and where we will see God other than in his works. It is not a retirement home. It is a formless principle which animates forms. It is the Chinese Tao which is on this side of the norms and of "heaven" (which the Chinese also talk of), this side of Providence or Fate taught by Westerners. It is the unimaginable and even the inconceivable which nevertheless supports all conceived ideas and all realized forms and which makes of the visible world (or of the visible God) not a cold monster or a phantasmagoria, but an incarnation permitting continuous incarnations.

The invisible world is not a myth reduced to the abstract or a sort of intelligent vacuum. It is an inevitable presupposition, a postulate, or rather a postulandum. For otherwise we would be doomed to the positivist myth of the world as an actual surface without thickness, complete in its present functioning, where memories would be false memories since they would only be material inscriptions, where ideas would be false ideas since they would be reduced to the different forms they take moment by moment.

The most positive science, quite distinct from the positivist myth which reduces the universe to "that which the atoms are at present," makes our present something more than the myth of the ancient atomists, since it considers our present to be like a cross-section of the general system of time-space and the present of the atom to be like an "action," i.e., even for the most elementary action like energy multiplied by time. We are certainly always at the surface of the invisible ocean; we live only instant by instant, action by action, although our remembering and anticipating consciousness always gives or always supposes a certain limited thickness of this surface.

But if there is a surface, there is also depth and thickness. And we can do better than simply postulate this thickness, for we experience it in the limited and tolerated thickness of the lived present. Without this tolerated thickness (concretely several seconds, more abstractly several months or years for a mammal, theoretically several billion years for a cosmologist, geologist or biologist), we would not even be conscious. An absolutely instantaneous consciousness would disappear.

This incontestable experience of a “thick” present forces us to consider the ocean on whose surface we live as a great unknown consciousness. An invisible world or an unknown God envelopes the “material” world which, minus this envelope, would be only “thing” in its purest state, indistinguishable from nothing, or which would be only a present incapable of presence lacking a past and a future.