

“The darkened world”
After Auschwitz and Hiroshima’s Catastrophes,
according to G. Anders and T. W. Adorno

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The world has darkened. Our eyes have become blurred.

The world has darkened once before, and then more times since. Already in Auschwitz and in other European Jewish extermination sites. But, when an extreme glare burnished the skies above and burned the earth below in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945, then something unprecedented and unheard of happened: we entered into the “atomic age”.

After that, to the “after Auschwitz” the “after Hiroshima” was added. “After Auschwitz and Hiroshima”, it was said, thus coining an indissoluble pair, bound to be thought, to be interpreted in its entirety by many philosophers, or distinguishing the two disasters that bear the names of those places. There was one, Theodor W. Adorno, who dwelled much on the first, on the “after Auschwitz” and on the new categorical imperative of “Auschwitz never again”, without however neglecting to deal with the atomic bomb, and there was another, Günther Anders, who instead devoted his whole speculation and even his whole life to thinking especially “after Hiroshima” and to warning, in practice as in theory, “Hiroshima never again”, without however forgetting to make his own “descent into Hades”¹ and to meditate on Auschwitz. And it is exactly on these two authors, “morally sensitive in immoral times”,² that I wish

¹ G. ANDERS, *Besuch im Hades. Auschwitz und Breslau*, C. H. Beck, München, 1979. In addition to the texts by the author mentioned below, the following are also to be mentioned: *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Band I: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, C. H. Beck, München, 1956, particularly the fourth part “Über die Bombe und die Wurzeln unserer Apokalypse-Blindheit“ and Id., *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Band II: Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution*, C. H. Beck, München, 1980. As critical literature, refer to the most recent volumes: Babette Babich, *Günther Anders’ Philosophy of Technology*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022; on Nuclear Power, see the collective volume, directed by O. Ombrosi, *Il nucleare. Una questione scientifica e filosofica dal 1945 a oggi/Nuclear Power. A scientific and Philosophical Issue from 1945 to today*, Mimesis, Milan, 2020.

² Cfr. S. MÜLLER-DOOHM, *Adorno. Eine Biographie*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003 and D. CLAUSSEN, *Theodor W. Adorno. Ein letztes Genie*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2003.

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to dwell in the following pages. Without delaying by investigating their personal ties, seemingly not so friendly,³ I would like to consider the essential points of how they considered, albeit in very different ways, the catastrophes that have settled in the heart of 20th century Europe, how they evaluated the possibilities of assessing their causes and consequences, chasing to the most hidden corners of that defeat, of that critical situation of the world that brought men not only to auto-alienation but also to auto-destruction. There is the same shade of color in their writings, the same “darkness”, if we can say so, in their thoughts, a darkness that, however, never gives in to resignation. On the contrary, their call is addressed to all people, especially to young people in a nearly pedagogic way: a call for *resistance* and for a “never again”. It is exactly for this lucid resistance of theirs, made of awareness and of critical aptitude towards what happened and what can still happen, that it seems to me, today, necessary to re-read them and to recollect some of the fundamental stages of their reflections.

The world darkened and our eyes were blinded by grief, by the “blind mourning”,⁴ according to an intense expression of Anders, by the monstrosity and the enormity of facts, by the incredulity of the boundless, by the anguish of the future, blinded by the incineration and the explosion that were made to happen. But there is another darkness Anders also deals with, one that concerns our present and our relation with the world of technology in the “atomic age”, the age which we have entered with that “after” and in which many of us have always been. He writes in his open letter to Adolf Eichmann’s son (1964) entitled as seriously as it is provocatively *We, the sons of Eichmann*:

Although our world is made by man and is kept in motion by us all, because of the fact that it escapes our imagination and our perception, it becomes darker

³ Cfr. G. ANDERS, *Günther Anders antwortet*, Tiamat, Berlin, 1987, pp. 88 et sq., French version by C. DAVID, « Contre un nouveau et définitif Nagasaki », in *Théorie Critique de la crise. Du crépuscule de la pensée à la catastrophe*, *Revue Illusio*, Le bord de l’eau, n° 12/13, Caen, 2014, pp. 479–484. It is the speech Anders delivered when he received the Adorno Prize in 1983. About the relationship between the two and more generally between him and the other members of the Frankfurt School refer also to the essay by C. DAVID, “Günther Anders, un “outsider” de la Théorie critique”, in *Théorie Critique de la crise*, *op. cit.*, pp. 487–505.

