

No Excuse ? Live !

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No Excuse? Live!

A Materialist Breviary of Lucidity

**Anatomy of Our Alibis,
Philosophical Arsenal, and a
Manuel for Rebirth Without
An Afterworld**

Michel Misrez

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In the collection
Believe? Who, What? Me?

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A Materialist Breviary of Lucidity

Not everything is all right.
Not everything may ever be all right.
But that does not give me the right to give up on living.

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How to Read This Book

This book can be read as a crossing.
From the anvil to the spark.
From the causes that shape us to the gestures that make us capable.
From the wound acknowledged to the alibi unmasked.
From the masks of flight to the philosophical arsenal.
From gesture to transmission.
From the absence of guarantee to earthly joy.
But it can also be read otherwise.
In fragments.
As calls.
Out of inner necessity.
One may enter through a wound.
Through a weariness.
Through a complaint.
Through a sentence that disturbs.
Through a philosopher.
Through a gesture.
Through a page opened almost at random.
For the alibi does not always present itself in order.
Nor does life.
It is therefore not necessary to understand everything before beginning to read.
It is not necessary to follow each step as though it were a compulsory staircase.

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The reader may move forward, return, skip ahead, begin again, stop.

A chapter may be enough for a day.

A sentence may be enough for a week.

A question may be enough to shift a life by a single degree.

The book has an inner spine:

What do you now do with what made you?

This is the question that binds the pages together.

Whether one reads it from the first line to the last, or opens it where something calls, the same movement is at work:

to see more clearly,

not to hate oneself,

to seek the possible gesture,

and to let the air return.

It is not, then, a matter of reading quickly.

It is a matter of reading rightly.

As one enters a room in search of a window.

As one looks for a handle in a wall.

As one recognizes an old sentence, then takes away a little of its empire.

This book does not require the reader to follow it obediently.

It asks only that the reader not flee from himself entirely.

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DEDICATION

To the one I do not name,
but whose Norman voice
taught me to walk without guarantee,
to inhabit life laid bare,
and to stand upright in tragic joy.

Not consoled.
Not saved.
But returned to the real.
And already, within that real,
something was breathing.

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Initial Tribute

Through your words, we learn to walk without guarantees.
You do not console us: you restore us to the real. You offer
neither refuge nor a beyond, but a higher demand: to dwell
in bare life, that is, to consent to this fragile, bodily, finite
existence without asking it to justify itself before the sky.
Where others promise salvation,
you teach presence.

Where others paint over the abyss,
you invite us to look into it without ceasing to love.
To stand upright in tragic joy is not to believe that all is
well. It is not to deny suffering, nor to turn trial into moral
ornament. It is simply to refuse the notion that suffering
has a monopoly on truth.

It is to know that nothing is guaranteed
and yet to choose to walk on.

Then something rises.

Not certainty.

Not promise.

But a clarity sufficient to take one more step.

Thus your words do not save us from life.

They bring us back to it. More naked.

More lucid.

More alive.

And perhaps that is the whole of serious joy:
to ask no longer that life spare us,
but to learn how to inhabit it.

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Intimate Epigraph

I see, and I understand.
When I understand, I see.
Then the alibi loses its hold.

And when the alibi yields,
the world has not yet changed,
but the air returns.

— Michel Misrez

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Note on the Author's Intent

The title No Excuses? Live! is blunt.

It can be misunderstood.

“Exist” names a presence.

“To live” implies a passage.

One could hear in it a condemnation of the one who falls, an injunction to get back up too quickly, a way of turning fatigue into fault.

That would miss the heart of the book.

This is not about speaking at the moment of impact.

It is not about asking someone who is bleeding to produce a philosophy of recovery at once.

There is a time for shelter, for care, for silence, for justice, and sometimes for survival alone.

But there is another time as well.

A later, more fragile time, when something becomes possible again.

Then the question changes.

It no longer asks: “Why did you fall?”

It asks: “What are you now making of what has happened to you?”

Only at that threshold does the question of excuse begin.

Then you can continue directly with:

No Excuses? does not mean:

“you are guilty.”

It means: “even wounded, life must not be surrendered

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without a fight to what has wounded it.”

This book knows that wounds exist.

Here is a natural, literary English version that stays very close to the thought of the French:

He knows that some shocks unmake a person, that some forms of violence first require us to protect ourselves, to go quiet, to heal, to withdraw, to ask for justice or redress. He knows that one does not ask a bruised body, a shattered soul, a life in ruins to leap at once toward joy.

Nothing here celebrates hardness.

Nothing here despises vulnerability.

Nothing here confuses freedom with an injunction to perform.

This book does not deny the wound.

It merely refuses to let it become sovereign.

It poses a later, quieter, but decisive question.

Not at the moment of impact.

Not at the heart of collapse.

But once the time for care, protection, or silence has been respected.

Only then does a question return:

What are we making of what has reached us?

Must the wound become our only dwelling?

Must suffering become our identity?

Must the injustice endured be given the power to speak in our place until the end?

Only there does the question of alibi begin.

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Here is a faithful, natural English rendering in literary
Anglo-Saxon style:

Not against pain.

But against its final dominion.

And when that dominion begins to falter, even a little, it is
not yet joy.

But it is already less night.

To distinguish, in order not to brutalize

To avoid any misunderstanding, a few words that common
usage often confuses must be distinguished: to explain, to
justify, to apologize, to give oneself an alibi, to be
responsible, to be guilty.

These distinctions are not theoretical refinements. They
protect the very heart of this book. For if one confuses
understanding with indulgence, responsibility with guilt,
wound with alibi, then thought itself becomes unjust. It
strikes where it should discern.

To explain is not to excuse.

To explain is to seek causes: to understand where a fear, an
anger, an exhaustion, a violence, an impotence comes from.
Any serious thought begins there. Nothing is more
dangerous than a morality that condemns without
understanding.

