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VOLUME 20

The Work and Thought of Jean Grenier (1898–1971)

J. S. T. GARFITT

THE MODERN HUMANITIES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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TEXTS AND DISSERTATIONS
(formerly Dissertation Series)

VOLUME 20

Editor
PETER FRANCE
(French: Modern)

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by

J. S. T. GARFITT

LONDON
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1983

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ISBN 978-1-83954-657-0
doi:10.59860/td.b27342a

Published by
The Modern Humanities Research Association

Honorary Treasurer, MHRA
KING'S COLLEGE, STRAND
LONDON WC2R 2LS
ENGLAND

ISBN 0 900547 87 1

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Printed in England by
W. S. MANEY & SON LIMITED
HUDSON ROAD LEEDS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a revised version of my Oxford D.Phil. thesis, submitted in 1979. My thanks are due to Mme Jean Grenier, for allowing me to consult her archives; to MM Louis Guilloux, Alain Lemière and Henri Petit; to M René Char, for permission to consult certain items; to the staff of the Bibliothèque Municipale, Saint-Brieuc, of the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet, Paris and of the Maison Française, Oxford; to my supervisor, Mr Peter Hoy; to Professor Peter France, for his careful and helpful editorial advice; and to my wife, Helen.

J. S. T. G.

ABBREVIATIONS

When a page-reference is given in the following form: *IM*, 115 (119), the first number is that of the relevant page in the first edition, and the number in parentheses is that of the relevant page in the most recent edition. This applies to *C*, *EO*, *IM* and *LI*.

(N)NRF	*La (Nouvelle) Nouvelle Revue française*
AC	*Albert Camus (Souvenirs)*
AP	*L'Art et ses problèmes*
APH	*A propos de l'humain*
B	*Borès*
C	*Le Choix*
C(2)	*Absolu et choix* (1961)
C(3)	*Absolu et choix* (1970)
CM	*Célébration du miroir*
E	*Écrits*
EBL	*Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*
ELF	*Entretiens avec Louis Foucher*
EM	*L'Existence malheureuse*
EO	*Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie*
EPC	*L'Esprit de la peinture contemporaine*
ET	*L'Esprit du Tao*
G	*Les Grèves* (1957)
IM	*Inspirations méditerranéennes*
L	*Lexique* (1955)
LI	*Les Îles* (1933)
LI(2)	*Les Îles, suivi d'Inspirations méditerranéennes* (1947)
LI(3)	*Les Îles* (1959)
LL	Jules Lequier, *La Liberté*
LOC	Jules Lequier, *Œuvres complètes*
M	*Music*
MIX	*Mémoires intimes de X.*
NL	*Nouveau Lexique* (1969)
P	*Prières* (1965)
PC	*Essais sur la peinture contemporaine*
PL	*La Philosophie de Jules Lequier*
R	*Le Problème du mal chez Renouvier*
RQE	*Réflexions sur quelques écrivains*
SC	*Santa-Cruz et autres paysages africains*

ABBREVIATIONS *(cont.)*

SMC	*Sur la mort d'un chien*
TL	*Troisième Lexique*
VN	*Voir Naples*
VQ	*La Vie quotidienne*

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1898	Camille-Jean-Charles Grenier born, in Paris, 6 February.
c. 1900	Parents divorce, mother returns to Brittany, later remarries.
c. 1904–15	Grenier attends École Saint-Charles in Saint-Brieuc.
1917	*Licence-ès-lettres* (Paris). Meets Guilloux in Saint-Brieuc.
1918–22	Further study in Paris, leading to *agrégation* (philosophy). Grenier's mother and stepfather are lodging in Paris with him at this period.
1922	Meets Lambert, in Saint-Brieuc, and Max Jacob, in Paris. Death of stepfather.
1923	First teaching post, in Avignon. Trip to Austria and Italy. First published essays and reviews.
1923–24	Algiers. Helps to launch *Philosophies* (1st issue 1924).
1924–26	Naples, Institut Français. Visits London (July 1925). Articles on Schopenhauer, Lequier, Jacob, Martin-Chauffier. On philosophers. 'Le Charme de l'Orient' (1925).
1926–28	Employed by Éditions Gallimard. Trip to Greece (1926). Lecture tour of Central Europe (Spring 1928). Seeks to launch collection about animals. *Suppléant* at Cherbourg (May–July 1928). Nominated to Tunis. First reviews for Paulhan's *NRF*. 'Interiora rerum' (1927).
1928–29	Marriage, Tunis post falls through. Scheme for society to promote Europeanism (with Chamson, Guilloux, Halévy). Elected one of first three *pensionnaires* of the Fondation de Lourmarin Laurent-Vibert.
1929–30	Visits Spain with Guilloux. Helps to launch 'Les Terrasses de Lourmarin'. 'Portrait de Mouloud' (1929).
1930–31	Departure for Algiers (–1938). Teaches Camus in *classe de philosophie*. 'Cum apparuerit'; 'Sur l'Inde'; 'Childe Harold' (written December 1930).

1931–32 Helps to launch *Sud*.
'Les Îles Kerguélen', 'Les Îles Fortunées', 'L'Île de Pâques'.

1932–33 Teaches Camus in *lettres supérieures*.
LES ÎLES. Essays in *Alger-Étudiant*.

1934–35 Attends AGM of 'Les Amis d'*Esprit*' and part of Pontigny *décade* (August).
Prose-poems in Capasso's *Lirica*.

1935–36 Speaks at Congress of Académie Méditerranéenne (November). Completion and *soutenance* of theses on Lequier.
'La Pensée engagée' (*Esprit*); 'L'Age des orthodoxies' (*NRF*).
LEQUIER.

1936–37 Encourages Charlot to set up in publishing. Gives papers at Ninth International Congress of Philosophy, and Second International Congress of Aesthetics.
SANTA-CRUZ.

1937–38 Attends Pontigny *décade*. Leaves Algiers.
ESSAI SUR L'ESPRIT D'ORTHODOXIE. Essays for *Aguedal* (Bosco). Plans 'Essai sur l'idée d'Absolu'.

1938–40 Lycée Michelet (Vanves). Mobilized: *infirmier militaire*, Draguignan. Then at Sisteron.
'Lettres à Cornélius' (1939).

1940–41 Montpellier.
LE CHOIX. INSPIRATIONS MÉDITERRANÉENNES (completed 1939).

1941–42 Nominated to Algiers, but unable to leave France. Remains at Sisteron.

1942–44 Lille, part-time and provisional post as *maître de conférences*.
Regular articles for *Comœdia*.

1944–45 Lille: *professeur titulaire*. Interested in 'philosophie de l'existence': Wahl, Marcel etc.
Edits *L'Existence*. Takes over art criticism in *Combat*.

1945–50 *Détaché* at Alexandria and Cairo.
Articles for *Valeurs* (Etiemble), *Cahiers de la Pléiade* (Paulhan).
ENTRETIENS SUR LE BON USAGE DE LA LIBERTÉ (1948). Articles in *Empédocle*. First *Lexique*.

1950–51 Returns to Lille.
'L'Humain'. *L'ESPRIT DE LA PEINTURE CONTEMPORAINE*. Max Jacob, *Lettres à un ami*. First fragment of *Les Grèves*.

1952 Jules Lequier, *Œuvres complètes*.

1953 First articles for *NNRF*; 'L'Époque des Sybilles', etc.

1954 First preface for Club Français du Livre (Dumas).

1955 *A PROPOS DE L'HUMAIN. LEXIQUE.* Articles for *L'Œil*, regular column in *L'Express*.

1956 J. Howlett, 'Une Tendre Lucidité'.
Preface: Dostoyevsky.
Preface: Tolstoy.
Articles for *L'Œil, L'Express*.
First part of *Les Grèves* in *NRF*.

1957 *L'ESPRIT DU TAO; LES GRÈVES; L'EXISTENCE MALHEUREUSE; SUR LA MORT D'UN CHIEN.* Articles for *L'Œil, La Nef*.

1958 Articles by R. Campbell, G. Picon.
Preface: Nietzsche, Rousseau.
Regular column in *Preuves*.
Regular reviews of philosophy books on radio.

1959 *ESSAIS SUR LA PEINTURE CONTEMPORAINE.*
New edition of *Les Îles*, with preface by Camus.

1960 *Preuves, XX^e siècle.*

1961 *ABSOLU ET CHOIX* (revised edition of *Le Choix*).
Borès. Articles in *Preuves*.
NRF: essays on Egypt.

1962 Appointed to Chair of Aesthetics and Science of Art, Sorbonne.
LETTRES D'ÉGYPTE.
Preface: Camus (Pléiade, also Sauret).
Articles in *Preuves*.

1963 *ENTRETIENS AVEC 17 PEINTRES NON-FIGURATIFS.*
Final articles in *Preuves*. *NRF*: first article on creation.

1964 *NRF*: second article on creation. First essays for *La Vie quotidienne* (1968).

1965 *CÉLÉBRATION DU MIROIR; PRIÈRES.*
NRF: third article on creation.
Introduction: Rousseau (Livre de poche).

1966 Series of three articles on dandies; two articles on Senancour.

1967 Exhibition catalogues.

1968 Retirement. Grand Prix National des Lettres.
LA VIE QUOTIDIENNE; SENANCOUR; ALBERT CAMUS (SOUVENIRS).
Prefaces: Labiche, Lequier.

1969 *ENTRETIENS AVEC LOUIS FOUCHER. NOUVEAU LEXIQUE* (Fata Morgana).

1970 *ABSOLU ET CHOIX* (third, new, edition).
L'ART ET SES PROBLÈMES; *MUSIC*; *QUATRE PRIÈRES*.
Preface: Molinos. 'Paulhan critique d'art'.
Three articles in *Revue philosophique*.

1971 Death of Jean Grenier, 5 March.
MÉMOIRES INTIMES DE X.
Two articles in *Revue philosophique*.

1973 *VOIR NAPLES*; *RÉFLEXIONS SUR QUELQUES ÉCRIVAINS*.

1977 Reissue of third edition of *Les Îles*.

1979 *JACQUES*.

1980 *JEAN GRENIER — GEORGES PERROS: CORRESPONDANCE 1950–1971*.

1981 *ALBERT CAMUS — JEAN GRENIER: CORRESPONDANCE 1932–1960*.

INTRODUCTION

In *Who's Who in France 1969–1970*, Jean Grenier is described as 'universitaire (en retraite), homme de lettres'. For some he is an intriguing philosopher and essayist, for others he is primarily the master of Albert Camus. Between 1930 and 1981, seventeen different volumes by Grenier were published by Gallimard, not counting revised editions, and some two dozen by other publishing houses. Between 1922 and his death in 1971 he wrote articles and essays for more than 120 different reviews and newspapers, ranging from the best-known to the most obscure. He was a teacher until his retirement in 1968, holding posts in Avignon, Algiers, Naples, Cherbourg, Albi, Vanves, Montpellier, Lille, Alexandria, Cairo and finally Paris. For much of his career, therefore, he was away from the centre of French literary and philosophical life, and out of the lime-light, although he did attend some of the major congresses and debates during the summer vacations. The critics paid little attention to him until 1957, when three of his books were published simultaneously by Gallimard. Attention then faded again until 1968. In that year Gallimard published his *Albert Camus* (*souvenirs*), which brought him to the notice of a wider public, and he was also awarded the Grand Prix National des Lettres. The publication of his important correspondence with Camus in 1981 has brought Grenier into fresh prominence.

Grenier was born in Paris in 1898 and brought up in Saint-Brieuc after the early divorce and remarriage of his mother. His childhood was uneventful. He had no brothers or sisters, and he attended the same school, the Institution Saint-Charles, until his *baccalauréat* in 1915. His philosophical and literary vocations thereafter went hand in hand. His studies prepared him for a career as a teacher of philosophy (*licence* 1917, *agrégation* 1922), while his friendships with such men as Louis Guilloux, Edmond Lambert and Max Jacob[1] encouraged him to write. He combined the two interests in his first articles for *La Vie des lettres et des arts* and *Philosophies*[2] (1922–25). During this period he was trying his hand at writing short novels, but he had not yet found the right medium for his particular talent. That came in 1926 after a visit to Greece. In the following year Daniel Halévy published Grenier's first lyrical essay 'Interiora rerum', of which Gaëtan Picon has said that it gave him 'le sentiment d'une œuvre dont les chances n'étaient pas inégales à celles de quelques jeunes écrivains voisinant avec lui, et qui allaient devenir célèbres':[3] these others were writers like Malraux, Chamson and Henri Petit. In 1927, on his return from a

two-year period teaching at the Institut Français in Naples, he joined the staff of the publishing house of Gallimard and became a regular contributor to Jean Paulhan's *Nouvelle Revue française*.

Thereafter Grenier's normal pattern of publishing was to write essays for the *NRF* or other reviews which would be collected at a later stage to form a volume. Thus *Les Îles* (1933) includes essays first published in the period 1929–33, *Inspirations méditerranéennes* (1941) covers the period 1927–39, *A propos de l'humain* (1955) the period 1934–52. Sometimes the original material is extensively re-written, sometimes retitled, and sometimes both. Thus 'Cum apparuerit' (*NRF*, 1930) becomes 'Initiation à la Provence' in *Inspirations méditerranéennes* with only minor modifications, while the first four chapters of *L'Existence malheureuse* (1957) have been adapted from a series of articles first published in 1949–50 with substantial changes. Even *Le Choix* (1941) may be regarded as an expanded version of a paper written for *Recherches philosophiques* in 1936–37. Grenier's first novel, *Les Grèves* (1957), conforms to the same pattern of prior publication and rewriting. It contains a number of sections that first appeared in several different reviews, sometimes using the true names of people and places which were disguised in the novel itself. Besides the initial fact of the re-use, in a modified form, of older material, there is also the intention and effect of such modifications to be taken into account. Grenier is not a static thinker, and his meditation evolves all the time, not necessarily in a constant direction. At times there is a noticeable shift in emphasis. Thus 'La Certitude de l'unité et le problème des croyances' (1936–37) ends on a note of humanism and love, whereas *Le Choix*, although it is based on that earlier paper, and although it shares the recognition that an attitude of indifference is a practical impossibility for most people, offers little concession to human needs and values. The second edition of *Le Choix*, on the other hand, re-titled *Absolu et choix* (1961), goes some way to reversing the trend, with its final reference to the humanistic solution offered by Camus in *La Peste*. The third edition goes even further. Again, between 1946 and 1948 the tone of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* becomes much more uncompromising on the question of the possibility and desirability of an attitude of total indifference. These changes reflect a mind in constant movement, and that in itself provides an important clue to Grenier's understanding of the central themes of freedom and choice. Possibility is not only the object of his meditation; it is also the mode of it. Grenier's thought is intimately bound up with his existence, and it would be a mistake to attempt to isolate too carefully the supposed content of his philosophy without at the same time considering the form of its expression.

Grenier taught philosophy in school and university for forty years; he wrote regularly for the *Revue philosophique*; his thesis on Jules Lequier is still the standard introduction to the work of a philosopher whose importance is

gradually being recognized, and his edition of Lequier's *Œuvres complètes* is indispensable; the collection entitled 'La Métaphysique' which he edited for Gallimard brought together thinkers such as Camus, Lavelle, Le Senne, Parain and others of similar calibre; and his own personal philosophical works are considered significant enough for one of them, *Absolu et choix*, to be published in the collection 'Initiation philosophique' edited for the Presses Universitaires de France by Jean Lacroix. First of all, then, where does he belong in the current of twentieth-century French philosophy?