⁴ G. ANDERS, *Die Toten. Rede über die drei Weltkriege* [1966], in id., *Hiroshima ist überall*, C. H. Beck, München, 1995, p. 363. Since there are no English versions of Anders’ works, from here on out the philosopher’s quotations will be translated by the authoress of the article.

day by day. So dark that we can no longer even notice its darkening, so dark, that we will even have reason to call our time a “dark age”.⁵

In other words, the optimistic hopes of the 19th century, implicit in the idea of progress and the resulting development that aimed to reach a condition of greater “clarity”, of wellness and safety for man, have instead shorted out the circuit, catapulting men into an age in which the higher the speed of progress and the greater the effects of its productions, the more defective human imagination and perception: the desired clarity diminishes, and their eyes become more and more “blind”.⁶

The world has also darkened because of technology, because it has been able to transform the “magnificent” into the “monstrous”, even in those years when the creation of its products went hand in hand with their destruction, when, more specifically, the production of cadavers proceeded just as fast as their annihilation, when the intensification and sophistication of weapons of war produced other dead, not the dead of war, but the civil dead of nuclear death.

So, the world darkened. Then. But maybe we should try to think, even imagine, that it continues still today to darken because of the same threat that looms: “it has not turned into evening yet”, wrote Anders.

But it is already too late to question the fact that we are moving towards this “evening” or more precisely towards the twilight of mechanical totalitarianism and that even now we are in its gravitational field and that these affirmations on the future *become* truer each day.⁷

He alludes to nuclear weapons and to that de-responsibilization of mechanical acts into the work of those employed in the production of those weapons (and not just of those), which is very similar to the de-responsibilization that made Eichmann a “banal” criminal. And nearly in the same way, Adorno introduced, with crepuscular tones, his reader to the “sad science” of the fragments contained in his book *Minima moralia* (1951), dwelling on the discrepancy between production and consumption of mass-produced goods and on their incidence on the destiny of real-life, when he wrote : “the change in the relations of production themselves depends largely on what takes place

⁵ G. ANDERS, *Wir Eichmannsöhne. Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann* [1964], C. H. Beck, München, 2022, pp. 25–26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

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in the ‘sphere of consumption’, the mere reflection of production and the caricature of true life’;⁸ and a few lines below he added:

In the period of his decay, the individual’s experience of himself and what he encounters contributes once more to knowledge, which he had merely obscured as long as he continued unshaken to construe himself positively as the dominant category. In face of the totalitarian unison with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself, even part of the social force of liberation may have temporarily withdrawn to the individual sphere. If critical theory lingers there, it is not only with a bad conscience.⁹

“In the period of his [of the individual’s] decay”, “totalitarian unison” gripped tightly onto the mechanisms of production and technical seriality that even out all differences: in those lines, Adorno writes of an inversion between means and ends, just as Anders speaks of “mechanical totalitarianism”, of the totalitarian power of machines, that exceed the same capacities of those who produced them, that is, the “Promethean shame”,¹⁰ of the levelling of acting, of the inability to imagine their own potentialities and responsibilities; Adorno, like Anders, talks of the inversion between means and ends, since, for human beings, means have become ends in themselves. All this is, long since, since then, since at least the 50s and the 60s during which these authors wrote, more or less well-known. But the evening, that evening that Anders talks about in the passage above, as well as that obscurity that captures my eyes in this reflection, are now, *today*, at a well-advanced stage.

Now, despite this obscurity of the world and the blindness in which human being seems to have fallen, and just because of the latter, in the two philosophers, as well as in those who are re-reading and interrogating them here, a strong desire for clarity and intelligibility persists, especially on questions of moral philosophy. Whether it is *minima moralia*, according to the Adornian expression, or *maxima moralia*,¹¹ according to the expression used by Anders with obvious reference to the

⁸ T. W. ADORNO, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a damaged life* (E.G.F. Jephcot, trans.), Verso, London, 2005, p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17–18

¹⁰ “Promethean shame” is the title of the first part of G. ANDERS, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen. Band I.*