Here is a faithful, natural English rendering in literary style:

To justify is something else.

To justify is to say: since this can be explained, then it
becomes legitimate.

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Yet not everything that can be explained is therefore acceptable. A wound may explain a reaction; it does not necessarily justify destroying one's own life or that of others. An excuse can be rightful when it acknowledges a real limit: an exhausted body, an impossible situation, violence suffered, a fragility that needs time.

But it becomes dangerous when it turns into a lasting permission never to answer to life again.

In this book, an alibi names that slide.

It is the moment when a real cause, a real pain, a real injustice, no longer merely explains our difficulty and becomes a dwelling, an identity, a permanent license for helplessness.

An alibi does not always lie.

That is what makes it so formidable.

It takes hold of a truth, then diverts its consequence.

I can keep going in the same register for the next passage if you want.

He says: "This happened to me," and concludes: "therefore I no longer have to answer."

There lies the passage to be examined. There lies the dangerous point.

But as soon as that passage appears, something loosens.

Truth ceases to be a closed room. It becomes a possible path again.

Not yet full deliverance.

But a bolt has shifted.

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Responsibility is not guilt

Responsibility does not mean that everything depends on us.

It means that, even amid what determines us, a share of response can sometimes open up. To be responsible is not to be all-powerful. It is not to make oneself from nothing. It is not to deny the body, childhood, class, injury, one's time, the unconscious.

To be responsible is to recognize the fragile place where an act remains possible.

Sometimes that act is tiny.

A word held back.

A violence not passed on.

A truth spoken.

A forgiveness asked for.

An escape interrupted.

A complaint shifted by a millimeter toward action.

It is little. But it is already a response.

Guilt, by contrast, accuses the being.

Here is a natural English rendering that keeps the nuance and tone of the French:

She says: "It's your fault." "You are blameworthy."

"You are the problem."

That is not what this book is saying.

It is not a matter of piling more burden onto those who suffer. On the contrary, it is a matter of seeking how to lighten life of whatever keeps it prisoner.

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This book therefore never confuses understanding with indulgence, responsibility with guilt, wound with alibi.

It tries only to think through that delicate passage where what has reached us risks speaking in our place.

We are not responsible for all our causes. But when an act becomes possible, however poor, however fragile, something in us ceases to be only defeated. And that small victory is sometimes enough to make morning livable.

Philosophers as Weapons of Lucidity

I owe Michel Onfray's Popular University less a system than a method: learning to read the map of the world in order to walk more surely through real life.

This book asks how a being shaped by forces, wounded, and traversed by causes can nonetheless recover a share of power. It does not believe in magical freedom. It does not believe in absolute innocence. It does not believe in salvation from elsewhere. It believes only this: an intelligence brave enough to look at its own alibis can become a force of transformation. And that transformation, even when tiny, is sometimes enough to strike a spark.

This book does not summon philosophers as statues. It does not ask them to decorate the argument or to provide an erudite gallery. It calls on them as weapons of lucidity, as demanding mirrors, as companions in the work of unveiling. Spinoza will help us understand the causes that move through us.

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Nietzsche, to unmask resentment, revenge-morality, and suspicious virtues.

Camus, to live without guarantee, without metaphysical consolation.

Epicurus and Lucretius, to return to the earth, to the body, to the material simplicity of living.

Freud, to distrust our inner narratives.

La Rochefoucauld, to uncover the ruses of self-love.

Bourdieu, to remind us that no human being is ever self-made.

Arendt will help us think responsibility within the shared world.

Simone Weil will help us relearn attention.

Girard will help us understand the violence that seeks a scapegoat.

Onfray will remind us that bare life is not a poor life, but one freed from beyond-worlds.

These authors will therefore not be ornaments.

They will be mirrors.

Each of them will pose a question:

What is it that I do not want to see?

And all of them will bring us back to this central question:

Where do I turn what explains me into permission not to act any longer?

Thought will not be a decoration of existence here.

It will be an instrument of disclosure.

But disclosure is not enough.

Here is a more natural, literarily faithful English version:

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Thought must reopen a path, however narrow it may be. It must give the reader not only the wound of seeing, but the sober joy of no longer lying to oneself entirely.

This book would like to be that: an anatomy of our alibis, an arsenal of lucidity, a handbook of rebirth without any beyond-world.

Not to judge life.

To restore passage to it.

If you want, I can also make the whole passage more Camus-like, more academic, or more biblical in cadence.

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OPENING

This civilization is exhausted.

So everything must be started over.

Not in order to go backward.

But in order to stop disappearing.

We live in an age that can explain almost everything, yet no longer quite knows how to live. It analyzes, classifies, explains, excuses, contextualizes, diagnoses. It has words for all its failures, theories for all its impotence, circumstances for all its cowardice.

It knows how to say why it is falling.

It knows less well how to rise again.

That is its deepest exhaustion: not the absence of intelligence, but the use of intelligence against the force of living. Not the absence of knowledge, but the transformation of knowledge into yet another source of fatigue. Not the absence of lucidity, but a lucidity that has at times become sterile, ironic, protective, incapable of producing an act.

Certainly – here is a polished English translation, keeping a serious, essayistic tone for an Anglo-Saxon readership: We have become experts in explanation. But to explain is not yet to answer.

We know how to explain our renunciations, to contextualize our cowardice, to wrap our lies in higher reasons. We do not lack discourse; we lack truth.

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Montaigne saw it: we never stop glossing ourselves. We comment on comments, then on the comments on those comments, until we lose contact with what was meant to be thought. A civilization can live on commentary so long as commentary remains a path toward truth. But when it becomes a screen, when it replaces confrontation with reality, it no longer transmits anything: it covers over.