The titles of some of his major works appear to suggest affinities with existentialist thinkers: *La Liberté*, *Le Choix*, *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*, *L'Existence malheureuse*. It is certainly true that he shares many concerns with those who are generally called 'existentialists'. Freedom and choice in the context of a problematic human existence are concepts that have, in the twentieth century, been under much discussion from an existential point of view, and not only by Sartrean Existentialists. Jean Lacroix notes that even before the thought of Kierkegaard and Heidegger began to dominate 'existentialist' philosophy, 'la double influence marxiste et nietzschéenne a fait passer l'accent de la liberté formelle à la liberté réelle'.[4] Within this broad current of thought, Grenier displays 'existentialist' leanings in that he is constantly aware of the precarious metaphysical situation of the human existent, and of the anguish experienced in the face of total possibility (rather than of a specific experience such as death). He is indebted to Lequier (who has been described as the French Kierkegaard)[5] for some of his expressions of that anguish, without being dependent on him for a knowledge of the experience itself. Furthermore, he is concerned with the possibility of creating value, and with the wider field of human creativity in general. However, these preoccupations are not enough to make him an existentialist, for he maintains a critical distance from the movement in all its forms. His clearest expression of opinion about his own response to it is found in the text of two talks given in Alexandria and later published as 'Deux entretiens sur l'Existentialisme':

> Ce que je pense de l'Existentialisme?
> Je l'approuve d'avoir dénoncé les soi-disant a priori dans lesquels notre existence est emprisonnée, d'avoir dégagé une vérité première qui est l'existence de ma propre réalité, d'avoir montré que les conditions de connaissance étaient secondaires par rapport aux raisons d'être, et qu'il n'y a pas de valeur sans évaluation, de vérité sans vérification.
> Je lui reproche d'avoir cru qu'en dehors de la raison il pouvait y avoir un critérium possible en l'absence d'un Être transcendant. La métaphysique reste nécessaire . . . L'irrationalisme (existentialiste) ne peut pas compenser l'échec du rationalisme.[6]

There is much that is conservative and indeed classical in Grenier's objections. He refuses to rebel openly against Descartes: he accepts the validity of the

Cogito, even if he finds fault with the use that Descartes subsequently puts it to. His idealism is indebted to modern philosophers: his concern with the ordinary and the everyday suggests that he could be seen as a spiritual descendant of Lagneau, himself a schoolteacher rather than an academic philosopher. Brunschvicg, too, may have left his mark on Grenier. He was the doyen of French academic philosophy between the wars, and maintained that freedom was to be found essentially in the development and exercise of a critical reason. At the same time he practised a 'méditation et culte de l'unité spirituelle'.[7] For him, the necessity of the world was held between two freedoms, that of inventive thought and that of technical application. Grenier's understanding of human creativity and of the practice of composition may owe something to Brunschvicg.[8] At the same time he is a spiritualist in the terms of Jean Guitton's definition. According to Guitton, the spiritualism that has flourished in France since 1870 has been modest, 'un spiritualisme . . . qui a une horreur naturelle de la facilité . . . qui doute donc de lui, qui loin de chercher d'abord à prouver l'Esprit part plutôt de la supposition contraire, mais qui tout autant se méfie de la précipitation inverse',[9] sympathetic to those who cannot bring themselves to affirm the reality of the spiritual. Grenier strongly emphasizes the conscious activity of the mind in thinking, but at the same time he cannot escape from the intuition of the existence of some greater spirit on which the human spirit depends.

The spiritualistic strand in Grenier's thought would seem, however, to suggest a closer parallel with Bergson than with Brunschvicg. Jean Guitton divides the Bergsonian school of spiritualists into two groups, the 'chrétiens philosophes' such as Édouard Le Roy and Jacques Chevalier, whose work would stand even apart from the fact of their Christian faith, and the 'philosophes chrétiens' for whom philosophy is essentially a Christian activity, and for whom without Christian faith there can be no philosophy, Blondel falling into this second category. The first group might be considered sufficiently broad to include Grenier: like Chevalier, Grenier maintains a dual emphasis on human life as opposed to academic speculation, and yet also on truth as opposed to mere expediency. He would have approved of the motto taken by Chevalier for his lectures: 'Non nova, sed vera'. His Christian faith is never as explicit as for Chevalier, but Grenier cannot be called non-Christian or anti-Christian. Further reasons for considering Grenier as a Bergsonian are his understanding of intuition, and his practice of allowing 'philosophy' to cover areas of life such as artistic creation, rather than confining it to the more traditional areas of analysis and speculation. Bergson himself, however, at least in his earlier works, was much more sceptical than Grenier in his interpretation of the sense of contingency and possibility, as Grenier recognizes in *Le Choix*, while Chevalier goes further in his theistic doctrine than Grenier is prepared to go.

Two other thinkers with whom a comparison might be fruitful are Gabriel Marcel and Louis Lavelle, both 'philosophers of existence' rather than 'existentialists', and both within the Christian tradition but pursuing a meditation that is very much on the fringes of that tradition. Lavelle and Grenier are both concerned with value. For Lavelle, value is revealed, realized or incarnated in a particular being when the potential of that being is actualized through the exercise of freedom. 'La valeur ne se réalise que par ce va-et-vient où la liberté se concrétise',[10] and hence value 'nous paraît demander tantôt à être produite, et tantôt à être éprouvée'. This is especially true in the case of aesthetic value, and Grenier makes similar statements in his writing about aesthetics. Lavelle, however, openly attacks certain positions which are close to those held by Grenier, and he may indeed have had Grenier in mind, since the sectional bibliography in his *Traité des valeurs*, vol. I, p. 508, includes both *Le Choix* and also 'De l'indifférence' (1945). While recognizing the legitimacy of a zone of indifference in the individual consciousness, and also of a certain passivity, Lavelle castigates the attitude of non-response if it means that 'je ne consens pas aux possibilités que recèlent les occasions'.[11] Grenier is prepared to be more radical than Lavelle and contemplate the possibility of going beyond value altogether, or at least to eliminate the very idea of value from everything except the Absolute which in any case is unattainable. He would be inclined to deny Le Senne's contention that absolute value is diffracted into a set of values that are more easily accessible to finite man. He would be more favourable to Lavelle's understanding of value as something that is realized in response to opportunities offered by Providence, but Lavelle's optimistic doctrine of participation is too presumptuous for a thinker like Grenier for whom the central Being is not the individual but the Absolute. Lavelle of course maintains a firm belief in an Absolute, identified with the Christian God: but it is precisely the firmness of that belief that distinguishes him from Grenier. It leaves him free to turn his attention to man and to the interval between *le Néant* and *l'Être*, whereas for Grenier the reality of the interval and even of man himself is all the time suspect. Grenier may be classified as a 'value-philosopher' in the sense that he is always aware that any form of evaluation points to the existence of an underlying absolute value, but any treatise on value that he might have written could only have been negative and destructive in its approach, in contrast to the positive systems of Lavelle and Le Senne.

Marcel and Lavelle both believe in the basic 'indivision de l'esprit' (J. Lacroix, loc. cit.), but they approach it from different angles. Lavelle is able to envisage an immediate leap on the part of the human spirit to the summit, to the creative unity of the divine spirit. This represents a participation in active Being, which is the source of all values. However, he is in danger of neglecting fundamental human limitations, weaknesses and sinfulness. Grenier, for his part, is all too well aware of human finitude and 'faiblesse', and participation

for him is a one-way process, with no possibility of an authentic downward movement to the world after the initial upward movement of union. Marcel shows himself much more aware of the human predicament, to the extent that he has been called an existentialist. He goes so far in that direction, however, that he places a strong emphasis on the human person in all its bodily materiality, whereas Grenier is more attracted by abstract thought even if it is suggested by quite ordinary phenomena. Indeed, Grenier sometimes seems to be more interested in the concept of 'l'humain' than in actual people. Concerned at the way philosophy was being debased to serve the interests of the moment, Grenier suggested in a lecture given in 1941 to the Société d'Études Philosophiques du Sud-Est:

> Il y aurait pourtant avantage . . . à permettre au philosophe d'abandonner les questions de morale et de politique à la religion, à la famille et à l'État (qui ont plus d'autorité pour agir efficacement sur l'humanité) pour lui laisser l'exercice de la pure spéculation dont l'influence ne peut être valable que si elle est fondée sur l'exemple personnel.[12]

Pure speculation and personal example combine to constitute authentic philosophy. It is not authentic existence that is in question, indeed human existence is seen as being quite conceivably (though not necessarily) subordinate to philosophical speculation. That is not the only orientation of Grenier's thought, but it is sufficient to drive him back towards idealism and traditional metaphysics, setting him on the very fringe of the philosophies of existence. But then, as he himself wrote, his vocation was to be always 'en marge' (*LI* (2), 13 (25)).

One reason why it is dificult to classify Grenier satisfactorily is that his thought is not integrated into a single system or around a single intuition. There are two main poles around which it revolves, and even so there are not two distinct systems but two areas of constant shifting, questioning, suggesting and doubting which at times interpenetrate one another and at times seem quite irreconcilable. The first pole is the Absolute, not defined as Spirit, Idea or God, but deliberately left undefined. The second is man, and in particular man as a creative being. The novelty of Grenier's philosophy of the Absolute is that while the contingent human spirit tends necessarily towards the Absolute and may experience some kind of union with it at moments of illumination, there can be no valid itinerary in reverse. The Absolute is the end-point and also the dead-end of all thought. Once the human spirit has recognized the Absolute, the initial intuition of contingency becomes a despairing acceptance of its utter unattainability, with the exception of those moments of illumination. Recourse to human values is always possible, but they have been emptied of all true value by the recognition of Value itself. The second area of thought, then, the human, while it may bulk large from time to time and is not to be underesti-

mated, is always precarious and ultimately valueless. Even this analysis, however, does not do justice to Grenier. Much of the tension and anguish evident in his writings stems from the inability to accept such an unsatisfactory state of affairs as being inevitable. The momentary glimpses of the Absolute continually provide a despairing hope, and the experience of the creative artist seems to indicate further that the Absolute does in some way express itself within a human framework. Beyond that, Grenier is fascinated by the idea that that expression may have a wider scope than merely in the field of art, indeed that there may be some kind of personal mediation through which the Absolute establishes an enduring, and no longer momentary, contact with the world of finite humanity, thus delivering man from his isolation. He is reluctant to see such a mediation in religious terms, because religion and philosophy seem to him to have different tasks to fulfil: that divorce in his own life is one reason why he might fit into Guitton's category of Bergsonian 'chrétiens philosophes' rather than that of 'philosophes chrétiens'.

However, it was pointed out earlier that Grenier is not first and foremost a philosopher. Should he not rather be assessed in quite different terms? Is he not really a man of letters, to be seen within the context of French literary movements? His output includes essays and novels as well as works of philosophy and criticism, and it has been suggested that his literary temperament was that of a poet. In all his writings, while the content is by no means to be dismissed, the most striking aspect is often not what is said but the way in which it is expressed: the choice of approach, the tone, the images. It is legitimate, then, to try to place him in the development of French literature in the twentieth century.

Gaëtan Picon has on several occasions paid tribute to Grenier's talent as a writer,[13] and other appreciations by leading critics have not been lacking, although they have always been discreet (to use an epithet applied to Grenier's own writings by no less than eight critics).[14] The reasons for his failure to achieve greater prominence are closely connected with his expression of the themes of freedom and choice not only in what he wrote but in his very approach to writing. He is hesitant, elusive, easily distracted from the task in hand, ready to explore side avenues, reluctant to come out into the light, concerned to show the fallacy or the narrowness of generally accepted ideas rather than to put anything positive in their place. Passed over by many, he is appreciated by the discerning for those very qualities. Edmond Jaloux devoted three articles to him in 1933, the year of publication of *Les Îles*, noting: 'Le nom de M. Jean Grenier est à retenir, c'est un des rares écrivains nouveaux que nous ayons vu paraître depuis 1930'.[15] The novelist Raymond Guérin was immediately struck by Grenier's writings. Later, in 1948, he recalled: 'Je ne sais qui a dit de Jean Grenier qu'il donnait toujours l'illusion d'avancer dans son existence comme s'il s'agissait pour lui, avant tout, de se trouver un passage

entre les hommes', and he added his own opinion that Grenier's talent as a writer was equal to his character as a man 'qu'on sait devoir ne jamais renier l'idéal qui a fait de lui ce qu'il est dans cette lutte que l'esprit livre à la matière, la liberté à la contrainte et la vérité à la justice'.[16] For Jacques Howlett, similarly, Grenier is a proponent of a philosophy that may be summed up as 'une tendre lucidité'.[17] That does not mean to say that he is anti-intellectual: his philosophy is progressive as opposed to systematic, 'toujours en quête, insatisfaite, vouée sinon à l'interminable odyssée de la recherche . . . du moins au repos difficile, aléatoire'. Grenier expresses in a simple style the contingency of man, and accepts the limitations of the human condition for his meditation on the highest and most spiritual aspects of existence. In this respect, according to Howlett, he is close to Valéry. Truth is glimpsed through negation and tension, without ever being fully attained, for Grenier's metaphysic of Being is not a system but rather a corrective to the systems too easily adopted by man. He is therefore thrown back into the impossible domain of choice. It may seem preferable to preserve the quality of spirit by a fruitful passivity rather than 'rendre compte du monde selon la quantité'. Howlett sees Grenier's invocation of Taoism as 'une référence féconde', not as a practical solution for rational Western man. Man must learn to be reconciled to his human imperfections and to accept his 'défaillance'. Grenier proposes a long, narrow path that is difficult to follow: not the path of discursive intelligence, of measurement and analysis, but that of poetry and indeed love. His highly intellectual quest has significance not primarily as philosophy but as an expression of love, of that which is most truly human. That is perhaps an over-statement: there is that element in Grenier's thought, but on the other hand he always seems to approach love from the outside, and to shy away from it as soon as it is offered. What is missing from Howlett's article is a compensating sense of the supreme value of something that is outside the self, namely the Absolute. He does indeed speak of an 'humanisme triste apparemment qu'écartèlent l'absolu et la finitude', but he confines his commentary to the human side of that tension. He is more perceptive than some other critics in the weight he gives to that side, but the equally important fascination of the Absolute in an intellectual and often abstract way does not come across at all.

Pierre-Henri Simon promises a more balanced approach.[18] He concentrates on *Les Grèves*, and notes in it the essential ambiguity of Grenier's world. As the conscious intelligence explores existence it encounters a *presque* which has a dual effect. First of all the *presque* speaks of not-nothing, or more than nothing, and thus provides a basis for the heart to build upon with such values as faith, esteem and love. Secondly, however, it speaks of less than completeness, so that even the most wonderful experiences of fulfilment are undermined by metaphysical doubt. Unfortunately Simon does not go on to show how Grenier develops the two terms and what possible resolutions of the tension he

envisages, although *Les Grèves* itself offers ample material for such a study. Robert Campbell, writing in the same year as Simon, 1958, adopts a different approach which is both narrower and wider in scope.[19] He singles out the theme of indifference, and refers to a wide range of Grenier's works in his article, the longest to be published in Grenier's lifetime. It is at times confused, and will be examined in more detail in the course of this study, but many of his insights are valid. He is careful to underline the importance of the Absolute in Grenier's thought, even where there is no explicit reference to the concept. His analysis of indifference as the only valid attitude in the face of the Absolute makes him unnecessarily tentative in his references to the concept of mediation: Grenier does consider it seriously in several places, even if he then draws back. At the same time, Campbell is too dogmatic about other aspects of Grenier's thought. The comparisons he makes with Sartre and Camus are pressed too far. His references to Sartre are discussed elsewhere: his adoption of Camus's claim that 'il ne peut y avoir pour un esprit humain que deux univers possibles, celui du *Sacré* (de la Grâce, comme disent les chrétiens) et celui de la *Révolte*' (quoted somewhat approximately from *L'Homme révolté*), for instance, is not obviously helpful in the context of a discussion of Grenier's thought, for while Grenier has clearly ruled out the way of revolt in any activist sense, it is far from clear that he has therefore turned 'résolument vers le premier terme' and that 'son "style" est celui de la *Grâce*'. Indifference is opposed to revolt, but it may equally well be opposed to grace. There is a tension in Grenier's thought which Campbell partly recognizes, but which is effectively destroyed by his emphasis on grace. It is a tension which must be seen not only in terms of the extremes but in terms of the oscillation itself, of alternation, ambiguity and the *acte divergent*. Campbell's article is long enough and detailed enough to bring out something of the agonizing complexity of Grenier's thought, but it never quite avoids the danger of trying to resolve that complexity in terms of a simple answer.

