

Introduction¹

At the beginning of the first edition of Guilty, I wrote these words whose meaning was related (on the whole) to the impression I had of inhabiting—this was 1942—a world wherein I was in the position of a stranger. (In a certain sense, this situation did not surprise me: more often than we think, Kafka's dreams, in many ways, are the depths of things . . .):*

Someone named Dianus† wrote these words and died.

He designated himself (paradoxically) by the name the guilty one.

The collection published under this title is a completed book.

A letter and fragments of a work just begun constitute its appendix.²



My intention, in these few lines—introducing the second edition of my first two books‡—is not to seek the principle from which my reflections set out . . ., but to say, more modestly, in what manner, in my eyes, my thought diverges from that of other people. Certainly from that of philosophers. In the first place it diverges from philosophical thought due to my ineptitude. Only late did I undertake acquiring the requisite knowledge. I was told that I was gifted, that I should . . ., but the critics—of the first volume of this work, and they weren't lacking—left me cold. (I have other worries, more reasonable perhaps . . .)

* Gallimard, 1944.

† Dianus is the pseudonym—from Roman mythology—that I used when I first published the initial pages of *Guilty*, in April 1940, in an issue of *Mesures* that was published by a printer in Abbeville at that time.

‡ *Inner Experience*, 2nd edition, revised, followed by *Method of Meditation*, 1954; *Guilty*, 2nd edition, revised, followed by *Alleluia*. These two books form volumes one and two of *The Atheological Summa* (Gallimard).

Today I would like to propose the principle explanation for a divergent attitude: I'm afraid. And I never felt charged with revealing truth, each day more clearly. My approach is that of a sick man, or at least that of a breathless, exhausted man. Fear carries me, fear—or horror—of what is at stake in the totality of my thought.

The search for truth is not my strong suit (above all, I mean the phraseology that represents it). And I should now put this forward: more than truth, it is fear that I want and that I am seeking: that which opens a dizzying fall, that which attains the unlimited possibility of thought.

It seems to me that human thought had two terms: God and the feeling of the absence of God; but God was only the confusion of the SACRED (of the religious) and of REASON (of the utilitarian). It only has a place in a world wherein the confusion of utility and of the sacred becomes the basis of a reassuring movement. God terrifies if he is no longer the same thing as reason (Pascal, Kierkegaard). But if he is no longer the same thing as reason, I am before the absence of god. And this absence being confused with the final appearance of the world—which is no longer utilitarian in any way—having nothing to do with future retributions or punishments: in the end, the question poses itself again:

- . . . fear . . . yes, fear, which alone reaches the unlimited thought . . . fear, yes, but fear of what . . . ?

The response fills the universe, fills the universe in me:

- . . . evidently, fear of NOTHING . . .



Evidently, to the extent that that which makes me afraid in this world is not limited by reason, I must tremble. I must tremble to the extent that the possibility of gambling does not attract me.

But, in human terms, the gamble that, by definition, remains open is condemned to loss in the long run . . .

Gambling calls into question not only the material results that may possibly come from work but also the results that might come, without work, from gambling. Gambling or fortune. In combat fortune is confused with courage, with strength, but courage, strength are in the end forms of chance. If they can include work, work does not attain its pure form. It is no less true that work, making its contribution, increases the gambler's chances: it increases them to the extent that, in an appropriate way, the gambler is working.

But in the end including work in gambling leaves the advantage to work. In the end the contribution of work to gambling cedes entirely to work, gambling then having its place reduced to inevitability.

Thus, even if my inclination had not delivered me to anguish, the roads that could have opened the game for me do not leave me any real escape. In the end, gambling only leads to anguish. And our only possibility is work.

Anguish is not really possible for human beings. No! Anguish is impossible! It is impossible in the sense that the impossible defines me. Mankind is the only animal that knows exactly how to make death weighty, impossible, because mankind is the only animal that dies in a closed sense. Consciousness is the condition of the perfected death. I die to the extent that I am conscious of death. But death takes consciousness away, I don't just have consciousness of dying: death takes this consciousness away from me . . .

Perhaps the human being that is the summit is only the summit of a disaster.

Like a delirious sunset, the enshrouded dying man sinks into the magnificence that escapes him: it escapes him to the extent that it enlarges him. At this moment, tears laugh, laughter cries, and time . . . Time attains the simplicity that stops it.



In fact, my language can only be completed by death. On condition of not confusing it with the violent and theatrical appearance that chance would give it. Death is a disappearance; it is a suppression so perfect that, at the summit, complete silence is its truth, so much so that it is impossible to speak of it. Here, the silence that I summon, evidently, can only be approached from outside, from a distance.

I'll add, if I died right now, the intolerable suffering would of course be added to my life. My suffering—which might make my death still more painful for survivors—would not change the suppression whose object I would be.

In this way, I will reach the end of language, which is death. Potentially this is still a question of language, but of a language whose meaning—already the absence of meaning—is given in the words that put an end to language. These words only have meaning, at least, to the extent that they immediately precede the silence (silence that stops them): they should only have a full meaning when forgotten, falling clearly, suddenly, into oblivion.

But I remain, we remain—whatever the case—in a realm in which only the limit of silence is accessible. The equivocal silence of ecstasy is itself barely inaccessible. Or, like death, accessible for an instant.

*Will I let my thought slowly, cleverly, cheating it as little as I can, merge with silence?**

* No. Not yet! My thought still needs to be compared to others! All the others? It is possible: I am coming to a *preliminary* conclusion: In the end can we not include all of the possibilities of thought (as more or less did Hegel, who perhaps, in a sense, died drowning . . .)?