The West has not exhausted itself merely by commenting on its founding texts. It has exhausted itself by preserving the habit of commentary after losing the courage to believe, to judge, and to name. Then explanation becomes an alibi. Nuance becomes a refuge. Complexity becomes anesthesia. A civilization can die of falsehood. It can also wear itself out under the weight of its justifications.

It does not die only because it lies. It dies because, every day, it must explain why its lie should still count as a form of truth.

We are not only drowned in lies. We are drowned in the reasons given not to call them lies anymore.

Yes, this does touch on a part of the West's decline — not because the West would have thought too much, but because it has gradually substituted the endless management of discourse for thought itself.

It no longer thinks reality. It comments on its own evasions. A civilization saturated with discourse, but emptied of truth. For the modern alibi is rarely crude.

It does not simply say: "I do not want to."

He says: "I can't, and here is why."

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He does not present himself as refusing, but as analyzing. He does not deny reality; he selects a fragment of it in order to organize impotence around it.

There is always a reason.

A wound. A childhood. An era. An injustice. A social class. A trauma. Fatigue. Fear. A diagnosis. A system. A world that is too heavy.

And often, these reasons are true.

That is precisely why they become dangerous when they turn into alibis.

A false reason is quickly disproved. A true reason, however, can become a fortress. At first it protects. Then it traps. It explains a delay, then justifies an entire life brought to a halt. It sheds light on a suffering, then gives it a throne.

That is where the danger begins.

Not in the wound.

But in its crowning.

Not in explanation.

But in its transformation into fate.

Not in determinism.

But in the use we make of it to renounce every margin of freedom.

We must therefore begin again.

Not by starting from zero, for no one ever starts from zero.

We are made of causes, bodies, histories, constraints, memories, inequalities, chance. Nothing in us is a pure beginning. But between the fantasy of absolute freedom and

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total surrender to determinism, there is a fragile space. That space is sometimes called: a gesture.

Not a miracle.

A gesture.

A tiny shift in repetition. A less cowardly word. A less complicit silence.

An interrupted transmission. A grievance that does not become doctrine.

A wound that does not govern the whole house.
A fatigue that asks for rest instead of turning itself into a metaphysics of failure.

It is little.

But this little is immense.

For every life that begins again does not begin with a victory.

It begins with a slight refusal to disappear entirely.

This book begins there.

With this fatigue of civilization.

With this intelligence that has sometimes become complicit in powerlessness.

With this modern way of explaining everything until nothing is left to demand of oneself.

With this temptation to turn every cause into an exemption.

From that gentle slope where lucidity turns into an excuse, where wound becomes identity, where misfortune becomes sovereignty.

But it does not begin there in order to accuse.

It begins there in order to reopen.

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For in lucidity there is something other than a knife. There is a light. A hard light, no doubt. A light that does not flatter. A light that strips bare narratives, postures, settled complaints, the fine explanations behind which we sometimes hide our refusal to live.

But when it truly illuminates, this light does not destroy.

It makes the passage visible.

And seeing the passage, however narrow, already changes the prison.

No excuse?

The phrase is harsh.

It is meant to be.

It is not there to strike the weak, the wounded, the defeated, the exhausted. It is not there to humiliate those who struggle to remain standing. It does not say: “you could do everything.”

It does not say: “you only had to.”

It does not say: “your suffering does not matter.”

It says only: Do not turn what explains you into a final permission to disappear.

Here is a refined English version, keeping the philosophical and essayistic tone:

This is the heart of it.

An excuse can be valid. A limit can be real. An impossibility can, for a time, be total. There are hours when one can do nothing. There are lives crushed by forces greater than themselves. There are situations in which the first dignity lies not in acting, but in surviving.

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This book knows that.

It will never speak from the cruel comfort of one who judges from a distance.

But it does ask this: when something becomes possible again, even if only barely, even if trembling, even if tiny, what do we do with it?

That is where the question begins.

Not before. Not when a person is on the ground.

But when a hand, however fragile, can begin to search for support.

Then the excuse can become an alibi.

Then the cause can become a crown.

Then the explanation can become a prison.

Then the wound can become authority.

And that is when one must ask: no excuse?

With a question mark.

For this book is not a verdict.

It is a trial.

A question addressed to everyone, first of all to the one writing it:

Where am I protecting myself?

Where am I lying to myself?

Here is a polished English version, keeping the reflective and philosophical tone:

Where am I turning a truth into a refuge against life?

Where have I made my wound into a pass?

Where have I given my past the right to decide once more?

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These questions are not comfortable.

But they can be liberating.

For it sometimes happens that a life is not enclosed by the most visible wall, but by the sentence that declares it impassable.

Changing the sentence does not always destroy the wall. But it makes the first step toward it possible.

And sometimes that is how deliverance begins: not with the disappearance of the obstacle, but with the end of its absoluteness.

Live!

The second word in the title is the most important.

Live!

Not merely survive in complaint.

Not merely function through fatigue.

Not merely tell oneself stories forever.

Not merely wait for the world to be repaired before consenting to breathe.

Live.

That is, reconnect with the minimal power to exist. With the body.

With the morning.

The table. The bread.

Walking. Work.

Friendship. Desire.

Laughter. Thought. The outstretched hand.

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The right phrase. The silence that no longer accuses.

Joy that no longer asks for metaphysical permission.

To live is not to deny the tragic.

It is to refuse to let it have the last word before we have even spoken.

Living does not mean believing that everything depends on us.

It means seeking what still depends, even a little, on us, amid everything that does not.

Living does not mean abolishing causes.

It means ceasing to hand them all the keys to the house.

That is why this book will be materialist.

It will not seek salvation outside the world. It will promise no redemption. It will invent no heaven to offset the injustice of the earth. It will not say that suffering has a hidden meaning, that trials always ennoble, that everything happens for a reason.

No.

Some things only destroy.

Some forms of violence contain no lesson.

Some losses do not make one better.

Some misfortunes deserve no poetry.