Again in 1958, Gaëtan Picon[20] sees Grenier's fundamental question as being 'Comment vivre dans et avec ce qui est, comment vivre avec l'Être?'. Like Campbell, he places the initial emphasis on the Absolute, but like Simon he concentrates on *Les Grèves*. He notes that: 'seule relève de la vérité l'expérience intérieure à la source, avant la chute dans le choix et dans l'acte, cette liberté d'indifférence pleine de tous les possibles intacts et comblée par son vide'. Possibility is the key to *Les Grèves*. He also notes that serenity is achieved when the individual consciousness is prepared to accept that the world does not answer to its own values and its other illusions. These are useful insights, but Picon fails to do full justice to the human emphases of *L'Existence malheureuse*, of *A propos de l'humain* and of the lyrical essays as well as of *Les Grèves* itself. He does not recognize that Grenier's protest against what he calls 'the grain of the century' is expressed in his humanism and in his creative

activity as a writer as well as in his exhortation to the serenity of abstention and indifference.

More recently, Robert Kanters and René Andrianne have tried to reassess Grenier's stature. For Kanters,[21] Grenier is an 'homme du secret', a philosopher of inner experience, who wants to teach us to recognize 'ce que nous devons emporter contre vent et marée dans notre arche intérieure' (an appropriate enough image, if not one used by Grenier himself). Kanters is careful not to specify exactly what that precious cargo consists of: it is not the content as such that is important. Andrianne offers a more detailed analysis.[22] He makes the important point that 'Grenier ne croit à la liberté que dans la reconnaissance des limites et se montre sceptique sur la capacité qu'aurait l'homme de modifier le monde en profondeur'. However, he grasps only half the truth when he says that Grenier's indifference is in fact simply 'la volonté d'agir d'une manière modeste et consciente de ses limites'. The parallel with Camus's *La Peste* has blinded him to the other aspect which indifference has for Grenier, namely the exclusive and uncompromising attachment to the Absolute. All these critics have shown themselves able to appreciate something of the quality of Grenier's mind, but have made the balance tip too far one way or the other in their exposition of the tension that is basic to his thought. S.-S. Juka recognizes the tension in Grenier's thought and in his writing, and in two recent articles,[23] she has offered an analysis of it which is in some ways more satisfactory than those of her predecessors, but in other ways is still misleading. In the first article, devoted to *Voir Naples*, she notes that 'le problème qui se pose dans le cas de Fritz (*sic*: the character's name is in fact Franz) est celui qui se pose devant le choix', and she goes on to show how the narrator, faced with Franz's failure, opts for the role of witness rather than that of judge. 'Le divin, qui reste son idéal, n'étant pas à sa portée, il peut, grâce à son témoignage écrit — à son intercession — participer au moins au sacré'. The human and the divine are thus somehow reconciled through art. Juka's article is too short to develop this insight, however, and it is buried in more general comments. The title of the much longer second article sounds promising, but in fact it is disappointing. Not only does Juka, like Treil, fail to recognize that the essay 'L'Attrait du vide' did not appear in the first edition of *Les Îles*, but in her desire to say something about every essay in the book she is led into hasty and superficial comments about the metaphysical positions explored in them. The nuances referred to in her earlier article are not given their full value. The ideal of passive submission to a necessary Absolute is too strongly emphasized, while at the same time the highly intellectual nature of Grenier's understanding of the Absolute is not recognized. An early reference to the importance of creation is not developed to balance the later discussion of the theme of the 'retour aux sources', nor is the concept of mediation given prominence. Juka has done Grenier a service in breaking away from the single central theme of

indifference which Campbell has isolated, and she is correct in saying that *Les Îles* 'contient en germe tous les thèmes que son auteur développera par la suite dans d'autres ouvrages' (p. 529), but her analysis is still unbalanced. This study is an attempt to correct the balance by means of a fuller, more detailed examination of Grenier's thought and writings, taking into account his intellectual development and the influences to which he was exposed, and making use of unpublished and hitherto unavailable material.

Another feature of these critical appreciations of Grenier is that they concentrate on ideas rather than on literary presentation. The first academic dissertation devoted to Grenier[24] illustrates the point in an extreme degree: no doubt under the influence of his supervisor, Olivier Lacombe, who is a leading Orientalist, Gérard Barrière devotes an altogether disproportionate amount of his *maîtrise* dissertation[25] to Grenier's dependence on Taoism, which, though important, needs to be put into perspective. As a writer, Grenier is very much in the French tradition. He himself acknowledged his literary debt to his compatriot Chateaubriand and to Barrès, 'le dernier des écrivains romantiques, avec ce piment qu'est la sensibilité imprégnant l'intelligence' (*ELF*, 94). Others have seen the influence of Montaigne, Vauvenargues and Joubert, of St François de Sales, Pascal and Fénelon, of Rousseau and Stendhal, of Valéry, Paulhan and even Marcel Arland, as well as of writers and thinkers from other traditions, St Augustine, Spinoza, Dostoyevsky. At times, of course, Grenier does adopt the tone of the Upanishads or of the Taoist classics, but it is as much to indulge his irony, his gift for pastiche and his mischievous delight in disorientating his interlocutors, as it is with serious intent. Even within the French tradition, however, it is a mixed inheritance, and one that does not lend itself to easy appreciation.

While Grenier's ostensible argument is often directed to the acute and alert intellect, his language speaks to the heart and the soul. The abundant imagery of the sea-shore, of the sea itself, of ships and boats, reaches out to embrace the reader as well. He is drawn into the landscape, becoming part of the Breton or the Mediterranean coastline, so that he too encounters the surge of the tide as it fills up the myriad *filières* of the muddy *grève*, he too experiences the human rhythm of existence measured by 'la course d'un jeune homme d'un bout de la plage à l'autre' (*IM*, 88 (90)). The imagery of artistic creation, merging insensibly with that of the sea, is similarly capable of extension to include the reader. Grenier describes a painting which depicts the creative moment: the painting is itself the expression of the artist's creative instinct, Grenier's description of it is similarly creative, and so is the reader's appreciation of it. Grenier's 'illustration et défense de la vie intérieure' (Henri Hell)[26] proceeds by inclusion, not by argument and demonstration. His meditation on indifference can only be understood in that way, and the same is true of his constant, unemphatic plea in favour of the Absolute.

The two aspects of his career that have brought Grenier the greatest prominence, his attack on 'orthodoxies' in 1936–38 at the time of the Spanish Civil War, and his position as the 'master' of Albert Camus, have both led to misunderstandings of his intention and of his message. He is not a 'pourfendeur du marxisme', nor is he a proto-existentialist. Perhaps François Bott came closest to his real greatness when he wrote of him, in Socratic terms, that he 'provoque une maïeutique'.[27] In his writing as in his teaching Grenier is like a midwife, helping his interlocutors to give birth to philosophical and literary intuitions which they were in danger of missing altogether.

This study of the work of Jean Grenier, then, is not primarily devoted either to philosophy and the history of ideas, although those are not neglected, or to literary analysis. Rather, it is an attempt to present a faithful picture of a little-known figure who, in his life and in his writing, was constantly expressing and resolving, with a greater or lesser degree of success, man's basic problems of freedom and choice in a puzzling contingent existence. His *œuvre* is wide-ranging, and it has not seemed legitimate to leave any area totally out of consideration, simply because, despite its apparent diversity, it presents a remarkable unity. Grenier himself maintained that he had only one song to sing, and the more one explores his philosophy, his art criticism and writings on aesthetics, his essays and novels, his literary criticism, his religious fragments and 'poems', the more the truth of that claim becomes evident.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHICAL INITIATION: RENOUVIER AND LEQUIER

Grenier's dissertation for the *diplôme d'études supérieures*[1] was presented in 1919, when he was 22, and has remained unpublished. Its title 'Le Problème du mal chez Renouvier' (hereafter cited as *R*), indicates clearly what aspect of Renouvier's thought attracted him. He had been preoccupied by the problem of suffering and evil since the age of sixteen, according to his own testimony.[2] He had soon discovered the pessimistic interpretation offered by Schopenhauer, and now he was undertaking an exploration of a rather different system. In his introduction, Grenier states that these two, Schopenhauer and Renouvier, of all the nineteenth-century philosophers, were those who meditated the most deeply on the problem of evil. He quotes, from the *Derniers Entretiens*, words spoken by Renouvier to a disciple on his death-bed: 'La vie ne peut avoir d'intérêt pour un penseur qu'à la condition de chercher à résoudre le problème du mal' (*R*, 1).[3] Renouvier's philosophy, however, was no 'pessimisme pathétique', based on an instinctive reaction to the cruelty of *mâyâ*. His system was already worked out in its main lines long before the problem of evil troubled him. Grounded in logical thought, it could be used to examine and explain that which shocked the intelligence. Pain, or suffering, happened to be a major example of such a feature. Renouvier, the Neocriticist, approached the topic with great prudence. No postulate or hypothesis was to be admitted unless absolutely required by 'la conscience morale', as opposed to 'la sensibilité', and unless it could be rigorously induced from actual or possible experience. He went further than Kant in taking the awfulness of evil and suffering seriously. The body, the flesh, which actually feels pain, had a reality for him. Immortality was not merely a consolation prize claimed in virtue of a cold categorical imperative, but a real revenge on pain and death, 'un établissement dans un bonheur qui ne saurait plus faillir car elle a été trop longtemps et trop injustement refusée'. The shades of the Kantian paradise had no life: Renouvier, increasingly in sympathy with Protestant thinkers, welcomed the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. His sense of the gravity of evil, combined with his desire to arrive at a rational explanation of the world, led him to the adventurous but in many ways admirable hypothesis which involved making the problem of evil the very centre of his philosophical system. He made use not only of moral postulates but also of a historical

explanation of the origin of evil and of the process by which it would ultimately be resolved.

All this may seem far removed from the concerns of the postwar generation of young intellectuals. However, there were good reasons why Renouvier's project should have appealed to Grenier both in its content and in its approach, and indeed should have exercised an influence on him that was to persist throughout his life. There is an interesting sentence in Grenier's introduction which, although it refers to Renouvier, could apply with almost equal force to Grenier himself:

> Et ainsi jusqu'au bout il aura concilié ce qui semblait inconciliable: le sentiment de la gravité du mal et son explication rationnelle; à la façon d'un philosophe grec qui interprète une religion orientale. (*R*, 5)

Although Renouvier belonged so firmly to the nineteenth century with his 'hypothèse suprême en théodicée', Grenier evidently felt a bond of sympathy with him in his attempt to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable. Furthermore, Grenier's nascent poetic instinct was aroused by the sheer grandeur of Renouvier's enterprise. He was to find a similar appeal in the 'suprême acte de liberté' of Jules Lequier, expressive of his 'élan intérieur',[4] and in the antics of those 'saints du désespoir' of whom he speaks in the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* (*EBL*, 64). This kind of noble folly evokes from Grenier, even in such a formal, academic piece of work as the dissertation in question, a response that is essentially poetic, foreshadowing the development of his own highly individual style.

Renouvier ranged widely in his investigation of the solutions that had been suggested to the problem of evil. Grenier found himself obliged to refer not only to Leibnitz, Kant and Schopenhauer, but also to the Book of Genesis, the Vedânta, and Secrétan's *Philosophie de la liberté*. The question of the relationship between human freedom and the existence of evil was clearly primary. In particular, it is the idea of the use to which freedom is put that Grenier has isolated from Renouvier's account. He will later develop it in *L'Existence malheureuse* and extend it beyond the immediate context of the problem of good and evil in the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*. He will propose attitudes varying from 'le meilleur usage que l'homme puisse faire de la liberté, c'est de n'en faire aucun' to the Mediterranean ideal of *construire*.

In the second and third parts of his study, Grenier moves on from a general survey of Renouvier's approach to the problem of evil and focusses on the content of the 'hypothèse suprême' itself, and then on the subsequent development of Renouvier's thought which led to the formulation of his philosophy of Personalism. There is less in the actual subject-matter to attract or influence Grenier. He is sensitive above all to the 'effort d'une extrême audace':

Mais déjà la pensée du philosophe que hante le spectacle du mal irréductible va s'élancer au-dessus des postulats et des inductions pour lui chercher au delà de notre monde une origine absolument première, dans un effort d'une extrême audace. (*R*, conclusion to Part I)

Having quoted the judgement of Séailles that it was nothing but 'un roman d'aventures cosmiques écrit par un polytechnicien pour des pasteurs protestants', Grenier comments that, nevertheless,

elle commande le respect par l'effort désespéré qu'elle représente pour expliquer le presque inexplicable: semblable au coureur de Marathon, elle meurt, mais c'est en croyant annoncer la victoire.

'L'effort désespéré': this aspect of Renouvier's project has already been touched upon, but the key to the attraction it held for Grenier is to be found in a later piece of writing, the 'Fragments d'une deuxième lettre à Cornélius':

Laisse-moi vivre et mourir les yeux fixés sur ces Victoires qui, dans leur course, n'ont pas désappris que leur but final était Ailleurs.

Peut-être ne croient-elles pas qu'il soit Ailleurs, mais elles ne nous empêchent pas de le penser. Elles poursuivent la gloire. Aimer la gloire, c'est vouloir rendre impérissable ce qu'on sait d'avance devoir être vaincu. C'est bannir le fol espoir de bâtir une Tour de Babel, c'est, par un désespoir raisonnable, approcher le plus qu'il est possible du divin. (*IM*, 189 (190))[5]

This is the significance of Renouvier's vast undertaking, of Lequier's life and death, of the lives of those mystics of all traditions whom Grenier in the *Entretiens* calls 'ces saints du désespoir', indeed of the flower that fades once it is picked and of all that reveals the contingency of existence. This is the source of Grenier's continuing poetical meditation, which will find expression in his large and varied literary output. 'Expliquer le presque inexplicable': Grenier's interpretation of Renouvier is already a charter for his own exploration of the *presque*. What the nineteenth-century philosopher tackled by means of an all-embracing system, comprising both historical explanation and moral justification, the twentieth-century philosopher-poet was to approach through suggestion, through the *entre-deux*, through the exploitation of possibility.

In his study of Renouvier, then, Grenier has found both materials and a method. The problem of evil has led to the underlying problem of freedom. Renouvier has raised the questions of the right use of freedom, and of its status. He has pointed to the particular problem involved in choosing between the good and the better. Grenier has also learned from him the value of exploring a number of possible solutions to a problem: that, combined with his growing awareness of the importance of possibility as a value in itself, will encourage him in his antipathy to systems that demand full allegiance. All these areas will be explored in Grenier's work. A more immediate effect of his study of

Renouvier, however, was the awakening of an active interest in Lequier, friend of Renouvier and native of the part of Brittany where Grenier grew up.

Jules Lequier or Lécuyer lived from 1814 to 1862.[6] For most of that time he remained in his native Brittany. He devoted his life to philosophical meditation, particularly on the problem of freedom. Although he made extensive notes for a book which would set out his method of investigation and the conclusions he hoped to establish, Lequier himself published nothing. A few fragments were circulated to friends. Charles Renouvier, with whom he kept up a friendship from the time of their first acquaintance at the École Polytechnique, collected some of the more finished fragments under Lequier's own title *La Recherche d'une première vérité* and had 120 copies printed privately after Lequier's death,[7] but the Breton philosopher remained almost unknown except through the acknowledgements and quotations in Renouvier's own work.

In 1914, 1920 and 1922, L. Dugas published several fragments both from *La Recherche* and from the notebooks which had been left to the University library at Rennes.[8] In 1924, a new edition of *La Recherche* appeared, with a biographical introduction by Dugas. It was this that aroused Grenier's latent interest in his fellow-countryman. Brought up in Saint-Brieuc, Grenier already knew the little graveyard at Plérin with its statue of the solitary philosopher, erected in 1868, six years after his death by drowning. It may have been Georges Palante, philosopher and eccentric himself, who showed him the house where Lequier lived and meditated.[9] Grenier had certainly come across the references to Lequier in Renouvier's writings while working on his dissertation for the *diplôme d'études supérieures* in 1918–19. But it was the publication of Dugas's edition of *La Recherche* in 1924 that inspired Grenier to write his first article on Lequier in the local review *La Bretagne touristique* in that same year (issue dated 15 October 1924, pp. 226–27).