¹¹ G. ANDERS, *Nach “Holocaust”* [1979], in *Besuch in Hades*, C.H. Beck, München, 1996, p. 216: “The things I have written are strictly linked with the questions treated in my book *Endzeit und Zeitenende*. The chapters dedicated to Hiroshima and Auschwitz, which dealt

former, with Auschwitz and Hiroshima, and within the epochal turning point of human decay that followed, the reference to morality was necessary, and continues to be so, precisely because, with those disasters, we witnessed the two “greatest moral scandals” of the 20th century. Thus, facing these scandals, all other theoretical priorities, all other philosophical interests, the great dialectical and ontological questions—not only do these not matter, but they have become blurred and may vanish. On the other hand, political questions remain urgent and alive, and, especially concerning nuclear power, some juridical-institutional solutions still need to be conceived, despite the permanent struggle for disarmament in which Anders was involved for many years, as suggested in his *Diary from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (1959): the progressive limitation of national sovereignty still needs to be considered, effecting the final goal of the creation of an universal state.¹² So, what is above all necessary and urgent for them both, is exactly a new moral code that concerns all human beings and even those who are not yet born, and that precisely because “all existing moral and religious philosophies have proved obsolete, they blew up with Hiroshima and were gassed with Auschwitz. We are at year zero of the new ethics”,¹³ as Anders writes. Precisely because of this failure of “all moral and religious philosophies”, it is necessary and pressing to reformulate some moral codes, as Anders attempted to do, sharing this aim with men and women from all over the world gathered in Tokyo in 1958 for the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs and for Disarmament, of which he gives us such a clear and strong account in his Japanese diary. The title of this moral code is therefore “the new moral obligations in the atomic age”, and its contents are radically new: since humanity confronts itself, for the first time, with the possibility of its own annihilation due to the exploding of the two bombs, ethics needs to be rethought “afresh” in order to lead humanity into a new era. A new code is therefore necessary, one constituted even, as someone criticised the philosopher, “by laws without force of law”, which, however, would have the peculiarity of being no longer promulgated from “above” and then applied “below” but, on the contrary, of being thought from “below” and applied “above”, where the “below” itself would also be the main authority. In other words, the respect for the new code should be demanded first from those who control the nuclear power on the forefront. Nevertheless, its radicality would not lie so much here—that is, in the reverse direction of the

with the two major moral scandals and with our task today, should be titled as MAXIMA MORALIA”.

¹² G. ANDERS, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki*, in id., *Hiroshima ist überall*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–52.

¹³ G. ANDERS, *Nach “Holocaust”*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

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prescriptibility of the new code of ethics of the atomic era (no more from the top down, but from the bottom up)—rather, the most subversive element of Ander’s proposal would be in, so to speak, the keeping of a moral posture: “the task of moral is exactly to discredit and *dissolve the immorality which holds power illegally. The voice of morality, when legality is immoral, is the voice of resistance*”.¹⁴ So, Anders considers the necessity of a new code of ethics, new not only in its contents, as we will see soon, but, first of all, new in its form, which is to say, in the safeguarding of the morality already implicit in the *resistance* that faces the immorality that is very often combined with political power. Consequently, *resistance* against immorality in general, and against political immorality in particular, could be recognised as the first moral attitude.

As perhaps many already know, Adorno equally feels the need for a radically new ethics, and, in his *Negative Dialectics* (1966), he formulates a new categorical imperative valid exactly in the “after Auschwitz”: “a new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen”.¹⁵ He then adds a crucial point, very close to the “contents” of Ander’s ethics, because, as we will show, the body element plays a decisive role:

Dealing discursively with it would be an outrage, for the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum—bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed...It is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives.¹⁶

Therefore, radically different morals are necessary in Adorno’s opinion too. But before getting to this content more specifically, and thus before arriving at the heart of this analysis, it is important to note that, also for the philosopher of Frankfurt, the first moral posture, and even the first philosophical aptitude of a philosophy of the “after”, is, as in Anders’s opinion, *resistance*, meant as critical lucidity. In fact, he writes clearly that “the power of this resistance is the only criterion of philosophy

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35. (italics mine).