But even in a world without guarantees, one task remains: not to add to the violence endured the inner surrender that would give it the final word forever.

It is not a matter of conquering life.

It is a matter of not abandoning it too quickly.

Then a singular kind of joy can come into being.

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Not the joy of the innocent.

Not the joy of the distracted.

Not the joy of those who have seen nothing.

A lower joy, a graver joy, a more earthly joy.

The joy of one who knows that nothing is saved, but that not everything is lost.

The joy of one who has stopped confusing lucidity with renunciation.

The joy of one who discovers that a margin still exists.

A joy of passage.

A joy of breach.

A small thrill before the return of air.

That is the joy this book seeks.

Not as decoration.

As deliverance.

The Project

This book offers an anatomy.

It seeks to examine the alibis through which we stop responding to life while preserving the appearance of lucidity.

The alibi of the wound. The alibi of childhood. The alibi of the age we live in.

The alibi of the system. The alibi of fatigue. The alibi of diagnosis.

The alibi of suffering. The alibi of resentment. The alibi of purity. The alibi of victimhood. The alibi of "that's just the

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way I am.” The alibi of “it’s too late.” The alibi of “what’s the point?”

Each contains a measure of truth.

Each becomes dangerous when it turns into a sovereign power.

This book will not, therefore, deny the forces that shape us. It will seek to move through them without turning them into gods.

Nor will it preach some abstract doctrine of willpower. It will seek, within the very substance of our constraints, the places where a gesture remains possible.

That gesture may be tiny.

But sometimes it is enough to redirect a life.

For freedom may not be an empire.

Sometimes it is a beginning again. An inward turning around.

An interrupted transmission. A less false sentence.

A refusal to take revenge.

An act of attention.

A complaint that becomes a request.

An explanation that once again becomes a path.

The book will therefore proceed between two refusals.

A refusal of brutal moralism, which condemns without understanding.

A refusal of total determinism, which understands until every possibility of response dissolves.

Between the two lies active lucidity.

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The kind that sees the causes, yet searches for the margin.
The kind that acknowledges the wound, yet refuses to let it rule.

The kind that unmask the alibi, yet restores the breath.
The kind that says no to the fiction of omnipotence, but also no to the intoxicating allure of powerlessness.

It is a narrow line.

But the narrowest passages are sometimes the ones that let in the most light.

Method

To move forward, we will need companions.

Not masters to be revered.

Tools to be taken up.

The philosophers, moralists, poets, sociologists, psychoanalysts, and writers summoned here will not be authorities placed above the text. They will be guides, each bringing a different lamp.

Spinoza: understanding causes without hatred.

Nietzsche: unmasking resentment and disguised moralities.

Camus: standing firm in the absurd without lying.

Epicurus and Lucretius: returning to the body, to simple needs, to earthly peace.

Freud: questioning the stories we tell ourselves within.

La Rochefoucauld: tracing the detours of self-love.

Bourdieu: reminding us of the weight of society, structures, and inheritances.

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Arendt: thinking responsibility within the common world.

Simone Weil: learning attention anew.

Girard: seeing the violence that seeks a culprit.

Onfray: inhabiting life without a world beyond this one.

No single one will be enough.

But together, they will help us dismantle our illusions.

Not to build a tribunal. To forge an arsenal.

For sometimes we need weapons in order to free ourselves from ourselves.

Weapons of lucidity. Weapons against settled complaint.

Weapons against bad faith. Weapons against the temptation to turn our pain into a sacred identity.

Weapons against inner servitude.

But a weapon has meaning only if it protects life.

Otherwise, it becomes a form of brutality in its own right.

The lucidity this book seeks will therefore not be cold for the sake of coldness. It will be demanding because it wants to give life back its space. It will not wound in order to dominate. It will open a way to breathe.

The whole task will consist in distinguishing:

what explains from what excuses;

what wounds from what rules;

what determines from what condemns;

what limits from what confines;

what protects from what prevents us from coming into being.

These distinctions are vital.

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For wherever everything is conflated, the alibi flourishes.
Where distinctions are made, a path begins.

What This Book Will Not Do

It will not offer recipes.

It will not say, “Here is how to succeed in life in ten easy steps.” It will not reduce existence to a form of self-help. It will not turn happiness into yet another obligation. It will not transform joy into a performance.

For today there is a tyranny of well-being.

It commands us to be well, resilient, productive, at peace, aligned, and high-performing—even in the process of healing. It demands that everyone repair themselves quickly, tell their story convincingly, market themselves more effectively, and turn their wounds into symbolic capital.

This book refuses all that.

It does not want to turn deliverance into an injunction.

It does not want to add a new source of shame to those who are not yet able to rise again.

It wants only to ask this humble and terrible question:

When I am able to respond, even a little, why do I sometimes prefer to take shelter behind what explains me?

That question is enough.

It is already immense.

It does not demand strength.

It demands honesty.

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And sometimes honesty begins quietly. Not with a great act of courage, but with a small inner admission:

“I am suffering, yes.

But this suffering cannot decide everything.”

At that moment, nothing has yet been won.

But something has changed sides.

Life is no longer entirely on the side of escape.

Who This Book Is For

For those who are no longer satisfied with their own explanations.

For those who vaguely sense that they have every right to suffer, but no right to reduce themselves to that suffering.

For those who know that their childhood matters, yet refuse to let it hold the pen of their future on its own.

For those who understand the violence of structures, but are still searching for the opening through which a gesture might emerge.

For those who have used intelligence as a means of self-protection, only to discover that it could become a cage.

For those who no longer want to turn every wound into a kingdom.

For those who sense that lucidity can be something other than an elegant way of despairing.

For those who no longer believe in salvation, but have not given up on joy.

For those who want to live. Not to triumph.

Not to purify themselves. Not to become exemplary.