There was as yet no suggestion that he should attempt any detailed study of Lequier. In 1922 he had become an *agrégé de philosophie* and begun his teaching career, but apart from a monograph on Schopenhauer and Indian thought[10] his output was to be non-academic for several years. He was associated with a group of literary-minded young intellectuals, and his mentor Edmond Lambert was encouraging him to shake off the dry, stultifying atmosphere of the University and give expression to his lyrical talents.[11] However, the enigmatic figure of Lequier remained with him, and he eventually resolved to devote his doctoral thesis to him, in preference to undertaking research into aspects of Indian metaphysics.[12]

In his 1924 article Grenier wrote of Lequier:

> Ce qu'il faut que nous admirions en cet homme, ce n'est pas tant sa doctrine qui n'est qu'une doctrine entre bien d'autres, aussi forte, aussi discutable que d'autres, ce n'est pas tant cette doctrine que l'élan intérieur qui la soutient et lui donne une signification tragique.

He responded to Lequier in much the same way as he had to Renouvier: both spoke to him of an 'effort désespéré' which impressed him far more than the actual content of their system, interesting though that undoubtedly was. It is true that in 1924 Grenier still lacked a close acquaintance with Lequier's thought, but the parallel with his response to Renouvier, which had avoided being completely stifled by the demands of an academic approach, is to be noted. It helps to correct a possible false impression that might be given by a reading of *La Philosophie de Jules Lequier*. For the purposes of his doctoral thesis Grenier was obliged to concentrate on the philosophical system more than on the man himself, and he could no longer permit himself even the few flights of lyrical prose that found their way into his dissertation on Renouvier. Even so, as A. Lazareff recognized,[13] the result is less of a betrayal of such a complex personality than might have been expected. By espousing the contours of Lequier's thought, with all its hesitations and repetitions, just as he had tried to do with Renouvier, Grenier manages to convey an impression of his subject that Lazareff terms 'polyrealism':

> L'ouvrage de M. Grenier est complexe lui aussi, pareil en quelque sorte à un cristal à multiples facettes, comme l'être extraordinaire qu'il étudie. Et l'on y distingue une image de Lequier qui diffère par certains de ses traits de celle que fixent les conclusions de l'ouvrage, et de la part de l'auteur, d'autres intuitions que celles que finalement il nous propose. Ce 'polyréalisme', si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, dans la description de l'être spirituel de Lequier confère au livre une valeur toute particulière. M. Grenier ne se met pas en avant, il ne nous cache pas Jules Lequier et nous laisse toute latitude de l'atteindre directement.[14]

As in his study of Renouvier, Grenier is concerned in *La Philosophie de Jules Lequier* to present a faithful picture of one man's system and of his intentions in elaborating it, rather than to pursue points that may interest him personally. The plan of the thesis follows that drawn up by Lequier for his own work. Lequier had projected a work in eight books, of which only the first and the last ever came anywhere near completion. It was the first, 'Le Problème de la science', that Renouvier hailed as his friend's great achievement, despite its unfinished state. He considered it superior to, or at least more successful than, the last book, 'Indications de l'idée du libre arbitre'. Grenier disagrees strongly with this view. In proving his point he devotes 36,000 words, half the total length of the thesis, to a study of Lequier's 'philosophie chrétienne', and only a quarter of that amount to an exposition of 'Le Problème de la science'. He characterizes this Book I as:

> Une sorte de 'discours sur la méthode', où Lequier après avoir montré toutes les difficultés de la recherche de la vérité, l'attrait du scepticisme et du déterminisme, l'impossibilité d'y adhérer, finit par trouver la première vérité dans l'affirmation de la liberté. (*PL*, 17)

It is, however, precisely this kind of exercise that provides Grenier with the substance of much of his own writing. *Le Choix* and *L'Existence malheureuse* are two examples of books in which he adopts a similarly hesitant, exploratory, at times almost self-contradictory approach. On the other hand, the firmness of Lequier's conclusion in 'Le Problème de la science' finds no echo in Grenier's works, convinced though he may be of the primacy and importance of freedom; and the theological framework of Book VIII is also more sharply defined than the looser metaphysical context within which Grenier prefers to conduct his meditations. If it is the grandeur of Lequier's project of basing a complete 'philosophie chrétienne' on the idea of freedom as a 'première vérité' that evokes Grenier's admiration, it is the detail of his method and of the possible solutions envisaged, rather than any conclusion which Lequier reached, that provides him with fuel for his own thought.

> *Recherche d'une première vérité*, ce titre indique suffisamment qu'il ne s'agit pas d'un système à exposer mais d'une doctrine à trouver. La marche de Lequier ne sera pas didactique mais heuristique.(*PL*, 41)

The last sentence could equally well describe Grenier's own *œuvre*, and it is possible to see here an implicit tribute to the importance of Lequier's example in the development of his own thought.

It is in exploring the subtle twists and turns of such a mind, so similar in many ways to his own, that Grenier excels. He is not concerned to give a careful historical analysis of the arguments employed by Lequier. He considers the relationship of Lequier's meditation on necessity and the affirmation of freedom to that of Fichte (*PL*, 55–60), but it will be up to Tilliette to provide a satisfactory survey of that aspect.[15] He does not chart, as does Wahl, the position occupied by Lequier in the development of a theory of the active self from Maine de Biran to Bergson.[16] His contribution to the study of possibility is more in terms of a portrait of one man's consciousness at grips with the problem than of an actual analysis of the problem itself. The interest of the *double dilemme* for him is not its place in the nineteenth-century debate on free-will and determinism,[17] but its meaning for Lequier in the context of his own search.

His study of Lequier acted above all as a stimulus on Grenier. The issues raised by Lequier are not always pursued by Grenier in the same terms. The incident related by Lequier in the fragment entitled 'La Feuille de charmille', for instance, is interpreted by Grenier in the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* in a way that accords with his own preoccupations (*EBL*, 17–18). The *ivresse* felt by Lequier at the possibility of making a free choice between two mutually exclusive courses of action, and of making it by an act that would be a 'premier commencement', is seen by Grenier more in the context of the fragility of freedom as possibility is translated into reality. He is concerned to

preserve possibility against the destructive force, not of necessity, but of choice. For him that is achieved by the recognition of contingency, not by the perspective of any 'premier commencement'.

Bréhier described Lequier's work as

> une méditation constamment tendue, où viennent se confronter, avec la liberté, les dogmes de la création, de la toute-puissance de Dieu et surtout de la prédestination; cette méditation n'arrive nulle part à une doctrine précise: il reprend tous les thèmes de la théologie sans voir le point où ils coincident; d'une part notre liberté est comme la création de nous-même . . .; mais comment y accorder la puissance de Dieu. (op. cit., p. 841)

Grenier displays the same kind of tension in his own work, and despite Lambert's criticism that 'vous êtes comme Lecuyer (*sic*): quel douloureux destin et quel attristant spectacle: tant de belle intelligence qu'étouffent les mots' (31 January 1937), there is surely a sense in which both Lequier and Grenier by-pass words and convey their meaning through the very pattern which their meditation takes. It is not to the formal conclusions of Grenier's study of Lequier, or indeed of Renouvier, that one must look in order to trace some supposed influence in the realm of ideas. The hesitant, circular approach of *L'Existence malheureuse*, for instance, betrays this influence.

Grenier's theses were defended in 1936, by which time he had already published one book and numerous articles and essays. It is hardly surprising that his own philosophical preoccupations should on occasion have caused him to pursue points in Lequier's thought that were less developed in their original fragmentary form, or to give to other points less attention than they perhaps deserved; but the shadow of his fellow-countryman's anguished exploration of the dimensions of freedom in the face of the overwhelming proofs of determinism is always discernible in the background. Lequier remained within the Roman Catholic Church, and his thought always has God as a point of reference, although the idea of the freedom of God caused him endless difficulties. Grenier's thought has a similar point of reference. He prefers to avoid the historical and religious associations of the word 'God' and call it the 'Absolute' instead, but his constant struggle to understand the relationship between finite, imperfect man and the infinite, perfect Absolute, which will be explored in the next few chapters, bears a close similarity to Lequier's 'Problème de la science' and 'Problème de la prescience'. In 1968 Grenier commented to Louis Foucher that Lequier (whose last page he had just republished, showing his continuing interest in him)[18] was 'hanté par la perfection de la forme, par la perfection tout court' (*ELF*, 47): he might have been speaking of himself.

CHAPTER 2

CONTINGENCY AND THE INTUITION OF THE ABSOLUTE: *LE CHOIX*

Grenier's studies of Renouvier and Lequier have provided him with themes and a method of approach to them, but alongside these and chronologically prior to them is a basic intuition which is the key to the whole world of metaphysical consciousness.

Nous ne sommes pas au monde, telle est la première pensée qui donne le branle à la philosophie. Pas au monde et pourtant dans le monde, vivants, heureux de vivre, agissants, heureux d'agir. Ce n'est pas que le monde nous apparaisse mauvais, c'est qu'il nous apparaît *autre*. Le pessimisme n'est pas forcément au point de départ de la réflexion philosophique, et ce n'est pas toujours la considération du mal, de la vieillesse et de la mort qui nous incite à nous poser les questions qui nous importent le plus. C'est un sentiment plus général, un sentiment d'étrangeté.(*C*, 3 (7))

In this opening passage of *Le Choix* Grenier is indicating that the problem of evil and the treatment of it that he found in the works of Schopenhauer and Renouvier were not the only factors to have stimulated his philosophical reflection. They were rather channels into which his consciousness, already awakened by a more general sense of the otherness of the world, was directed.

Grenier continues: 'L'état philosophique est un état de rupture avec l'état de communion où vit l'enfant et l'homme qui jouit innocemment de ses sens' (*C*, 4 (7)). Despite its appearance of objectivity, this whole passage is intensely personal. It may be read as a commentary on other, more obviously autobiographical passages in the novels and lyrical essays. The essence of the experience which Grenier is describing and analysing is the realization that the apparent coherence and stability of the world is an illusion. The individual has a sense of lostness instead of a sense of belonging. He perceives *le vide* or *le néant* where before he simply accepted the *plénitude* of what was experienced as the real world.

The most striking account of such a moment is found in 'L'Attrait du vide'. The experience is linked with Grenier's childhood, and indeed there are similar descriptions dating from much earlier.

J'ai peur de ces moments qui ouvrent une porte sur le vide — quand la nuit montante cherche à t'étrangler, quand le sommeil t'engloutit, quand au milieu de la

nuit tu fais le compte de ce que tu es, quand tu penses — à ce qui n'est pas. Le jour t'abuse mais la nuit n'a pas de décor. (1929) (*LI*, 16–17 (37))[1]

Frêle décor, pouvait-il faire illusion à cette minute, à un esprit trop détaché de son corps, pour parvenir à *croire*? J'évoquais cette fin d'après-midi lointaine où, adossé contre un mur, je vis l'arbre que je regardais fixement (un pommier) disparaître comme une tache qu'on enlève, m'entraîner avec lui et m'engloutir. (1933) (*LI*, 24 (43))

In 'L'Attrait du vide', which belongs more to the period of *Le Choix* than to that of the earliest lyrical essays, there is more philosophical interpretation:

Allongé à l'ombre d'un tilleul, contemplant un ciel presque sans nuage, j'ai vu ce ciel basculer et s'engloutir dans le vide: ç'a été ma première impression du néant, et d'autant plus vive qu'elle succédait à celle d'une existence riche et pleine . . . Je n'avais pas devant moi une faillite mais une lacune. Dans ce trou béant, tout, absolument tout, risquait de s'engloutir. De cette date commença pour moi une rumination sur le peu de réalité des choses. (1946) (*LI* (2), 12, 25))[2]

What was previously thought to be a presence is realized to be an absence, or at least to mask an absence. There is no longer any permanence. This revelation inspires a sense of *inquiétude* or of *étonnement philosophique*, stemming from what Grenier, quoting Schopenhauer, calls 'cette claire représentation que la non-existence du monde est aussi possible que son existence' (C, 51, n. 7 (19)). It is, in fact, a revelation of the radical contingency of the world. Grenier makes no claim for the originality of this, indeed he argues for its universality (*C*, 5–6 (9)). His treatment of it, however, is far from standard. At first sight it appears to share many features with the 'existential' experience that underlies the philosophy of many modern writers. Robert Campbell has drawn attention to the parallel with Sartre,[3] and certainly the accounts already quoted do have some features in common with the passage in *La Nausée* which describes Roquentin's experience in the *jardin public* of Bouville. However, Sartre's interpretation of that experience, and the lessons he draws from it, are quite different from Grenier's. In the experience of contingency, what is important for Sartre is what is there, not what might have been or what is absent. Indeed, it is existence itself, as an undifferentiated kind of raw material, that is experienced by Roquentin's consciousness: and he, as an existent, seems to be inextricably involved in it. The justification of *individual* existence is not to be found latent in the metaphysical structure of the universe, but is rather to be affirmed, chosen by a free act of will. The individual consciousness, threatened by 'les choses', chooses to affirm its own contingent existence at all costs. Grenier, on the other hand, although his starting-point in the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* will be not dissimilar, is concerned in *Le Choix* to arrive at a satisfactory metaphysical framework which will be the logical conclusion of the acceptance of a truly radical contingency, and in which the individual has no necessarily privileged status. For him, indeed, it is not so much the contingent

individual or even the contingent world that is thrown into relief, but rather that underlying reality which he claims to be the Absolute: an ultimate value in relation to which all other values are relative, indeed all existence is relative. This is very different from Sartre's understanding of the responsibility of creating value in a contingent world that is deprived of an absolute reference. It may, indeed, be misleading to approach Grenier's thought with a mind that is too heavily conditioned by 'existentialist' concepts. Robert Campbell is one critic who has succumbed to this danger.

On page 694 of the article already mentioned, Campbell misunderstands Grenier's point about being 'en deçà du choix' or 'au delà du choix' (*C*, 128–29 (109–10)). He sees it as being a distinction between the common herd, the ἄκριτα φῦλα, living 'comme ça', following their actions, and those on the other hand who create themselves, who precede their actions. It is the well-known distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence. The first category of people is 'au delà du choix', the second 'en deçà'. But this is not Grenier's point at all. Grenier is in fact not concerned with authentic and inauthentic existence at all. Both categories of people are admired by him. The mistake Campbell makes is to attempt an interpretation of the passage in question in terms borrowed from elsewhere in Grenier's work, from the episode of the Gare de Milan, which occurs at the beginning of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*.

What Grenier is doing in the passage from *Le Choix* is to hold up for admiration two classes of people who show themselves able, in two different and opposite ways, to maintain the all-important distinction between 'ce qui vaut en soi' and 'ce qui vaut pour nous à l'instant donné': between 'l'Inévaluable' and 'ce qui est évalué'. There are two possible attitudes, Grenier claims, which both succeed in maintaining the distinction. One is that of the sage who is absolutely indifferent to everything, untouched by good or evil, pleasure or pain, desire or repugnance. The reason for such an attitude is that the sage 'se retourne vers l'Absolu' (however that Absolute may be conceived). In comparison with what alone is, and has, value, everything else becomes indifferent, in the double sense of undifferentiated and unattractive, and the sage abdicates his power of making choices. He is truly 'en deçà du choix'.

But the opposite attitude is equally possible, and equally satisfactory in so far as it preserves the distinction already mentioned. It is that of the hero, who 'se décide sans délibérer', not at all because he belongs to the mindless, uncritical tribe, but because his *élan* carries him on into action 'par-dessus la délibération'. The hero is concerned exclusively with 'l'achèvement de l'œuvre', just as the sage is concerned with 'le perfectionnement intérieur'. Neither of them encroaches on the domain of the Absolute or enters into competition with it through the value-judgements that are necessarily involved in an act of choice,

for neither of them comes to, or rather passes through, the point at which a choice is made. Evaluation is side-stepped by them.