¹⁵ T. W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics*, (E.B. Ashton, trans.), Continuum, New York, 1973, p. 365.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

today”.¹⁷ In other words, philosophy can still make sense and be useful for human beings, at least by making them aware as objectively as possible of themselves, of what happened, of what happened to other people and, albeit indirectly, to them too, of what could still happen; and it can even allow them to gain leeway in reality, even if only in the contraposition to current forces, in the opposition to what never seems to change—in short, in the resistance that does not come to terms with barbarity, even if its range would be minimal or minimalistic. Adorno writes in a memorable lesson of 1965:

Philosophy seems to me to represent the only chance, within the boundaries of this departmentalized world, of making good *at least* a part of what, as I have tried to explain to you, is otherwise denied. If one is not oneself capable at each moment of identification with the victims, and of alert awareness and remembrance, philosophy, in the necessary forms of its own reification, is perhaps the only form of consciousness which, by seeing through these matters and making them conscious in a more objective form, can *at least* do *something*, a small part of that which we are unable to do.¹⁸

Therefore, philosophical reflection is necessary as *resistance*, and it would act, in Adorno’s opinion, at least in this “*at least*”. Certainly, someone might observe that the resistance of which Anders speaks is mainly active in the moral-political field and is to be understood as resistance against immorality above all, whereas the resistance of which Adorno speaks is strictly philosophical and, I would go so far as to say, related to the end of metaphysics; equally, a distinction must be made between, on the one hand, the minimal, not to say minimalistic, philosophical gaze of the latter concerning the force of the ability for action implicit within resistance and of the *parva* possibility implied in the expression *at least* which he uses and, on the other, Anders’s maximum philosophical gaze aimed at the highest issues and at the immeasurableness of the alternative between nuclear disarmament and the annihilation of humanity as a whole. It is as if the one, Adorno, were more rapt by the *microscopic*, while the other, Anders, by the *macroscopic*, in their common search for lucidity or clarity into the heart of darkness, and in their resistance as well, whether “kept small” or “made big”.

¹⁷ T.W. ADORNO, *Wozu noch Philosophie*, in *Eingriffe. Neun kritische Modelle*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1977, cit. p. 471: “Die Kraft solchen Widerstandes ist das einzige Maß von Philosophie heute”.

¹⁸ T. W. ADORNO, *Metaphysics. Concept and problems* (E. Jephcott, trans.), Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001, p. 124.

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Moreover, if Adorno conceives of the philosophy of the “after”, after the world darkened, as a philosophy of resistance, a philosophy that resists prejudices, lies, and, above all, the ancient certainties and absolutes, a similar proposition and idea remain true also for Anders. In a passage deserving of greater commentary, which deals with the debt that the Viennese philosopher has with his Jewish roots, he writes as follows with his prose, paroxytone and incandescent at the same time:

Now I know what my root is. Its formula is: “You shall not make unto you any image.” It is that which feeds all my passions. As “philosopher”, my activity consists only in obeying this precept, in the struggle against all absolutes built by man: that is to say, in the iconoclasm.¹⁹

However, if resistance is the first moral posture, and even the main philosophical posture after the darkness that Auschwitz and Hiroshima imposed on the world, what exactly should we resist?

One should—but maybe it’s better to speak personally, so *I, we* should—resist the hypnosis, the illusion, the lie, the blindness, namely the blind and reified consciousness of mass society, of consumption, of products and of these as ends; resist, moreover, the docile acceptance facing all that happens as if it were part of the natural course of things, resist that form of consciousness that, as Adorno says in a Benjaminian sort of way, “adapts itself to the world as it is, which obeys the principle of inertia. And this principle of inertia truly is what is radically evil”;²⁰ and, finally, resist the idea that everything is already accomplished, and therefore, in philosophy as in life, resist the idea of having to “copy” the world and of having to mirror what exists, all in order to, instead, face the *ultimate*, or even the “absolutely unthinkable”.²¹ In short, as both these philosophers suggest, we should be able to conceive the “absolutely unthinkable” just because it was conceived and even realised. Anders writes, “The moral premise of truth is, today, the imagination”,²² and, according to the warning of an even more explicit formulation written in a letter of 1959 addressed to Claude Eatherly, the pilot who gave the order to drop the bomb on Hiroshima:

¹⁹ G. ANDERS, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²⁰ T. W. ADORNO, *Metaphysics. Concept and problems*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² G. ANDERS, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

You should strive to widen the scope limited to your imagination (and that even narrower of the feeling), so that feeling and imagination come to learn and conceive the enormity that you have already been able to produce; so that you could accept or reject what you have understood. In short, your task is that to widen your *moral imagination*.²³