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To live. With their causes.
With their scars.
With their limitations.
With their dead.
With their contradictions.
And to live nonetheless.
And perhaps to discover, at the very heart of this absence of
guarantees, a modest gladness.
A joy without heaven.
A joy without lies.
A joy strong enough not to need innocence.

Enter

We must enter now.
Enter the alibis.
Their ruses.
Their elegance.
Their justifications.
Their partial lies.
Their diverted truths.
We will have to look without indulgence.
But also without cruelty.
For we are speaking about ourselves.
The alibi does not exist only in others. It is not found merely
in the age we live in, in public discourse, in social postures,
or in comfortable ideologies. It also inhabits our intimate
sentences. Our noble weariness. Our justified anger. Our

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loyalty to pain. Our ways of saying, "I can't," when some part of us may be whispering, "I no longer want to risk it."

We will therefore have to move forward with rigor.
But also with tenderness.

A tenderness without indulgence. A tenderness that does not stroke the lie, but understands that human beings often construct alibis because they are afraid, because they are suffering, because they have been undone, because they are trying to survive.

We can only properly expose what we understand.
But we can only free what we dare to look at.

So let us enter.

Without guarantees.

Without a world beyond this one.

Without any promise of salvation.

But with this simple conviction:

wherever an alibi falls, even gently, life finds a passage again.

And in that passage, sometimes, a small joy begins.

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Introduction

We have learned to explain everything.

We know how to invoke childhood, environment, the age we live in, the body, trauma, forms of domination, structures, diagnoses, inheritances, vulnerabilities, and determinisms. We know how to say where our fears, our anger, our renunciations, our repetitions, our cowardice, and our inertia come from.

We have grown more intelligent.

But we have not always grown stronger.

For sometimes an explanation, instead of opening a path, closes a door. Sometimes a cause, however real, becomes a barrier. Sometimes a wound, instead of being acknowledged so that it can be traversed, is elevated into an identity. Sometimes a truth is used against life.

That is what this book calls an alibi.

Not a pure lie.

A pure lie is easy to combat. It is exposed, refuted, and brought down by contradiction. An alibi is more subtle. It feeds on truth. It takes an undeniable part of reality and uses it to suspend our response.

It says: "This is why I suffer."

And sometimes it adds, almost imperceptibly: "This is why I no longer have to respond."

That is the transition that matters.

The transition from explanation to exemption.

From the wound to the sovereignty of the wound.

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From determinism to capitulation.

From lucidity to cultivated powerlessness.

From cause to destiny.

This book arises from a suspicion: perhaps our age does not lack explanations, but new beginnings. It does not lack diagnoses, but gestures. It does not lack denunciations, but paths.

It knows how to say what has made us what we are. It knows less well how to ask what we can still do with what has made us.

And perhaps that is where an adult life begins.

Not in the illusion of absolute autonomy. Not in the naïve belief that each person could choose themselves entirely, outside the body, outside history, outside class, outside wounds, outside social forces, outside the unconscious.

That fiction is brutal.

It blames the defeated for all their defeats. It turns inequality into laziness, distress into weakness, and failure into a moral fault. It ignores causes, contexts, violence, and inheritances. It preaches an empty, abstract freedom—one that is often comfortable for those whom the world has already favored.

This book rejects it.

But it also rejects the other fiction: the one that dissolves human beings entirely into what determines them; the one that explains so thoroughly that it ends up removing every possibility of response; the one that turns causes into sacred chains; the one that says: “You are nothing but the product

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of your history, your age, your brain, your class, your wound, your diagnosis.”

That fiction may appear generous.

It understands. It contextualizes. At first, it protects us from guilt. It prevents easy judgment. It reminds us that no one creates themselves alone.

But taken to its logical conclusion, it ends up stealing from human beings their last dignity: the possibility of responding, however modestly, to what moves through them.

Between these two lies, this book seeks a path.

Neither brutal blame nor total exoneration.

Neither magical freedom nor definitive servitude.

Neither the morality of “where there’s a will, there’s a way” nor the metaphysics of “there’s nothing I can do.”

Between the two: an active lucidity.

A lucidity that sees the causes, but refuses to turn them into gods. A lucidity that acknowledges wounds, but does not crown them. A lucidity that knows we are traversed by forces stronger than ourselves, yet still searches for the fragile space where a response becomes possible.

This space is not always large.

Sometimes it is almost invisible.

It may lie in a pause.

In a sentence.

In a refusal.

In a restrained gesture.

In a request for help.

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In a violence that is not passed on.

In a complaint that ceases to revolve around itself.

In tidying up one small thing.

In a walk.

In a letter written.

In an apology offered.

In a joy we stop regarding with suspicion.

It is not heroic.

It is human.

And perhaps this is what we must save today: not the triumphant human being, not the sovereign subject, not the high-performing individual, but the being who, amid all the forces that shape them, is still capable of producing a response.

A tiny response.

But a living one.

The Alibi as a Misuse of Truth

It must be emphasized: the alibi is not always false.

If it were false, it would be less powerful.

The alibi becomes dangerous because it often rests upon a truth. A genuinely difficult childhood. A real injustice. Genuine exhaustion. Real oppression. Genuine vulnerability. Real trauma. Real inequality. A real illness. A real fear.

The point is never to say: "None of this exists."

The point is to ask: "What does all of this become within me?"

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Is it a cause I must understand in order to free myself more fully?

Or an authority to which I hand over every key?

Is it a wound that calls for care, justice, and patience?

Or an identity I protect because it explains everything?

Is it a temporary limitation?

Or an inner annuity?

Is it a truth that sheds light?

Or a truth I use so that I no longer have to move forward?

The question is harsh.

It has to be.

But it is not cruel.

It does not deny suffering. It merely refuses to let suffering become a principle of government. It does not deny causes. It merely refuses to turn causes into inner divinities before which every response must bow.