Both the sage and the hero have an 'attitude singulière', an expression that is evidently to be understood in a mathematical sense in view of the following gloss on it: 'La seule manière que nous ayons d'imiter l'*unité* de l'Absolu est en effet de devenir nous-mêmes *unifiés*.' In their single-minded self-expression, the two types of person analysed by Grenier are achieving precisely this unification, while yet presenting a spectacle not of uniformity, which would be to 'vouloir introduire l'Absolu dans le relatif', but of what Grenier calls *le style*, corresponding to the 'diversité infinie du monde'. That in itself is 'un hommage à l'unité suprême'. Both types represent 'des états . . . sublimes'.[4]

The interest of the episode in the *Entretiens*, termed an 'anecdote' by Grenier, is that it illustrates one particular case in which Grenier is led to reflect on his metaphysical status. That reflection is still very general at this early point in the book. Grenier sums up the point he is making by emphasizing that 'le vertige qui saisit l'homme devant la multitude des possibles est donc fait à la fois d'angoisse et d'ivresse'. He insists that such an experience is not exceptional. Of course every being has a situation, a kind of mould, but as soon as it is a question of 'un choix fait en connaissance de cause, c'est-à-dire avec une hypertrophie de l'intelligence', as soon as the consciousness of the human subject is actively brought into play, then 'le hiatus qui constitue le fondement initial de l'acte', from being almost negligible,

> devient considérable à mesure que la conscience présente un plus grand écartement sur l'avenir et que son horizon tend vers l'infini. Les questions éthiques prennent le pas sur les questions pratiques, le pourquoi faire sur le comment faire.

The problem of what is best will naturally lead on to that of absolute value, but that is not Grenier's concern at the moment. In the first chapter he is simply sketching

> une phénoménologie du vertige mental, de l'homme au bord de l'action qui ne peut s'empêcher d'avoir en même temps l'intelligence la plus aiguë de la multitude des futurs et le sentiment le plus désespéré de l'*impuissance* où il est d'exercer intelligemment sa *puissance*.

In view of the fact that Grenier, like Lequier, is a thinker for whom the mode of his argument, even the digressions and pseudo-conclusions, are at least as important as the actual main line of argument itself with its formal conclusions, it is clear that Campbell is doing him a grave injustice by thus arbitrarily bringing together texts so widely separated. It is necessary, instead, to consider carefully the movement of Grenier's thought, and to consider it in his own terms.

From an early age Grenier had what he calls 'le goût de l'Absolu' (*MIX*, 71, 95). He was unable to define exactly what he meant by that, but it involved an

instinctive aspiration towards 'ces réalités transcendantes dont je croyais avoir l'intuition' (84–85), towards some kind of 'principe d'unification' (78). It was natural to identify this transcendent reality with the traditional metaphysical concept of the Absolute.

There were several factors, however, which combined to keep him from being convinced by the Idealism or the more specifically Christian metaphysical systems which represented the Western understanding of the Absolute. These factors were his own experiences of 'disparition du monde et de la personnalité', his reflection on the problem of suffering and evil, and his growing acquaintance with Indian thought.

Grenier gives yet another description of his childhood experiences in the posthumous *Mémoires intimes de X*.

> Je m'amusais souvent, étant enfant, à m'allonger sur la terre pour contempler le ciel: je suivais des yeux les nuages de toute forme et de teinte diverse qui avaient l'air immobiles, et qui en réalité, lorsqu'ils étaient fixés assez longtemps, se déplaçaient très vite; j'imaginais des terres inconnues, des royaumes fabuleux dans ces nuages et toutes sortes d'existences fantastiques qui pourraient y être vécues. Puis, insensiblement, ma rêverie faisait place à un état de contemplation à vide qui ne devait pas durer en réalité plus de quelques minutes, mais à moi me semblait occuper un temps infini. Alors les choses perdaient leur apparence, les nuages leur contour, le ciel sa couleur; tout se brouillait et devenait uniforme. A la fin, j'étais *absorbé* parce que moi-même, je ne me sentais plus exister, je n'étais plus rien et ne voyais rien au-devant de moi. Cet état n'était pas joyeux, il n'était pas douloureux non plus. Cette disparition du monde et de la personnalité présentait quand même un attrait, comme tout ce qui paraît être un repos absolu. (73–74)

He offers no definitive explanation or interpretation of these 'états'. Even when suggesting their metaphysical nature, he is chary of attaching any label to whatever reality is encountered in such 'états'.

> S'agit-il alors d'une prise de contact avec l'Être? avec le Néant? Je l'ignore. Ces mots sont équivalents d'ailleurs dans ces expériences. On va du néant de l'expérience sensible vers un Absolu dont on a une expérience nouvelle. Savoir ce que représente cet Absolu serait une question tout-à-fait oiseuse. On ne peut le savoir puisque toute connaissance suppose une relation et que la relation est abolie dans l'union de l'individu avec l'Absolu. Ces termes d'individu et d'Absolu sont d'ailleurs susceptibles de bien des définitions ou plutôt ils sont en dernière analyse indéfinissables. (77–78)

Western philosophy seemed to him to be too ready to define the Absolute and then to build a whole system upon that definition. For Grenier it was, for a time at least, the experience of release from the world that was important, rather than the term towards which his *esprit* moved in such an experience.

The problem of suffering reinforced this attitude. Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four he was dominated by it, so that during those formative years his admiration went not to the philosophers of the school and university

programme but rather to Schopenhauer, who was deeply concerned with the same problem (*MIX*, 96–98). It was through Schopenhauer that Grenier became acquainted with Indian thought, with the Buddhist tradition to begin with, and later with the Brahmanic.[5]

In both those traditions there is a close connection between release from suffering and the experience of union with the Absolute. The first significant mention of the Absolute in Grenier's published writings occurs in the context of a series of articles which appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue française* in 1930 under the title 'Sur l'Inde.'[6] All through the 1930s the Absolute continued to be linked by Grenier with India. In 1938 came the announcement of a forthcoming book to be entitled *Essai sur l'idée d'absolu*.[7] When it was eventually published in 1941, as *Le Choix*, there could be no further doubt that the idea of the Absolute was inseparable in Grenier's thought from the Indian philosophical tradition. As the Orientalist Masson-Oursel noted in his review of Grenier's book, 'L'Inde fournit bien plus que des cas parallèles.'[8] The Indian approach to philosophy was integral to Grenier's argument.

The idea of the Absolute belongs to the Upanishadic tradition, as Madeleine Biardeau makes clear:

> à travers le langage encore mythique et très lié à l'univers rituel qui est celui des *Upaniṣad*, apparaît la croyance à une réalité absolue, permanente et qui, si l'on parvient à l'atteindre, nous délivre de la nécessité de remourir. Cet Absolu, on l'appelle le *brahman* . . . Il est le fondement dernier de l'être, il est l'Être, c'est lui qu'il faut atteindre.[9]

Later tradition emphasized the concept even more strongly, until, for the orthodox Vedânta school represented supremely by Śaṅkara, the Absolute or Brahman was the only reality.[10] It was this exclusive concentration upon the Absolute that moved Grenier to claim in 1930 that India had a unique spiritual heritage to offer the West:

> elle a représenté l'effort le plus héroïque que l'homme ait fait pour dégager la pensée de tout ce qui n'était pas purement elle et s'élever vers ce que l'on est convenu d'appeler un absolu. (art. cit., p. 55)

The Indian thinkers had indeed faced the same fundamental questions as the Greeks, and had come to a significantly different conclusion. Both perceived the dilemma of the human mind:

> L'intelligence adhère immédiatement à l'éternel; et il se trouve que non seulement elle ne peut se définir que dans le temps, mais qu'elle y est plongée par sa nature même (art. cit., p. 338)

but the Greeks gave more weight to the realm of time, of change, of human values, while their Indian counterparts refused to compromise the purity of the eternal Absolute:

un Grec ne peut s'arrêter à l'absolu: il a trop souci de la forme humaine. Seuls les philosophes indiens ont considéré l'opposition dans sa nudité. (art cit., pp. 338–39)

The sheer intellectual ambition of this attitude could not fail to attract Grenier, just as he was attracted by the ambition of Renouvier's 'hypothèse suprême' or Lequier's affirmation of his freedom. He was prepared, at least in the first instance, to accept the dissociation of the intellectual and ethical spheres. That does not mean to say that there is no place for ethics. It simply means that, as he will claim in *Le Choix*, 'il est impossible de passer de la pensée à la croyance et de la croyance à l'action' (*C*, 30 (34)). The Indian tradition preserves a distinction which has been frequently obscured in the West, and particularly in the twentieth century. Grenier is determined to 'séparer les deux ordres et voir jusqu'où l'on peut aller dans la voie de la pensée avant de s'engager dans la voie de la croyance' (ibid.).[11]

According to the 'Avertissement' of *Le Choix*, 'l'idée d'Absolu . . . selon nous, constitue le fondement même de toute pensée (*C*, v (6)). In one sense, then, it requires no demonstration. As Grenier had written in 1930, 'l'intelligence adhère immédiatement à l'éternel'. In the paper he presented to the Ninth International Congress of Philosophy, the 'Congrès Descartes', in 1937,[12] he quoted, via Grousset's *Histoire de la philosophie orientale*, from Śaṅkara: 'L'atman est le lieu (condition première de toute démonstration), donc il est prouvé avant toute démonstration'.[13] Neither Śaṅkara nor Grenier can doubt the existence of an ultimate reality, but equally neither of them can avoid expending considerable energy in elucidating the concept, in order to show up the misinderstandings of other thinkers. Śaṅkara felt that the possibility of release from *samsâra* was jeopardized by the teaching of false knowledge: the Vijñânavâda school of Buddhism and the Śâṅkhya school of Hinduism taught a salvation that was ineffectual.[14] Grenier, in his turn, found himself confronted with religious and philosophical systems which promised liberation, but without clearly distinguishing between the purely intellectual realm and that of belief. The Absolute was invoked to justify complete systems of values. Grenier therefore had to show just what the intelligence could be held to reveal about ultimate reality, and what could only be affirmed by an act of faith.

Grenier's main point in the first two parts of *Le Choix*, as in the two papers which prepared the way for the book as early as 1936–37,[15] is that while the mind adheres immediately to the Absolute, it can offer no indication whatsoever of the nature of that Absolute. Any attempt to define, characterize or qualify the Absolute simply reduces it to the level of a contingent being. It cannot even be said to be given, for its very givenness would constitute a limitation. Rather, it is *realized*, in the sense that the mind is gradually cured of the illusion and ignorance which made it appear that the individual mind was

essentially distinct from the Absolute. The Absolute is then experienced as the only true reality, at the expense of the phenomenal world: and the result is an attitude of pure indifference.[16]

This is a disconcerting argument for the Western reader, although it has affinities with the thought of Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and indeed Bradley and other modern Idealists.[17] It appeals constantly, as do some of them, to the Indian tradition and in particular to that of the Vedânta. However, Grenier is at pains to point out that there is not such a fundamental difference as might be supposed between the Western and Eastern traditions. He shows, for instance, that the Cartesian Cogito is not, in its essence, significantly different from the Vedântist reasoning concerning the existence of the Self. The important divergence comes only at a secondary stage, where Descartes moves from the realm of pure thought to that of belief. His argument from the existence of the individual thinking self to that of the ultimate Self, which Descartes calls God, would be perfectly acceptable in Indian categories. It is only when he feels the need to endow his 'God' with qualities, for instance that of veracity, that he exceeds those categories. The 'malin génie' is rejected by an act of faith, whereas the cosmic *mâyâ* is retained by the Indian tradition on purely intellectual grounds. It is perfectly possible for the purity of the Cogito to be preserved, and Grenier quotes an experiment made by Gobineau which demonstrated that possibility:

> Gobineau ayant fait lire le *Discours de la Méthode* à des Persans, remarque que la vive impression qu'ils en ont reçue ne tient pas tant à la formule fondamentale *Cogito ergo sum* et à sa suite, qui leur est extrêmement familière, mais au 'parti modéré auquel les Européens ont la prétention de s'arrêter' à partir de cette formule. 'La conséquence qu'ils en tirent est celle-ci: que Dieu étant l'existence par excellence, l'existence unique, il est en même temps l'unique pensée et l'unique parole, ce qui ne va pas au résultat cherché par Descartes'.[18]

Grenier is therefore not so much adopting methods of reasoning peculiar to the East as using the Oriental tradition to correct errors of perspective which, in the West, have deformed a common philosophical core.

Intuition is not, for Grenier, opposed to intelligence. Indeed, the process of the realization of the Absolute begins and ends with an intuition. 'L'intelligence adhère immédiatement à l'éternel', and then, after a long period of conscious reflection, the essential unity of the two terms is revealed by a second intuition (*C*, 36–37 (39–41)). The gulf between the individual and the Absolute is first exposed, and then abolished, but its abolition meets no need unless the scandal of its existence is first fully appreciated by the conscious intelligence. In the same way as for Bergson, the intuition comes only after a disciplined intellectual preparation and search.[19] The same is true for Śaṅkara, although for him the first steps are not simply transcended but actually negated in the ultimate realization of the Absolute.

The basic 'sentiment métaphysique', according to Grenier, is of a 'surprise en face d'un abîme' (*C*, 6 (9)). There is a *manque* or *vide* at the centre of conscious existence, which is implied even in its denial by some philosophers. Philosophical and religious systems undertake to substitute for that *vide* some form of *plein*, 'l'idée d'un Tout éternellement nécessaire ou d'une totalisation jamais finie' (*C*, 11 (16)). The problem is not that of an initial creation, which is not even envisaged in some well-established traditions such as the Hindu and the Greek (*C*, 14–15) (21–23)); nor is it that of 'une nécessité derrière les contingences' (*C*, 16 (24)), at least in the sense in which that is usually understood in the West, with the 'nécessité' being equated with 'de soi-disant vérités éternelles' (*C*, 25 (29)). Idealism and realism, rationalism and empiricism, all depend on a belief in static forms, whether objects or Ideas, in which knowledge is apprehended. The Indian conception is quite different:

> Pour l'Inde, aucune opération de l'esprit n'est fixe; toute chose, quelle qu'elle soit, n'est qu'un résidu de l'action: pas d'états de conscience mais des survivances du passé ou des anticipations de l'avenir. (*C*, 22–23 (26–27))

It is therefore out of the question to appeal to 'le sens commun' to establish any kind of philosophy of Being, since what is thereby demonstrated is cultural conditioning rather than universal truth. The attitude of pragmatic realism stands self-condemned as far as truth is concerned. The temptation to provide a ready-made solution must in fact be resisted in the name of truth. 'Ce qu'il faut c'est prendre conscience d'un vide; mais ne pas le combler tout de suite n'importe comment (*C*, 29 (33)). The most that Grenier will allow is that, while the mind is less a 'reflet d'une *réalité* préexistante' than an 'agent créateur et transformateur' (*C*, 27 (31)), yet the creative part it plays in the realization of truth is only possible in response to a certain gleam of light: 'cette clarté ne peut venir que de *l'Esprit*' (ibid.). *Réalisation, formation, création, relation, continuité* . . .: these are the terms in which Grenier is restating the problem of 'l'Absolu et la pensée'. Attention is drawn away from the objective reality of the phenomenal world, and real existence is predicated of the mind only when it turns away from the world and so escapes from the status of a mere *relation*. It is then easy to point out that the mind is made rather to 'devenir Un' than to explain or possess 'le Tout', and that this is achieved by a *dépouillement* or *détachement*, in which the mind must 'se mettre en mesure d'accueillir par un travail intérieur la vérité qui doit sourdre au fond de lui' (*C*, 39 (43)). That truth is, in Indian terms, that Atman is Brahman. The identification results from a suppression of consciousness:

> c'est une libération de la connaissance en tant que celle-ci est une *relation*. Les liens sont coupés, c'est une ab-solution ou une dis-solution, mais en tout cas c'est un état qui se rapproche de celui de non-relation. (*C*, 38–39 (42))

The individual achieves deliverance, and the world remains as it is, neither justified nor abolished but ignored.