“Moral imagination”: there is much to say, to think, even to invent, about this expression, this idea, which is absolutely unprecedented in the field of moral philosophy—unprecedented because on imagination or fancy are founded no more eventual aesthetical categories, but exactly the premises of a new ethic capable of observing the happening, of approaching it and able, above all, to imagine the enormity of what could still happen. The imagination and its dilatation are not so much a *divertissement* as they are an ethical task, whose achievement is not up to the pilot of Hiroshima merely as a means to clear his conscience, but up to each man and woman because it would allow them to imagine the enormity of what happened and the immeasurableness of what still threatens. Therefore, for Anders, stigmatised rightly or wrongly by his critics as “the philosopher of desperation”, widening the spheres of feeling and imagination is the first step of the new code of ethics in the age of the darkened world, one world “after Auschwitz and Hiroshima”. In other words, alongside a resistance that is, as we were saying, the first moral posture *in form*, and even the first philosophical attitude, suddenly imagination and feeling arise as the very first, almost primordial, elements of the *content* of a new ethical code. Even before the “commandments of the atomic era”, which Anders also enumerates in several of his books, circumscribed from six to ten points, imagination and feeling arise, at the beginning of this new era, as the possible “instruments” or, better yet, “foundations”—but in quotation marks, since the word ‘foundation’ is already too compromised—of the new ethics.

Having however to abandon the just approached shores of imagination and fancy, I head, in this little search into the obscure, towards feeling, because this, and not the others, is at the basis of the new Adornian morality and is the fulcrum of its categorical imperative. There are several similarities between the two philosophers, those already detected certainly, but many other *leitmotivs* revolve precisely around feelings: for example, the feeling of being survivors, not only in relation to the past

²³ G. ANDERS, *Off limits für das Gewissen. Der Briefwechsel zwischen dem Hiroshima-Piloten Claude Eatherly und Günther Anders* [1961], in id., *Hiroshima ist überall*, C. H. Beck, München, 1995, pp. 219–220.

and to what happened, but also in relation to what will happen in the future, the feeling of being or having been survivors in the future, we could say; moreover, the feeling of respect and reserve—I would say absolute, sacral, if these terms were still appropriate—towards the dead. The dead, the dead of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, of “the millions that have been annihilated for nothing – and then again for nothing”,²⁴ inhabit the pages of their writings. But the feeling that these dead arouse in the two philosophers is different: in Anders shame rules, the shame of “being men”²⁵ and of having allowed so much, in short, the shame as the expression of the refusal and, at the same time, of the sharing of those responsibilities that led to devastation and would lead to the apocalypse; in Adorno, there is more a looming feeling of guilt, the fault of having the vital breath that another no longer has, mixed with self-preservation instinct—already guilty—as what impedes each reconciliation with life. According to Adorno, it is not at all wrong to wonder “whether after Auschwitz you can go on living”.²⁶ In him, this sense of guilt is characterized even as a nightmare “of a man killed twenty years earlier”.²⁷ In his words, “the guilt of a life which purely as a fact will strangle other life, according to statistics that eke out an overwhelming number of killed with a minimal number of rescued...is irreconcilable with living. And the guilt does not cease to reproduce itself, because not for an instant can it be made fully, presently conscious”.²⁸ This sense of guilt, which can be neither constant nor constantly present to conscience—and which, for that reason, also increases the fault—is nevertheless, once again, what obligates Adorno and what would obligate others to philosophize. It is the feeling of guilt, united with the feeling of un-reconciliation and also that of anger, of abhorrence, which is the motor of a philosophy and an ethics of the “after”, of a philosophy and an ethic certainly proved by the events, but above all upset by the fact that these same events incite both philosophy and ethics to look deeper and deeper into the monstrous, the unconceivable and what is “down-to-earth”.

But there is something more. The feeling, actually and more precisely, a certain physical reaction associated with the feeling of abhorrence or revolt, comes to

²⁴ G. ANDERS, *Die Toten. Rede über die drei Weltkriege*, in id., *Hiroshima ist überall*, C. H. Beck, München, 1995, p. 363.