The alibi begins when truth ceases to illuminate and starts to imprison.

Here we encounter a subtle perversion of lucidity.

We believe we are looking clearly at our lives. We name our obstacles precisely. We know how to explain our repetitions, our withdrawals, our failures, our anger, and our renunciations. We have exact words.

But sometimes those words no longer serve to open anything.

They serve to close things neatly.

They bring order to the prison.

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And in the end, we may come to prefer a well-explained prison to an uncertain outside.

That is why this book seeks to unsettle our explanations.
Not to destroy them.

But to restore their original vocation: to help us live.

For an explanation that never increases our power to exist eventually begins to work against life. It becomes an archive of misfortune. It turns intelligence into an administrator of powerlessness. It gives our chains a more elegant vocabulary.

We must therefore ask every explanation:

Do you help me see?

Or do you help me hide?

Do you help me act?

Or do you help me renounce without shame?

Do you help me understand myself?

Or do you help me place under sanctuary what diminishes me?

At this point, thought becomes dangerous again.

And rightly so.

Because it no longer flatters.

It liberates.

Not always gently.

But sometimes with that sudden burst of light that restores air to a closed room.

Against Self-Loathing

A book written against excuses could easily become a book against oneself.

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That would be a catastrophe.

The goal is not to add to the burden of existence by installing an extra layer of surveillance, an inner police force, or a refined sense of guilt. It is not about stalking yourself, holding yourself in contempt, or denouncing your every move. It is not about turning every moment of fatigue into a failure, every limitation into a lie, or every rest into an act of cowardice.

Lucidity has value only if it expands life.

If it humiliates, it misses its mark.

If it crushes, it betrays its purpose.

If it devolves into moral sadism, it still belongs to the very world it claims to combat.

We must, therefore, learn a decisive distinction: unmasking yourself is not the same as hating yourself.

To unmask is to strip an illusion of the power it has seized over you. It is to stop serving the things that diminish your stature. It is to grasp the inner trickery that turns a wound into a fortress. It is to see how, at times, we use our own defenses to protect ourselves against life itself.

Self-hatred, on the contrary, is a form of imprisonment.

It is just another brand of painful narcissism: everything returns to the self—to one's own failings, inadequacies, shame, and indignity. It delivers nothing. It tightens. It traps the being in a permanent state of self-indictment. It merely changes the color of the prison walls.

This book does not want this.

It seeks neither total absolution nor total accusation.

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It seeks honesty without hatred.

Lucidity without cruelty.

Rigorous standards without contempt.

It will not be easy.

For we often oscillate between two shelters: to absolve ourselves entirely, or to condemn ourselves entirely. In both cases, we avoid the true task at hand: to respond.

Absolution avoids the effort.

Self-condemnation, surprisingly, avoids the effort as well.

For the one who declares themselves hopelessly broken, bad, or incapable, paradoxically spares themselves the ordeal of action. Condemnation becomes another kind of alibi. A dark way to stop trying.

"I'm finished" can become just as comfortable as "it's not my fault."

Two different phrases.

The same immobility.

We must, therefore, escape this binary.

Neither whitewash the self.

Nor soil the self.

Simply reclaim the self.

And this reclamation often begins with a single, humble phrase: "I understand what has made me this way."

But I do not want this to be the sole decider.

In that sentence, there is neither triumph nor condemnation.

There is a small insurrection.

Discrete enough not to mistake itself for a revolution.

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Strong enough to shift a life by a single degree.
And sometimes, one degree is enough to keep you from
ending up in the same place.

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Materialism as fidelity to reality

This book is materialist.

Not out of dryness.

But out of fidelity.

It will not seek to save life by tearing it away from the earth.

It will offer no consolation through other-worldly realms. It will not promise that suffering will be rewarded, that injustices will find ultimate meaning, or that losses will be compensated within some invisible economy.

Materialism here is not a reduction. It is a loyalty to what is. The body exists. Fatigue exists. Hunger exists. Sleep exists. Social class exists. Money exists. Desire exists. Hormones exist. Trauma exists. Institutions exist. Power dynamics exist. Death exists.

Thought does not need to flee from this. It must start from here.

To think from the body, from finitude, from causes, from the social and affective matter of our lives—this is not to diminish the human. On the contrary, it is to cease demanding that man live as a pure spirit.

We are embodied beings. Therefore vulnerable. Therefore determined. Therefore sometimes thwarted.

But embodiment is not merely a limit. It is also the site of recovery. One never recovers oneself in the abstract. One recovers through a body that rises, a hand that writes, a mouth that asks, legs that walk, eyes that finally look, a breath that ceases to be confused with fear.

There is no salvation outside the world. But there can be

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deliverances within it.

A face looked upon without hatred. A symbolic debt broken. A dependency left behind. A shame worked through. A room put in order. A meal shared. A sentence that no longer lies. A day that does not begin with capitulation.

These are small things. But real life is made of small things. Spectacular, grand conversions flatter the imagination. True recoveries are often modest, repeated, material. They do not resemble revelations. They resemble an hygiene of freedom. Sleeping. Walking. Working. Reading. Repairing. Speaking. Falling silent at the right place. Saying no at the right time. Starting over without theater.

The materialism of this book is therefore also a morality of the concrete. Not a morality imposed from above, but a wisdom of the ground.

Where illusions seek to rise, one must come back down. Back down to the body.

To the gestures.

To the gestures.

Towards the consequences.

Towards others. Towards the matter of our days. Towards that which effectively increases or diminishes our power to live.

For the alibi loves grand abstractions. Life itself often begins again with a simple act. An act without glory. But suddenly, in this little, something breathes.

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The Tragic Joy

We must also speak of joy.

This word may seem misplaced on the threshold of a book about alibis, wounds, determinisms, and the ruses of powerlessness.

Yet, it is central.

For it is not merely a matter of unmasking.