Grenier's purpose in undertaking this heterodox investigation of the basis of metaphysics is twofold, having a negative and a positive aspect. The negative purpose is to criticize the two main solutions adopted, in the Western tradition, to explain or justify contingent human existence. They are, essentially, philosophies of Being and philosophies of action. As to the former, Grenier comments that 'La plupart du temps ce que les penseurs ont appelé "l'Être" n'était que le résidu nominal de leurs abstractions' (*C*, 39 (43)), with no justification in the realm of pure thought. 'L'Être n'est qu'un mot comme le Néant' (*C*, 40 (43)), and the reality represented by both words is not susceptible of definition. Śaṅkara, indeed, laid particular stress on those Upanishadic texts which refer to the Absolute only in negative terms, and his system is known as 'non-dualism', *Advaita*, rather than as monism (*C*, 42, n. (44); 72 (56)).[20] As to the philosophies of action, Grenier finds that they fail to do justice to the yearning for truth which is a 'besoin de l'intelligence'. Truth is the perfection towards which the human mind tends: but there is no absolute truth apart from the Absolute itself. The adoption of provisional principles of conduct does not rule out the existence of an absolute standard; and the elevation of such provisional principles to the status of a metaphysical absolute is simply an abomination. At the same time Grenier has a positive purpose, which is to point out that there are other viable and respectable systems of thought besides those usually recognized in the West, and that in some ways they may have superior insights. He is conscious of the limitations, and in particular of the lack of ambition, of European metaphysics, and he is genuinely enthusiastic about the Indian alternative, just as he will be about the extreme doctrines of Taoism. The love of truth for its own sake will not necessarily lead the metaphysician along traditional paths, and indeed in an article published in 1940 Grenier suggests that what is usually regarded as belonging to the European tradition has been heavily influenced by the East, so that movement between the two even today is by no means unthinkable. Śaṅkara and Râmânuja still have many lessons to teach.[21]

At the same time, however, Grenier is well aware of the predicament in which the course of realizing the Absolute lands him. With an Absolute which is the only reality, the problem of the world is properly insoluble. Grenier outlines four possible ways of envisaging the problem, but none constitutes a true solution. Starting from the Absolute, the world may be seen as the product of a cosmic illusion, an apparent modification of Brahman; or as a real modification of a Spinozist Substance; or as a lie for which God is responsible, on the lines of Descartes's theory of the 'Grand Trompeur'; or, starting from the individual, the world may be seen simply as the result of ignorance, of 'un mal guérissable' (*C*, 74–88 (57–71)). However, although reality may be denied to the world, it is none the less there.

Il faut reconnaître que le monisme le plus décidé, même si on l'envisage comme nous venons de le faire, c'est-à-dire comme une conquête, ne peut entièrement rendre compte de l'expérience globale. L'acosmisme est un pressentiment puis une réalisation; il ne supprime pas l'entredeux. Nous en arrivons à cette conclusion que toute métaphysique est obligée d'établir une échelle de l'être et finalement de reconnaître des différences et des degrés. (*C*, 88 (70–71))[22]

Even Śaṅkara is obliged to distinguish between a higher form of Brahman, without any attributes, and a lower form, 'conceived with attributes for the purposes of devout meditation'[23] (*C*, 90–91 (74–75)). His theory of transpersonality, according to which Atman is 'plutôt un soi qu'un non-moi', does little to resolve the practical difficulties. The whole system of thought is circular, and never really touches the world. Descartes himself had recognized the problem: 'De Dieu on ne peut aller qu'à Dieu'.[24] The system is unexceptionable in itself and none of the eminent philosophers who reviewed *Le Choix* could fault Grenier's argument in the first two parts,[25] but it does not provide an answer of the kind that is felt to be necessary by the Western tradition. This is an illustration of the principle that Grenier was to put forward in *L'Existence malheureuse* in connection with the place of freedom in any solution of the problem of evil: freedom belongs more to the original choice of a *cadre* of thought than to the nature of the problem itself and its solution. In *Le Choix* itself Grenier suggests that it is impossible to establish which is the best option to take in any given situtation of choice, and that the important thing is in fact to choose oneself, 'se choisir' (*C*, 119 ff. (98 ff.)). The principle is the same, for the details lose their initial apparent significance.

However, Grenier has recognized that the 'entre-deux' remains, even if it is emptied of significance and indeed of reality by the sheer fact of the Absolute. Later chapters of this study will be concerned with the area of the 'entre-deux', the world which has to be considered as 'presque rien'. It was only intellectually that Grenier could consider the full implications of the principle of 'l'existence irréfragable de l'Absolu' (*C*, 109 (91)), that Absolute which is described in the *Nouveau Lexique* as 'clair et lointain comme le Fuji-Yama'. (*NL*, art. 'Absolu') Those implications were not unknown to Plotinus, to Spinoza, even to Descartes, but, as Grenier wrote in 1930 in reply to his own question 'Pourquoi l'Inde?', 'des auteurs comme Çankara ou Vallabha ont au moins le mérite d'être neufs et pas encore travestis' (art. cit., p. 352). With them, and soon with Lao Tzu and the other Taoist fathers, as his guides, he was able to explore the principles and practice of indifference without the compromises and deformations that had crept into the Western tradition.

CHAPTER 3

ENTRETIENS SUR LE BON USAGE DE LA LIBERTÉ

Le problème de la liberté a été posé et résolu sur bien des plans différents, le plan psychologique, le plan moral, le plan théologique, le plan scientifique. Nous le posons ici sur le plan ontologique en partant de l'idée d'Absolu qui, selon nous, constitue le fondement même de toute pensée. (*C*, v (6), 'Avertissement')

That approach, adopted in *Le Choix*, led to the conclusion that human freedom is to be understood essentially in terms of contingency, but not of possibility. Contingency points inescapably to the Absolute, and in comparison with the Absolute all other existence is completely devalued. 'Il n'y a pas de valeurs, il n'y a pas de libertés car un seul être vaut et un seul être existe' (*C*, 113 (93)). However, man finds it impossible to live by such implacable reasoning, and most theological and philosophical systems, even those which apparently preach a rigorous monism, are attempts to establish some kind of scale of values which will provide a link between the Absolute and the relative world. In the third part of *Le Choix*, 'Le Choix et l'initiative', Grenier places himself firmly within the domain of relative existence, and tries to approach the practical problem of choosing from that angle. He finds that he is faced with two questions that are closely related: 'celle du *pouvoir* de choisir, celle de la *valeur* de l'objet choisi' (ibid.), or the object of choice and its possibility. The possibility of making a free choice, although accepted intuitively, is demonstrably limited and conceivably non-existent. The important thing, in any case, is to choose oneself, 'se choisir', by expressing one's 'dynamisme intérieur'. Grenier notes that 'on pourrait dire que le bon acteur invente son rôle à mesure qu'il le récite' (*C*, 124 (103)): this will be important later on for his understanding of creation.

Although he claims to recognize that 'le choix a une immense importance par suite des conséquences qu'il comporte dans le temps et pour l'individu', Grenier adds that 'il n'a qu'une valeur de second plan par rapport à ce qui est véritablement' (*C*, 127 (108)). He admires the attitude of those who respect the distance between 'ce qui est évalué' and 'l'Inévaluable', but he hardly does justice to the problems of choice in daily life. There is no sense here of the experience of possibility in the context of normal human existence. The intellectual cast of the argument in *Le Choix* is such as to suppress the intermediate zone of human values. It was to correct the balance after this

uncompromising treatment of the subject of choice that Grenier undertook a more popular but no less significant work, which he called 'Conversations' (*Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*) and in which the emphasis is strongly on possibility.

The prefatory paragraph entitled 'Dessein' takes up the same themes of the object and the possibility of choice that had been treated in the third part of *Le Choix*. Grenier emphasizes that 'nous nous poserons un problème éthique, non théorique, et qui importe par conséquent à la plupart des hommes, non aux seuls philosophes' (*EBL*, 7); it is not only an ethical question, however, for there is also 'le problème fondamental de nos possibilités' which must not be minimized. In *Le Choix* he had dismissed this latter problem as being not of major importance, but now he promises to give greater attention to it. He begins, in fact, by giving full recognition to the sense of *ivresse* at the discovery of possibility, without arguing immediately from the fact of contingency to the fact of the Absolute.

The first part of the *Entretiens* is entitled 'Existence et liberté'. Grenier provides the following plan:

> L'auteur suppose qu'il est libre. En possession de sa liberté, que va-t-il faire? Suivant quel principe agira-t-il? Et, dans chaque cas, de quels sentiments sera-t-il animé? (*EBL*, 9) (final sentence not in 1946 version)

In the first chapter, 'Le Choix'[1] he examines what is essentially an intellectual approach to the problem. He begins by illustrating the reaction of the individual to the revelation of possibility. Whether possibility is infinite, as for Mallarmé, faced with a blank sheet of paper, or limited to a certain number of clear options, as with the traveller at an international railway station, it is both intoxicating and frightening, inspiring both *ivresse* and *angoisse*. The child described by Lequier in 'La Feuille de charmille' marvels at the power he has to initiate something, to change the course of the world by his decision to grasp, or not to grasp, a simple leaf. The responsibility involved in even the smallest decision is brought home to him when, by finally grasping the leaf, he disturbs a bird which flies away and falls prey to a sparrow-hawk. The child's apparently insignificant action has indeed had grave consequences: and any choice may turn out to be equally weighty. Grenier anticipates the objection that there will always be factors — circumstances of personal temperament — which *situate* a choice and influence it, so that it would be misleading to speak of a 'choix indifférencié *a priori*'. He makes it clear that he is here considering a *cas limite*, that of 'disponibilité totale', in which a choice is to be made purely by the exercise of the intellect (*EBL*, 19–20). Just as Lequier with his *dilemme* had provisionally adopted an interpretation of determinism with which he himself was not fully in agreement, in order the better to win his argument against those philosophers who did propound such an interpretation, so Grenier examines

an extreme position in order the better to demonstrate the need to adopt one that is more subtle. It is true that in the 1946 version of the plan of 'Existence et liberté' he concludes his examination of the fourth and last possible approach to the problem of the right use of freedom with the statement that 'Cette attitude ambiguë ne peut être tenue longtemps, et il faut en revenir à la réflexion pour choisir, réflexion que nous avons déclarée au début être insuffisante, quoique nécessaire': but this is an example of the circularity or 'polyrealism' of Grenier's method, in which an apparent conclusion carries no more weight than other, even contradictory, arguments put forward in the course of a discussion. The attitude of *dégagement* is no less strongly recommended for being apparently overruled in the 1946 text, and no more strongly recommended for being left 'en guise de conclusion' in the definitive text of 1948.

In this first chapter, then, Grenier is concerned with a severely rational approach to choice. His initial presentation of the *ivresse* caused by the spectacle of the multiplicity of possibilities is to be understood in terms of the awakening of consciousness. The 'être spontané', whose consciousness is not awakened, experiences no interval between himself and the world, and so is not paralysed by this sense of *ivresse*. He is not faced with the prospect of making a first beginning, of initiating a creative act. The awakening of consciousness, however, widens the field of perception from the immediate act to its consequences, in the future, and to the possibilities which will be eliminated by it, in the present. Indeed, the perspective may become infinite, in which case the practical question of how to act gives way to what Grenier calls an ethical question, but which is more truly metaphysical: why act at all? The motive of the preservation of possibility for its own sake is not considered explicitly here by Grenier, although it is implicit in the opening pages of the chapter, and will be discussed elsewhere. His formal argument is restricted to purely intellectual considerations. He envisages a rational approach which will rule out any definitive option if the reasons in its favour are not entirely convincing. Such an approach, he warns, can provide no firm guidance in the practical decisions of human existence. He adduces two reasons for this. It is impossible to determine what is best, and at the same time, only the best will satisfy the kind of rational intellect that he has posited (*EBL*, 20 ff.).

It is not only a question of selecting the best from a greater or smaller number of possibilities. As Grenier indicated in the 'Dessein', the so-called possibilities 'ne sont peut-être pas définissables *a priori*'. Time and place will affect the issue, as will the individual's personality and indeed the aim that he has set himself. One option can never embrace all the advantages of those options which have to be sacrificed to it. Again, a wider perspective may reveal that 'the best' includes options which in themselves appear less good, or even positively bad. Faced with all these complications, and yet compelled by his intellect,

which is 'tyrannisé par l'idée de perfection', to reject any course which would involve the abdication of responsibility, what is Grenier's character to do? Grenier is able to make some progress by limiting the discussion to those situations in which two options are both perceived equally as being the best. Elsewhere, in *L'Existence malheureuse*, he will argue that 'le mieux risque de faire manquer le meilleur' (*EM*, 81), and that indeed 'le mieux est l'ennemi du bien' (*EM*, 87, 88, 94), so that the desire for absolute perfection must not be allowed to influence practical choices: for 'Tout ce dont l'homme est capable c'est de rectifier' (*EM*, 95). An ambitious attitude is therefore to be discouraged: for the moment, however, he is still concerned with examining just such an ambitious attitude, to see if it can be reconciled with practical action. If man occupies the centre of Grenier's thought, he can allow some value to the task of 'rectifying': but as soon as he thinks in terms of 'the best', of perfection, then human values fade. The tension between absolute ambition and relative action is a constant one for him.

Grenier envisages three possible solutions, which he labels *ambiguïté, alternance* and *acte divergent*. The solution of *ambiguïté* involves taking both options simultaneously: two jobs, or flowers *and* biscuits. However, circumstances do not always allow of this. If they did, the problem of choice would hardly be posed in any acute form. If both of two jewels could be afforded, there would be no agonizing decision to make between the two. Yet the solution is not to be dismissed, and the ten lines that Grenier gives to it (*EBL*, 24–25) are not proportionate to the place it occupies in his own life and thought. In the *Mémoires intimes de X.* he records examples of his own practice of *ambiguïté*:

> Un signe de croix double est plus sûr: un à gauche comme dans l'Eglise d'Occident, un à droite comme dans celle d'Orient. (*MIX*, 123)

> Dans le train, il m'arrive de garder deux places dans deux compartiments différents — ne sachant encore dans lequel je serai le mieux. Dans l'un il n'y a personne mais, étant à l'extrémité du wagon, il doit être plus secoué, dans l'autre, on doit être mieux porté mais il y a déjà deux voyageurs qui parlent et qui fument. (*MIX*, 144)

His personal philosophy is essentially pluralistic, with apparently contradictory strands representing, for him, different aspects of one truth. However, there is one domain in which an attitude of *ambiguïté*, in the sense of choosing two options at the same time, is, by his own demonstration, impracticable. He gives a clue to its identity, and to the personal grief caused to him by this impracticability, in what is at first sight a rather curious addition to the illustration he provides of the two jewels. 'Une femme séduite par deux bijoux très chers à la fois ne les obtiendra pas facilement tous deux, à moins que l'un des deux ne soit faux — ou les deux' (*EBL*, 25). It is scarcely necessary to refer to the parable of the pearl of great price (Matthew 13, 45–46) to see here an allusion to the

ultimate worth of the Absolute. A jewel is cheap only if it is paste. If two jewels, two precious things, are to be enjoyed together, one or both of them must be paste, and will therefore not give true satisfaction. If one of them is paste, then only the other, the genuine, precious jewel, is worth having. If both are paste, then it is surely better to forego them both and seek after that what is truly precious. *Ambiguïté* may be an attitude that is adopted for practical reasons, but it is fundamentally unsatisfactory, for only the Absolute can satisfy the need of a contingent being. To draw out the implications of his brief illustration, however, would be to force Grenier to by-pass other areas of exploration and arrive prematurely at the attitude of the 'saints du désespoir', for whom 'rien ne compte à leurs yeux que cet Être si infiniment éloigné d'eux que rien ne leur permette de l'atteindre' (*EBL*, 64).