²⁵ G. ANDERS, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki*, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁶ T. W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., p. 363. With regard to the possibility/impossibility of living “after Auschwitz”, refer also to the already mentioned seminars of 1965 collected in id., *Metaphysics*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

found in some way the new ethics, both in Anders and in Adorno. In Adorno it is clear when, in relation to the categorical imperative, he explains:

For the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum—bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed even with individuality about to vanish as a form of mental reflection.²⁹

Bodily, therefore, because our reaction—the abhorrence becomes “practical”—facing the “unbearable physical agony” of those we have not known, facing the outrage that their bodies suffered, is bodily, belongs to our way of feeling, to the feeling of our body. In other words, in the categorical imperative of Adorno the force of the “not” and of the “never”, of the “never again”, is conveyed by our “practical abhorrence” and the “unbearable physical agony” the victims suffered and to which by now everyone has been exposed. In short, physical agony is the basis of the imperative; our abhorrence is the answer to this foundation, and it becomes the “foundation” of ethics. In fact, this physical abhorrence, or this feeling of the unbearable, or again this physical aversion that we feel with regard to the extreme suffering of and insult against those dead, is not only the result of the fear of being potentially exposed to a similar torment, namely another expression of self-preservation and the identification process; nor is it the simple expression of a foolish refusal of the common human destiny—and of the “living”—in the experience of suffering. That feeling of abhorrence is not generated from sufferance/suffering in general, but arises, inasmuch as it is a repulsion particularly toward the suffering and insult born by bodies during the mass extermination. So, what Adorno seems to be saying is that this aversion, which our own body feels with regard to the destruction of the “stacked” bodies in Auschwitz, is an acknowledgement of individuality, of those singularities violated, and violated even into their corporeality. And if it is true that individuality is more than integrity and physical specificity/singularity, it is also true that it is *at least* physical integrity. Therefore, the physical abhorrence we feel in this “after” that never ends, becomes an acknowledgement *at least* of the other’s individuality and physical singularity. And in that, it is maximally, that is to say minimally, moral.

In Anders, it is equally in the feeling of abhorrence and in the physical reaction that a *rest* nestles, a *minimum* of morality. Whether it is the feeling of the “throat

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 365

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tightly closed”³⁰ upon seeing the image of a desolated and desertified land in the atomic nothing or the feeling disgust for the unbearable view of the remains of the gas chambers, the sphere of morality seems to move exactly in this strange hybrid of physical reaction and feeling/emotion. In reference to an account by Adolf Eichmann on the sense of nausea due to the blood of the mass murdered that poured out, Anders, writing to Eichmann’s son, said:

It is difficult to judge which is the most terrible thing: maybe it is the event that he reports, or his reaction or the fact that the stomach has become the last asylum of civilization and *pity*, that bestiality and morality have exchanged places. The conclusion we reach is that he had to do everything in order to contrast the danger of *a physiological irruption of morality* in the implementation of his project.³¹

“*A physiological irruption of morality*”, I underline this expression by Anders just as I underlined Adorno’s “*practical abhorrence*”. In these bodily reactions, in the throat or the stomach, associated with the feeling of abhorrence, of revolt or whatever you want to call it—which perhaps we should begin to decipher and name—there is a *minimum* trace of morality. Anders reports, and it is important to mention this here, that at the Nagasaki Museum, he could see the monstrous enclosed into showcases, and what provoked in him this feeling of indignation, of anger and even of escape, was accompanied, however, by the need to understand: a man’s hand melted with a beer bottle, a false bottom-helmet, constituted precisely by the helmet and by the skullcap melted together by the “flash”, and, above all, a shadow, only a shadow, imprinted on the wall, of which he writes: “what do you see on the wall? It is true. There is something. A profile, a shadow. The shadow of a man....Peter Schlemihl’s shadow. A depersonalised shadow. Become autonomous. A shadow becomes eternal”.³² A sensation of opposition, a “Stop!” arising from such an inexpressible object, monstrous, unimaginable, a shadow without man and made intelligible only by the caption of the showcase:

³⁰ G. ANDERS, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki*, op. cit., p. 79.

³¹ G. ANDERS, *Wir Eichmannsöhne. Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann*, op. cit., p. 39.

³² G. ANDERS, *Der Mann auf der Brücke. Tagebuch aus Hiroshima und Nagasaki*, op. cit., p. 131.