To unmask without healing would be a useless violence. To destroy illusions without making life more habitable would be just one more form of nihilism.

Lucidity that leads to no power is merely a refinement of despair.

There is, indeed, a kind of intoxication in seeing everything, in dissecting one's own chains, in naming with surgical precision the roots of one's own powerlessness. It is a brilliant intellectual exercise, almost aesthetic.

But if this clear-sightedness stops at mere observation, it becomes a gilded cage: we contemplate the mechanics of our own defeat with the precision of a jeweler, and it is precisely this refinement that prevents us from rising again.

To know is necessary, but knowledge is sterile if it becomes a form of self-indulgence.

Lucidity, when isolated, is nothing more than a mirror held up to the void. It gives us the illusion of mastering the tragic simply because we know how to name it.

But naming the wound is not enough to heal the skin. True lucidity is that which, at the very moment it has grasped the

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full extent of the impasse, seeks—not an imaginary exit—but a fulcrum on which to stand upright amidst the disaster.

Power, here, is not brute force that changes the world or crushes circumstances. It is the power of the minimal act. It is the transition from a consciousness that "observes" to a will that "decides."

For the deepest despair is not that of the ignorant; it is that of the person so clear-sighted that they have transformed their own truth into a fatality.

They have locked themselves within their own diagnosis. They have turned their clairvoyance into a tomb.

To escape this refinement is to accept being less "intelligent" in order to be more alive. It is to understand that lucidity is a flame: it must serve to light the path, not to burn through our own reserves of energy.

If it does not make us capable of a gesture, a smile, or an act of resistance, then it is not lucidity at all: it is a luxury for those who have renounced life.

The Passage to Freedom

This is where lucidity can tip. As long as it remains mere observation, it risks becoming a prison. But when it accepts to seek a foothold, it becomes something else: not a consolation, nor a certainty, but a possibility of presence. Nothing is promised to us. The world owes us neither total justice, nor certain reparation, nor salvation. Yet this lack of guarantee does not strip the present of its value. It makes it all the sharper. Those who understand that the map does not

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match the terrain may choose to sit before the cartographer's error. But they can also lift their eyes. And look at the ground beneath them.

Seek where to place the next step. This walk is not optimism. It heralds no victory. It says only that lucidity is not meant to paralyze life. It does not transform "all is lost" into "something is sometimes possible." Rather, it transforms "all is lost" into a more meager, more truthful question: "What remains possible here?" It is within this very poverty that tragic joy can appear. Not as a forced gratitude. But as a breath. To still be here. To see without lying to oneself. And yet, to yield nothing. The joy in question here is in no way optimistic. It does not say that everything will be alright.

It does not paint over the tragic with pleasant colors. It denies neither death, nor injustice, nor loss, nor sickness, nor cruelty, nor the irreparable. It does not turn suffering into a necessary stage of moral perfection. It does not thank misfortune for having taught a lesson.

It does not thank misfortune.

It merely strips it of the right to possess everything.

This joy is tragic because it knows.

It knows that we are mortal.

It knows that we are shaped by forces beyond our control.

It knows that some wounds remain.

It knows that some reparations will never come to pass.

It knows that no one emerges from life unscathed.

But it affirms nonetheless.

Not out of blindness.

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But out of an excess of presence.

It says: since nothing is possible, we must be more attentive to what is offered. Since time is limited, we must stop offering it to our alibis. Since the world owes us no salvation, we must learn to inhabit the earth with more strength, more sober gratitude, more precision.

This joy is not a permanent state.

It is a breakthrough.

A lull after the violent winds.

A breathable space after suffocation.

A clearing that does not eliminate the storm, but reminds us that the sky is not reduced to it alone.

Here is the "rising" (or the lifting).

Not a pirouette.

Not an artificial balm.

But that moment where, after having looked harshly, something opens up. A tension dissolves. A sentence ceases to be a chain. A truth no longer serves to imprison. The real remains rugged, but it is no longer entirely hostile.

The rising does not cancel out gravity.

It prevents it from becoming a tomb.

It is that discreet movement by which thought, after having traversed the night, restores a little air to the reader.

This book will need this rising.

Without it, it would be merely severe.

With it, it can become fraternal.

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The reader as a companion in the trial.

The reader will not be treated as a student.

Even less as a culprit.

They will be a companion in the trial.

The author will not speak from a place of purity. The one who writes is not outside the alibi. They are caught in it like the others. They know the comfortable explanations, the used wounds, the nurtured angers, the well-argued renunciations, the complaints that have become a style, the impuissances decorated with intelligence. No one writes about alibis from a position of innocence. One writes from the struggle with one's own.

That is why this book will not say: "look at yourselves."

It will say, rather: "let us look."

Let us look at what we do with our causes.

Let us look at how we sometimes transform the truth into a refuge.

Let us look at how pain can become an identity.

Let us look at how the era provides us with splendid vocabularies to avoid answering.

Let us look at how lucidity can serve fear.

Let us look at how complaining can become a dwelling.

Let us look at how we sometimes prefer to be right against life rather than live with fewer reasons.

Looking together does not make the exercise easy.

But it makes it just.

There will be hard pages. They must be, for certain illusions do not come loose under a simple caress. There will be

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uncomfortable analyses, because the alibi lodges itself precisely where we believe ourselves to be the most legitimate. There will be sentences that resist, that sting, that disturb.

But none should humiliate.

If a sentence humiliates, it misses its mark.

The right sentence does not crush.

It awakens. It produces that particular discomfort where one feels seen, not condemned. Laid bare, not despised.

Dispossessed of a lie, not deprived of dignity.

This is what this book will seek: a fraternal hardness.

Fraternity without hardness becomes complacency.

Hardness without fraternity becomes violence.

We must hold both.

And in this balance, perhaps, something may be transmitted: not a doctrine, not a universal method, but a way of standing before oneself.