He moves on to a second suggestion, which he again discusses very briefly, in only eight lines (*EBL*, 25), but which again plays a disproportionately large part in his own life and thought. The theory of *alternance*, as elaborated by Montherlant, has undeniable attractions. Montherlant began from a sense of the transience of physical pleasure.[2] The tragic paradox of pleasure is that to obtain something is to destroy it. This is a major issue for Grenier too, as witness the frequency in his writings of the image of a flower withering and fading as soon as it has been picked, and of the theme of *le voyage* as a continual repudiation of what has been obtained. Montherlant's solution was to live both terms of the paradox in alternation, and so to negate its tragic effects. Self-indulgence and self-discipline succeed one another: as Grenier interprets it, 'six mois d'ascétisme et six mois de débauche; l'eau claire et puis le vin'. The capacity for enjoyment, blunted by indulgence, is as it were recharged by the period of abstinence. Grenier was strongly attracted by Montherlant's writings, devoting more reviews to them than to those of any other author in the 1920s and 1930s.[3] Further examples of *alternance* may be found in Grenier's own works.[4] India and Greece, for instance, represent the two terms of a couple in constant alternation. In this chapter, however, Grenier is concerned with the attitude to be adopted to two alternatives in the present, rather than with a global attitude to life, and he must therefore recognize that there may be obstacles to the solution of *alternance*. He does not specify what these may be, but time is an obvious candidate.[5] If *ambiguïté* and *alternance* are alike ruled out, what course of action remains? Grenier turns to a solution of compromise, which he calls the *acte divergent*.

It is to this solution that he devotes most space: a hundred lines, more than five times as much as to the other two together (*EBL*, 25–28). *Ambiguïté* and *alternance* are rarely possible, but the *acte divergent* has a much wider application, and Grenier himself is no stranger to it. It partakes of the nature of the first two solutions, but is clearly distinct from them. It is not *ambiguïté*, because there is a final option in favour of one term rather than the other — or rather,

not so much a 'choix final' as an 'arrêt final sur un des termes', which suggests a certain reservation, a refusal to exclude the other term totally, a preference more than a choice; it is not *alternance*, because the two terms do not alternate indefinitely: 'un terme doit l'emporter sur l'autre'. Although he recognizes that such a solution is still less satisfactory than a complete avoidance of choice, Grenier takes issue with those who dismiss it as an 'acte manqué'. It may be seen as an achievement rather than as a failure. The meaning of the *acte divergent* is that unattainable perfection is not left totally out of sight, but the 'safe' course of action is eventually chosen as a second-best: a second-best that is deprived of value only if the sights are kept fixed on perfection. If the desire for absolute perfection is not abandoned, however, a relative perfection will not only not satisfy, it will be a positive obstacle to satisfaction. In his discussion of the *acte divergent* Grenier sees only one combination of circumstances that will allow for a relative satisfaction: it is when the individual is conscious of having done his best to achieve one term, representing perfection, but has eventually had to bow to the inevitability of the other. He has, in fact, avoided making a deliberate act of choice, and has the sense of having espoused a necessary course of action. That is the point of the story which Grenier relates of the tourist and the two carpets. He wanted to buy both, but one type could not officially be exported. He succeeded in persuading the local official, but at the time of the crucial transaction he took the initiative in supporting the official's deliberately weak arguments: 'ainsi le voyageur put acquérir le second tapis . . . avec la conscience qu'il avait presque tout fait pour avoir les deux en même temps et que l'option lui avait été imposée' (*EBL*, 27). Grenier's tourist first makes sure of his freedom by deliberately opening up the field of possibility, then submits himself to a semi-imposed decision. But this is anticipating the argument of the next chapter, entitled 'L'Abandon'.

Although Grenier does not refer explicitly to the Absolute in this section, his argument presupposes an absolute reference. The *acte divergent* in the context of two options that are on the same level, such as two carpets, is only a pale reflection of the supreme *acte divergent* in which the two terms are the Absolute and, on the other hand, some relative system of values. The detail in the story about the restriction on the exporting of one type of carpet is a hint at the unattainability of the Absolute. The value of the *acte divergent* is precisely that, while the Absolute is not achieved, the value of the second term on which the 'arrêt final' falls is undermined.

The case of Franz in *Voir Naples* is of particular interest in the context of Grenier's presentation of the *acte divergent*. In some respects Franz resembles the man who finds an excuse for returning time after time to the bookshop, exchanging his reserved book for another (*EBL*, 26). After the breakdown of his friendship with Raffaël, the first narrator also follows a similar pattern, moving from one transitory acquaintanceship to another, and remaining

uncommitted. Franz, however, retains just too great a measure of idealism. Whereas the man in the bookshop contents himself with reserving 'un livre qui ne l'intéresse pas', Franz has 'un désir de s'élever au-dessus de ce qui était commun' (*VN*, 329). His desire for a certain perfection will not allow him to adopt the course of the *acte divergent* and settle for the acceptance of a life based, like that of the man in the bookshop, on a system of relative values. In the context of the single issue of his marriage, however, Franz has indeed performed an *acte divergent*, and his case is not unlike that of the tourist with his two carpets. In such particular instances the absolute reference is of less immediate importance, although it underlies Grenier's whole discussion. There are many examples of this propensity for the *acte divergent* in Grenier's own life, making it natural to see the cases of the tourist, of the man in the bookshop and of Franz as reflections of his own experience. Étiemble provides this testimony:

> Une année qu'il devait se rendre aux Rencontres internationales de Genève, Grenier me téléphone: il poussera jusqu'à mon chalet savoyard; le 5 septembre. Peu avant le jour préfixé, il se décommande. J'en conclus qu'il viendra *donc* le 5. Car je me souviens de l'Egypte: de ses fuites vers Le Caire, comme à la cloche de bois, quelques instants avant l'heure du train précisément qu'il avait décidé de ne pas prendre; de ces déjeuners au restaurant, où longuement, douloureusement, il finissait par choisir sur la carte un plat que Mme Grenier sait déjà qu'il refusera au garçon, ce qui lui conseille, à elle, de feindre de se choisir le plat qu'elle devine qu'il eût aimé pouvoir se commander et qu'il mangera de bon gré venant d'elle comme par surprise, puisque alors ce poisson, cette viande n'auront pas été imposés par le choix qu'il faut pourtant faire si l'on veut tenter de se démontrer qu'on est libre, mais qui, à peine décidé, annule toute liberté, etc. Il viendra *donc*, me dis-je, pour déjeuner. Après avoir préparé de quoi le fêter un peu, et avant de filer de grand matin pour ma promenade en montagne, je crayonne un mot sur une fiche que je fixe à la porte: 'Pour Jean Grenier. De retour vers 11 heures. A tout à l'heure??' Rentré un peu en retard, ne serait-ce que pour brouiller la chance, à midi cinq ou dix, ce fut pour lire à l'encre, sous mon crayonnage: '*Mercredi 5*. Arrivés à onze heures. Nous repartons à midi, ne vous voyant pas, et regrettant beaucoup. J'ai essayé de téléphoner. Saint-Nicolas était coupé.' Une fois de plus, son angoisse avait joué devant le choix; l'avait joué; nous avait joués. Etonnez-vous que ses livres sur le choix, ou sur la liberté, soient proprement *irréfutables*.[6]

In the compass of the first chapter, only thirteen pages long, Grenier has covered a considerable amount of ground. Although he seems at times to be dealing only with 'des cas extrêmes', far removed from normal experience by the lack of situation and the improbably cerebral approach that is envisaged, he asks at the end : 'qu'avons-nous essayé de faire sinon une phénoménologie du vertige mental, de l'homme au bord de l'action?' (*EBL*, 28) This is the area explored in his two novels: the richness of possibility, together with the anguish involved in ever trying to appropriate it. The solutions that he offers are only provisional, allowing the whole area to be called into question time and again.

In contrast, the more radical solutions of abstention and of commitment, once arrived at, allow of little discussion. As Grenier found in *Le Choix*, a ruthlessly logical argument leads all too quickly from the fact of contingency to the fact of the Absolute, and the result is stalemate, with no room for the mental manoeuvring and anguish that is so much a feature of the human condition. He found an expression of this latter aspect in the circular thought of Lequier, and he himself tries to do justice to the *entre-deux* of which he is conscious. At the same time, he is conscious of the strong attraction exercised upon him by a number of different solutions, which he cannot ignore. He more than once quotes Gide's cry of frustration: 'Choisir me fut toujours intolérable, et préservant en moi le meilleur et le pire, c'est en écartelé que j'ai vécu' (*EBL*, 27–28).[7]

The first chapter, or 'entretien', contains the seeds of the remaining three. Grenier has already contrasted the awakened consciousness, all too strongly aware of the multiplicity of possibilities and the gravity of the consequences of adopting any one, with the 'être spontané', who experiences no 'hiatus' because he 'se meut à la surface des choses'. Now, in the second 'entretien', entitled 'L'Abandon', he examines that position, for 'Si l'intelligence est incapable de me guider, je ferais mieux de me laisser aller complètement à ma nature' (*EBL*, 10). The opening 'méditation' once again portrays the sense of infinite possibility; at the hour of the dusk before dawn, when the events of yesterday count no more, and today has not yet come into existence,

> je suis sur le fléau d'une balance, ne penchant ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, parfaitement impartial dans la plénitude des possibilités qui effleurent (*sic*) en moi, mais d'avance déchiré par la nécessité de m'incliner, au moment où le jour s'annoncera par un rais de lumière sous la porte. (*EBL* 30)

This time, however, the mind will not be used at all to consider the relative merits of different courses of action. Circumstances will be allowed to dictate the course to follow. In practice, though, this involves some kind of decision-making, however arbitrary. Pure chance must be reduced to some observable principle: hence the recourse to casting lots and other forms of divination. Hence, too, the various caste systems which imprison men in the role to which chance has assigned them at birth. Is this not the answer?

> Ne serait-il pas reposant pour l'esprit autant que salutaire pour la société, que chaque homme ne sortît du magma initial de l'indifférence que pour suivre la direction à lui imposée par sa situation personnelle? (*EBL*, 36)[8]

Before proceeding with his analysis of this position, Grenier indicates that everything depends on the point of view: there is a difference between the justification of what is experienced as a problem, and the purely aesthetic justification of what is merely seen as a spectacle. This is a point to which he will return later.

Men, in their diversity, are not simply like flowers in a garden. Grenier recognizes that the point of view is all-important. To extend the image of the theatre used by Epictetus: 'Sans doute, vues des coulisses, les situations des êtres sont quelque peu ridicules ou absurdes, mais vues de loin et d'en haut, le coup d'œil est magnifique' (*EBL*, 38–39). From the point of view of the individual it is a serious limitation of freedom to be like a flower in the garden or a pot in the hands of the potter, fulfilling a predetermined role; and the harmony of the whole is upset by the individual who exercises his power of conscious reflection.

> Nous le sentons bien; et une gêne nous envahit à chaque fois qu'un individu *veut* être libre; car sa liberté est néfaste à son existence, par l'usage qu'elle fait de la réflexion . . . Un phénomène nouveau surgit en effet, avec la conscience. (*EBL*, 39, 41)

Man, as a conscious being, is not content to be what he is. He wants to arrogate to himself the right to dominate the pattern of existence, placing himself at the 'point de vue particulier au spectacteur et au créateur'. Insensibly, Grenier has moved away from his consideration of the 'être spontané', in that he now recognizes the importance of the factor of consciousness; but yet man now claims, consciously, the right to be spontaneous, to enjoy 'l'incohérence des jets d'eau, des vasques, de tout ce qui est imprévu et imprévisible'. This is the area of what Lequier called 'l'arbitraire', and, like Lequier, Grenier connects it with God himself. 'Peut-être le propre de l'homme est-il la *surabondance*, et non pas seulement le propre de Dieu' (*EBL*, 42). Is this *surabondance*, then, the principle of human freedom? Grenier is not convinced. If it 'fait la joie de quelques-uns très rares', it also causes 'le malheur irrémédiable du plus grand nombre'. Elsewhere he will take up the theme of the hero who displays the absolute freedom implied by *surabondance*, 'le type de l'homme d'action, qui lui se place *au delà du choix* proprement dit, parce qu'il saute dans son élan par-dessus la délibération' (*C*, 129 (110)). Grenier cannot deny this element, and the logical conclusion of the second 'entretien' is that the attitude of 'l'abandon' is therefore impracticable. Grenier does, however, devote a certain amount of space to the theme of the Divin Jardinier and the Divin Potier, images of God which offer a guarantee and a justification of the order of the world, even if it is purely aesthetic (*EBL*, 40–41); and in the fourth 'entretien' he will distinguish between this 'abandon passif' and what he calls a 'fatalisme . . . actif', involving the Taoist concept of 'une domination sur la Nature qui suit la domination sur soi' (*EBL*, 75). He has not, then, ruled out 'l'abandon' as a possible solution, and, as with his thesis on Lequier, 'l'on y distingue . . . de la part de l'auteur, d'autres intuitions que celles que finalement il nous propose' (Lazareff, loc. cit.).

In the third 'entretien', 'L'Engagement', or 'L'Engagement arbitraire', Grenier recalls again that the modern understanding of freedom is quite

different from that which has prevailed during most of history: to free oneself meant to recognize one's vocation and then obey it. 'Connaître sa nature dans ce qu'elle avait d'original et la suivre dans ce qu'elle avait de nécessaire, telle paraissait être la mission de l'homme intelligent' (*EBL*, 45). Now the concepts of Nature, God, Society and even Man have been discarded, in favour of a 'métaphysique du pur devenir'. 'L'existentialisme . . . fait de l'homme, comme dans la Genèse, une sorte de pro-créateur ou de vice-dieu, ou plutôt il en fait un créateur et un dieu' (*EBL*, 53).[9] Man is endowed with a 'puissance illimitée': what is he to do with it? If his radical nihilism is totally consistent, he risks achieving no more than a 'révolte . . . dans le vide', which will take the form either of a highly individualistic anarchism or else of 'le conformisme le plus écœurant' (*EBL*, 56). At least the concept of *karma*, to which Grenier refers at this point and which he discusses in more detail elsewhere,[10] takes account of the past, and so 'intègre ce qu'il y a de juste dans la théorie existentialiste' (*EBL*, 56). Other traditions also emphasize the need for continuity even in revolution: Christianity and Marxism both involve definite notions of man and society.[11] But Grenier's main objections are still to come. The first is a simple matter of common sense. Why is it so imperative to change accepted patterns of belief and conduct and rush into an untried commitment? 'Il est sans doute odieux que l'individu soit sacrifié à un ordre; c'est une sottise qu'il le soit à un désordre. Jamais, pour ma part, je n'appellerai cela liberté' (*EBL*, 57). This is the theme of his *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie*. In response to any orthodox system which demands the loyalty of its members, he objects, first, that the individual should be set free and not enslaved, and second, that the system is in any case not free from error, bias, limitation and so on. But in the *Entretiens* he adds a further, more damning objection, based on the concept of value. It may be that the modern age has been right to discard the traditional concepts and values which provided man with something on which to build, and with some idea of the direction to follow:

> Il n'en reste pas moins que la considération de la pure existence, si elle nous révèle un manque, et par conséquent nous met sur le chemin de la valeur, ne peut absolument pas nous dire en quoi consiste cette valeur. (*EBL*, 57)

A radical nihilism can only set up values that are properly quixotic. Their only justification would be an implicit denial of the professed radical nihilism by an appeal to some transcendent value. It is with such a procedure that Grenier reproaches the Sartre of *L'Être et le néant*. Although Sartre appears to reject the hypothesis of the definition of freedom 'par rapport à une valeur transcendante qui la hante', he nevertheless maintains that 'la liberté ne peut échapper à la situation et elle ne doit pas lui échapper; et elle se situera d'autant plus qu'elle revendiquera davantage sa responsabilité' (*EBL*, 58). There must be values in a given situation, and yet freedom is said to be an autonomous value

and itself the source of all value. What is the link, asks Grenier, between freedom and the system of values that is adopted in the given situation? He suspects that the system of values is in fact derived from 'la force des événements ou la ruse des instincts . . . Ou encore par une soi-disante dialectique de l'histoire', and not from freedom at all. The consequence is that freedom, supposedly the supreme value, is in fact crushed 'sous le poids de l'inintelligence' (*EBL*, 59). The call for commitment, however, is addressed to the intellect. This supreme contradiction is too much for Grenier to swallow. It is one thing to admit that the intellect is being deliberately by-passed, in an attitude of *abandon*: it is quite another to trick the intellect into betraying its own *raison d'être*.