On the morning of the 9th a man leaned against the wall without suspecting anything. In that moment the thunder broke out. And in a while the wall was a burning surface, and the man reduced to ashes. But the area of the wall covered and protected by the man in the last split second of his existence did not burn. That piece of wall was *fixed*, like in a picture taken with a magnesium flash. As in a negative. For it is the only trace remaining of his days and the only one destined to survive.³³

Enough! I go no further in wanting to show what is hardly conceivable, but I shift the focus on Anders's reaction, which we can deduce from this account and to which, paradoxically, painfully, the philosopher himself appeals in the formulation of his new code of ethics: only thanks to this feeling of revolt and opposition, only thanks to this "stop!" and this "no!" is it possible to think of creating a new way of feeling and, consequently, a new way of thinking. In other words, if it is true that in feeling and in the feeling of revolt toward the unbearable, the *rest* of morality emerges, as we were saying earlier, it is also true that the inadequacy of our feeling is what allowed and would still allow the disaster. And if, moreover, we consider the fact that, in the atomic age, what we should hopefully react to becomes exactly boundless, then we can understand that "even our feeling inevitably jams", because the boundless, or the "too large", leave and left cold, unmoved. Therefore, the danger is increasingly serious, because, in Anders's words, we become "emotional illiterates" having to face immeasurableness: "six million remains a figure, while if we talk of ten murdered maybe something echoes inside of us somehow and just one murdered fills us with horror".³⁴ As for that shadow fixed on the wall. Now, precisely because of the fact that the inadequacy of our feeling makes the repetition of these very terrifying situations possible, it is necessary to build ever more, allow me this expression, this moral "muscle", which lies precisely in feeling or physical perception, and, at the same time and in this way, to stem ever more the coldness or this illiteracy of emotions. Adorno, for his part, also teaches, in the radio broadcast that has become a text titled *Education after Auschwitz*³⁵ (1966), that barbarity will continue to exist so long as the conditions that made that disaster possible continue to persist, and that the attempts to hinder the repetition—the "never again"—should be sought precisely in the direction

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ G. ANDERS, *Wir Eichmannsöhne. Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

³⁵ T. W. ADORNO, *Education after Auschwitz*, in *id.*, *Can One live after Auschwitz. A philosophical reader*, ed. by R. Tiedeman, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, pp. 19–37.

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of the culprits, going in the opposite direction to coldness and trying to develop their conscience at most.

Ethics would thus seem to inscribe itself into a physical and emotional reaction. For the morality of this bodily reaction, which concerns feelings, facing the monstrous, facing even the loss of bodily individuality—whether it is that of the piled and insulted corpses of Auschwitz or that of the dissolution of the bodies in the fusion of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—becomes the moment in which the other’s body, that in which the other is body, made itself morally visible, even in a shadow, in that only shadow without man that Anders describes. Since all this is produced in the context of the “moral’s eclipses” and in a world by now darkened, morality then survives *at least* in letting this bodily, physical, and emotional motive, prevail and be valid, the motive also called ‘feeling’ by the two philosophers, and in letting ourselves be materialized by this “materialistic motive”: it is only “in the unvarnished materialistic motive”³⁶ that morality survives, as Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*. After the eclipse of morality, the eclipse of reason, after the world darkened and blurred our life as well as our sight, ethics can only survive by finding its “fragile foundation”, its cracked and upset “foundation”, in the materiality and fragility of the body. With Adorno, “the somatic, unmeaningful stratum of life is the stage of suffering, of the suffering which in the camps, without any consolation, burned every soothing feature out of the mind”.³⁷ For the mind, with all its derivation, with its false products and its legislations, including those of all morals that in no way prevented those disasters, burned in the death-chamber or on the Japanese land, it is up to the body to become the material place of the “fragile foundation” of a new ethic that remains, however, as all scuppered pains, without consolation. An ethics that has nothing either reassuring or spiritual, a restless ethics, imposed during a state of subjugation and included in a state of emergency, an ethics that has no presumption of having anything to do with freedom. An ethics therefore “without consolation”, as imposed by powerful people of history, “by Hitler” and by Truman, risen only in our physical and emotional response facing the horror and the unbearability of those monstrosities.

The world has been darkened. Our body has been shaken and will shake again. But *at least* that will keep us awake.

³⁶ T. W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

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