Upright, if possible. And when that is not possible, at least oriented toward the recovery.

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Starting with the alibi.

Why start with the alibi?

Because it is the place where our remaining freedom is lost most discreetly.

The great chains are visible. Social, economic, affective, bodily, and psychic prisons exist. They must be named, fought, and understood. But the alibi sometimes adds an inner lock to these chains.

It says: "Since the chain exists, I no longer have to look for the key."

Yet, looking for the key does not mean denying the chain.

It means refusing to collaborate with it.

The alibi is this intimate collaboration with that which diminishes us. A collaboration often involuntary, sometimes even protective at the start, but which ends up taking the shape of the prison. By dint of explaining to ourselves why we are imprisoned, we sometimes learn to defend our imprisonment.

We do not always love our chains.

But we sometimes love the reasons that make them indisputable.

It is this knot that must be undone.

With patience.

With precision.

With courage.

It will not be enough to repeat: "be free." That phrase is too poor. We must descend into the mechanisms: vanity, resentment, the fear of failure, the secondary gains of

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complaining, the satisfaction of being right, the identity of the victim, loyalty to the past, the fear of betraying one's pain, real exhaustion, the confusion between rest and renunciation.

Every alibi has its own logic.

Every alibi protects something.

Every alibi costs something.

The work will consist of asking:

What does it protect?

And what does it destroy?

For no one keeps an alibi for long without finding some benefit in it. But no one inhabits one for long without losing a part of their life.

This balance will be our method.

Not to deny what the alibi has helped us endure.

But to measure what it now prevents us from becoming.

There are necessary crutches.

But it happens that a crutch kept for too long prevents the leg from regaining its strength.

Then comes a delicate moment.

Not by violently discarding the support.

But by testing, cautiously, if a step becomes possible.

This moment is not spectacular in the least.

Yet, perhaps all rebirth begins right there:

in the instant one no longer confuses what once saved us with what must govern us forever.

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The minimal promise

This book will not promise happiness.

It will not promise healing.

It will not promise success.

It will not promise definitive peace.

It will not promise that lucidity will be enough.

It will not even promise that every alibi can be overcome.

Some are ancient, deep-seated, almost organic. Some stem from wounds so severe that it takes years of care, presence, repair—and sometimes justice—before a recovery is even thinkable.

We must respect that.

Violence begins as soon as one demands more from a being than they are capable of.

But resignation begins as soon as one refuses to see that they can sometimes do a little more than they believe.

Between violence and resignation, there exists a minimal promise: to see better, in order to live a little more.

That is all.

To see one's ruses better.

To see one's refuges better.

To see one's stock phrases better.

To see one's loyalties to pain better.

To see one's noble angers better.

To see one's hidden benefits better.

To see one's renunciations disguised as wisdom better.

To see one's real impossibilities better, too, so as not to do oneself violence unnecessarily.

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And to live a little more.
Not a lot. A little.
A little more true.
A little more free.
A little more responsible.
A little less captive.
A little less submissive to the past.
A little less in love with one's own complaint.
A little less faithful to what diminishes us.
A little more available to what is coming.
This modesty is essential.
Grand promises are exhausting.
Small recoveries sometimes save a day.
And a saved day is not nothing.
Because life is not won in general.
It is reclaimed in fragments.

Crossing the threshold.

We can now cross the threshold.
The book will open with a primary self-evident truth: man is not an empire within an empire. He does not possess himself entirely. He does not spring forth outside of causes. He is not the absolute author of himself.
We must therefore begin with determinisms.
Not to submit to them.
To understand them.
For one does not fight what one refuses to see. And one does not liberate oneself by despising the forces that flow through

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us. The first gesture of lucidity consists in acknowledging that we are made, affected, preceded, constituted.

We did not choose our birth.

We did not choose our initial body.

We did not choose our mother tongue.

We did not choose our era.

We did not choose our social class of origin.

We did not choose many of our wounds.

We did not choose the first sentences that defined us.

It is true. It must be said forcefully.

But it must immediately be added:

what constitutes us should not always conclude us.

We are made by causes.

But sometimes, we can become a cause in our turn.

Not an absolute cause.

A partial cause.

A fragile cause.

A secondary cause.

A trembling cause.

But a cause nonetheless.

And as soon as a being becomes, even a little, the cause of something in their life, the alibi retreats.

It does not disappear. It recedes.

And in this tiny gap between what has made us and what we still do, life finds its place again.

That is where we shall begin.

Not with freedom.

With the chains.

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But to search, within the very design of the chains, for the spot where a hand can still move.

And if the hand moves, even slightly,
then all is not lost.

Then thought has served its purpose.

Then life, softly, catches its breath again.

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PREAMBLE — The Last Alibi

We all have an excuse.

Not always a lying, shameful, or manufactured excuse designed to deceive others. Often, our excuse is true. It stems from a childhood, a bruised body, an ancient fatigue, an injustice endured, an abandonment, an illness, or a world that seemed to us, quite rightly, too heavy.

Because it is true, this excuse seems irrefutable to us. That is the trap. An invented excuse eventually wears out, but a true excuse possesses a formidable power: it demands to be respected. And it is right to respect it. One must honor what has wounded, what has hindered, what has made certain steps heavier than others. The thought that despises this reality is not lucid: it is simply brutal. It judges from afar and transforms vulnerability into a failing, confusing unequal beginnings with a lack of merit.

This book will never start from that cruelty. It knows that no one emerges pure from themselves, that we are born with disparate burdens: for some, trust; for others, threat; for some, a promise; for others, danger. Yes, we all have reasons to tremble or to remain on the ground.

But this preamble begins precisely where reason, however real it may be, risks turning into a throne.

It does not ask: "Have you been wounded?"

It asks: "What do you do with your wound when it begins to speak for you?"

It does not ask: "Do you have causes?"