Grenier is not content with pointing out the contradiction that he discerns in the popular brand of existentialism. He suggests that it may be possible to avoid the contradiction by dissociating the three terms of freedom, value and situation. This suggestion leads him into the fourth and last 'entretien', entitled 'Le Dégagement'. It is of particular interest, in that there exist three distinct versions of it: the 'plan' of 1946, the 'plan' and text of the *Entretiens* as published in 1948, and the 'argument' and text as published in the *Cahiers de la Pléiade*, 5, also in 1948, under the title 'La Liberté contre les valeurs' (pp. 89–102).

The 'Plan' of 1946 reads as follows:

> Il est impossible de s'engager sans savoir à quoi l'on s'engage et en vertu d'une décision arbitraire. Aussi le désespoir peut-il succéder à la frénésie. Il se peut qu'aucune valeur humaine ne compte parce que trop éloignée de la Valeur suprême. Il se peut aussi qu'aucune valeur ne compte et ne puisse être remplacée par aucune autre. Or il est impossible d'échapper à la reconnaissance ou à la création d'une valeur. Je ne suis libre que lorsque j'ai fini de me dégager et n'ai pas encore commencé de m'engager. Cette attitude ambiguë ne peut être tenue longtemps, et il faut en revenir à la réflexion pour choisir, réflexion que nous avons déclarée au début être insuffisante, quoique nécessaire.

Grenier is tempted to abandon value altogether, either out of respect for a supreme but unattainable value, or simply because value can be attributed to nothing within or transcending the confines of human existence. These are extreme positions, and both involve an element of belief which contradicts the natural recognition of some kind of immanent value. Just as in the second 'entretien' Grenier was obliged to admit the *surabondance* of human existence, and so to discard the solution of *abandon* which clearly attracted him, so here he is prevented by a similar recognition of one aspect of human consciousness from adopting a radical solution that would ignore it. He is forced to the conclusion that man is only free in the brief interval between the ending of commitment to one value and the beginning of commitment to another.

In the versions of 1948 the discussion is filled out by a number of considerations which tip the balance in favour of a radical solution. The two reasons for

abandoning value altogether are supplemented by two reasons for refusing to commit oneself to a system of relative values. The 'argument' of the *Cahiers de la Pléiade* text presents the four reasons:

> Un homme refuse de s'engager:
> A — ou parce qu'il ne veut pas adopter les valeurs arbitraires, par souci de la vérité,
> B — ou parce qu'il considère toute valeur accessible à l'homme comme nulle vis-à-vis d'une valeur suprême,
> C — ou parce qu'il ne veut pas aliéner sa liberté en l'enchaînant à une valeur, fût-elle neuve,
> D — ou parce qu'il ne croit à l'existence d'aucune valeur.

There is also an introductory section on the natural 'désir de *sursis*', the longing not to be irrevocably committed to one's actions and their consequences, and on the *grandeur* and *angoisse* of man's total freedom to do and to become anything at all. It is surely this apprehension, more than the intellectual demand for truth, which prepares man's refusal to commit himself, even if the argument which finally decides him is indeed that demand. Certainly in Grenier's work as a whole the affective element seems to play as important a part as the intellectual, although the intellectual often serves to justify the affective, as it did for Lequier. Be that as it may, Grenier has here introduced a new factor into the discussion, namely truth: 'Or rien, absolument rien ne permet à la liberté de s'exercer en se passant de la vérité' (art. cit., p. 93; *EBL*, 63). There is, then, another value alongside freedom which limits its exercise. But Grenier has not argued for the existence of this value, indeed he has accepted the case for the discarding of traditional values. It simply appears, unheralded, as an obstacle to any doctrine of action which 'presse l'homme de s'engager sans lui dire en quoi ni pourquoi' (ibid.; *EBL*, 62 ('. . . en quoi, pourquoi')). Truth is, however, presupposed by Grenier's use of the word *pourquoi*. He is demanding an evaluation of the course of action proposed. Elsewhere he demonstrates that the faculty of evaluation points to, though some would say it begs the question of, an absolute standard of value, indeed an absolute value, an Absolute *tout court*. His appeal to truth, then, is an appeal to that Absolute, and points A and B are not essentially distinct, but merely two ways of formulating the same attitude. It is that of the 'saints du désespoir' of many religious traditions, whose 'nostalgie de l'Infini' causes them to adopt a life-style that appears demented. Their prayer is:

> Perfection . . .
>
> J'espérais approcher de toi lorsque je ne savais pas que, par définition, tu es inaccessible.
>
> Dès lors je veux m'éloigner de toi, non pour renoncer à toi, mais pour te rendre hommage . . .

Je ne veux plus être un homme ni une bête, ni quoi que ce soit au monde, mais un néant pour mieux refléter ton être . . .

A quoi peut me servir ma liberté? je ne puis atteindre qu'un but dérisoire, eu égard a toi.

La révélation d'un seul soir m'a rendu inutile le labeur de tous les matins. (*EBL*, 66)[12]

It is an attitude which could be classed as a supreme *acte divergent*, in which the second term is 'un néant'. It also has affinities with the attitude of the *héros*, whose *surabondance* is expressed not in immediate action but in a deliberate exhibition of wastefulness in which the divine attributes of man are squandered in order the better to show up those of Divinity. Of this attitude Grenier says: 'nous ne la faisons pas nôtre, mais nous la comprenons, nous l'admettons comme le privilège de quelques-uns' (ibid.).[13] It involves the use of freedom in conscious opposition to reason. The ordinary mortal, however, cannot adopt such a course. At least, Grenier does not say outright that he cannot, but he poses the question in four different ways, each time expecting the answer 'No':

l'homme ordinaire, au nombre desquels bien entendu je me range, peut-il user de sa liberté contre sa raison? Peut-il, n'ayant pas un idéal de perfection divine ou humaine inaccessible, prendre un engagement qui repose sur son seul vouloir? Puis-je, moi, homme mortel, décréter ce qui est le vrai et le faux, le bien et le mal? Autrement dit, puis-je créer la valeur? (*EBL*, 67)

Instead of giving a clear answer to this series of questions, Grenier leaves them as rhetorical. The continuation of his argument shows that he does not even entertain the possibility of creating value, even in the absence of 'un idéal de perfection divine ou humaine inaccessible'. He bases his argument on the universal acceptance of some kind of values, even in cases where they are supposedly rejected. To prove his point, he analyses the content of the term *libération*.

Man chooses to cultivate certain values. That is, his freedom is a means to recognize and to obey — voluntarily — a law. By deliberately exercising choice, and by exercising it in different directions, he continually sacrifices the freedom which he possesses only for the duration of the interval between his commitment to one value and his commitment to the next. That style of existence, therefore, leads to a loss of freedom in the sense of contingency, but to the acquisition of a different kind of freedom, moral freedom or the 'liberté du sage', otherwise known as *sagesse*. Grenier maintains, however, that it is misleading to use the term 'freedom' at all in this sense, since what is involved is an abdication of freedom. He denies any intention to discuss the concept at this point, but adds the comment: 'Abdication que l'on peut juger nécessaire et qui, en tout cas, conduit au bonheur' (*EBL*, 67–68). The implication is that freedom, after all, may not be regarded as the supreme value: and certainly

there is a strand of Grenier's thought which emphasizes *sagesse* in contrast to 'cette agitation qui est la stérilité même', which is the expression of a total freedom of contingency (*IM*, 104) (106)). The sacrifice of freedom may be seen as creative. The point of the present discussion, however, is not to indicate, far less to recommend, a course which involves the sacrifice of freedom. Rather, Grenier is concerned to draw attention to the inevitable opposition between freedom and value, with the aim of then proposing that it should be the latter, and not the former, which is abandoned. This opposition between freedom and value is generally obscured, Grenier argues, by the equivocal use of the term *libération*. It should mean 'freeing', 'setting free', 'removing the obstacles to the enjoyment of freedom'. However, it is frequently used in the sense of 'changement d'idéal'. Revolt against one law is quickly followed by submission to another. Liberation, in this sense, has nothing to do with the aspects of free-will and of contingency which are present in the wider concept of freedom. It has the sense of 'affranchissement du déterminisme physique, pour obtenir une abdication totale vis-à-vis d'un autre déterminisme qui est censé lui être supérieur' (*EBL*, 71). Liberation, then, involves renunciation and resignation. The freedom that is envisaged is to be obtained by disciplined obedience to the law, for it is freedom in the Oriental sense of accomplishment of the law. Any contingent freedom that is obtained through the rejection of a previous law is immediately annihilated in the complete acceptance of a new law.

Grenier regards it as impossible, or at least inconceivable, to create value authentically; he maintains that most attempts at liberation, even those of Nietzsche and other apparently radical thinkers, in fact involve the replacement of one set of values by another to which an equal submission is required; and he is therefore led to investigate the possibility of jettisoning values completely.[14] In the attitude of certain Oriental sages, particularly those of the Taoist tradition, Grenier finds an *inexistentialisme* in which 'les termes de l'équation du monde finalement s'annulent' (*EBL*, 73). It is an attitude which may be expressed in this prayer:

> Nature qui ne fais aucune différence entre les êtres et pour qui le jour et la nuit sont équivalents.
>
> Fais en sorte que je considère les hommes comme des insectes, les insectes comme des hommes et le Tout ensemble comme un Rien.
>
> Délivre-moi du mal, c'est-à-dire de la croyance que quelque chose soit à éviter et par conséquent de la peur et du scrupule; délivre-moi du bien, c'est-à-dire de la croyance que quelque chose puisse être désiré, et par conséquent de l'envie, de la jalousie, de la cupidité et de l'orgueil.
>
> Donne-moi la liberté du vent. (*EBL*, 73)

Complete freedom is enjoyed because the sage experiences no pull towards any doctrine, opinion or course of action. On the other hand, 'l'indifférence à

l'égard de fins idéologiques s'accompagne de différences produites par les situations données et acceptées telles quelles', so that 'Finalement l'homme n'échappe à la contrainte de la valeur qu'en recherchant la nécessité de la nature' (*EBL*, 74).[15]

Grenier arrives, then, at the following statement of a position of 'dégagement de toute valeur': (the underlined words are present in the *Cahiers de la Pléiade* text but absent from that of the *Entretiens*)

> Nous nous arrêtons donc à cette solution provisoire, qui offre le mérite de ne rien préjuger de la vérité et de l'idéal et de donner une règle de conduite qui n'engage en rien celui qui l'adopte, ne lui donne aucune responsabilité sociale, et, par l'abstention difficile qu'elle impose à chacun, assure, en même temps que le bonheur des autres, le sien propre. L'idéal change, la Nature demeure; et le meilleur usage que l'homme puisse faire de la liberté, c'est de n'en faire aucun. (*EBL*, 75)

The increasing firmness with which this solution is presented is to be seen, along with the use of the term *inexistentialisme*, as a protest against the rising tide of Sartrean Existentialism, rather than as an indication of any greater dogmatism on Grenier's part. He saw in existentialism a disguised and less honest form of the 'positivisme médiocre' into which he accused Western thought of falling all too easily (*ELF*, 74). It claimed to respect the freedom of the individual: on the contrary, says Grenier, the only doctrine which truly respects the freedom of the individual is one such as that preached by the school of Lao Tzu. In the *Entretiens avec Louis Foucher* he admits: 'Je ne la [cette sagesse] prêche pas parce que je la crois inaccessible. Elle me paraît être un beau rêve et je ne vois pas pourquoi l'on ne rêverait pas' (*ELF*, 75–76). The way of indifference certainly held a considerable attraction for him, and that aspect of his thought will be examined later: but in the context of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* it is important to note that Grenier points to a wide range of possible solutions in passing, and that the extreme solution with which he appears to conclude is by no means the only one that is considered in a favourable light. He indicates, for instance, that truth and happiness are values which may seem more desirable in a given situation than freedom: but he insists that in that case the facts should be admitted for what they are, and subjection to a particular value or set of values should not be dissimulated under the name of freedom.

What, then, does Grenier understand by 'freedom' in this first part of the *Entretiens*? By stating at the outset that 'l'auteur suppose qu'il est libre' (*EBL*, 9), and by adopting Sartre's maxim that 'la condition première de l'action, c'est la liberté' (*EBL*, 7), he is clearly indicating that he will be concerned with a freedom-to-act, a freedom which may be defined as a lack of constraint on the brink of action. However, that kind of freedom may already appear limited by the need to make a choice which bounds it, and which emerges together with the phenomenon of consciousness. There is an area of freedom which is

unlimited, and it is that freedom which is experienced in terms of possibility or of contingency. It is an area of semi-consciousness, for while the consciousness needs to be awakened in order to perceive it, yet the exercise of the consciousness will lead to a perception of the Absolute which underlies all contingent existence, and that perception will strike all possibility sterile. The question is, can that kind of freedom be preserved, in all its fragility, in such a way that it succumbs neither to the Absolute nor to the tyranny of some system of merely relative values? That question underlies Grenier's two novels, *Les Grèves* and *Voir Naples*. Then a third type of freedom is envisaged, a freedom which is not original but which is achieved, through the deliberate acceptance of a pattern of existence that is to some extent imposed. The freedom that is supposedly gained through liberation is shown to be a false freedom, because it does not involve deliverance from value, but a radical freedom is proposed which does involve precisely that.

Underlying all this discussion of the various types of freedom is an agonizing tension. On the one hand there is the *surabondance* of contingent existence, the freedom to be what one is not, to be creative,[16] to initiate; on the other, there is the desire for harmony, for coincidence with the rest of the universe, for a sense of completeness. Grenier tries to hold these two terms together, and it is not inconceivable to attempt to do so, for both are ultimately dependent on some idea of the Absolute, whether understood as a transcendent being, or as the totality of the universe, or as Nature. What he is unable to accept is an overemphasis on the first term, without a compensating regard for the second. The attraction of the Taoist way is that it seems to open up a new region in which the ambition for the Absolute can after all be realized, by the identification of the sage with the Tao itself, the Absolute Principle of existence. The tension will then be resolved, for the Principle displays both the arbitrary *surabondance* proper to divinity and humanity alike, and the regular harmony against which contingent existence always stands out. It is that solution that Grenier goes on to explore in the final part of the *Entretiens*, 'le non-agir d'après le Tao'.

Just as important as the content of the four 'entretiens' is the method adopted by Grenier to investigate freedom and the use to which it is to be put. He devotes a considerable proportion of the space to passages that are evocative rather than analytical or conclusive. Thus each 'entretien' includes two passages of a deliberately different tone which are indented on the page and also given a distinctive label: in the first 'entretien' there are two 'anecdotes' (*EBL*, 17–18, 18–19), in the second, two 'méditations' (*EBL*, 29–30, 37–38), in the third, two 'fables' (*EBL*, 47–48, 56–57), and in the fourth, two 'prières' (*EBL*, 66, 73). In addition to these, the 'entretiens' contain introductions and digressions which, while not advancing the argument, allow the affective element its place alongside the intellectual. It is in the place given to

this intensely personal aspect of existence, even more than in the more complete survey of the possible options, that the *Entretiens* mark an advance on *Le Choix*. The important shift of emphasis may have come between 1946 and 1948, for not only is all indication of the 'anecdotes', etc., missing from the 'plan' of 1946, but, in the opening paragraph of the 'plan', the sentence that is underlined here appears only in 1948:

L'auteur suppose qu'il est libre. En possession de sa liberté, que va-t-il faire? Suivant quel principe agira-t-il? Et, dans chaque cas, de quels sentiments sera-t-il animé?

The period 1946–48, then, may be said to be of significance in preparing the way for a new human concern which is a more sober development of the lyrical Mediterranean humanism of the mid-1930s. The following ten years were to see the genesis of Grenier's two novels and the publication of one of them, the appearance of the essays entitled *A propos de l'humain* (1955), *L'Existence malheureuse* (1957) and *Sur la mort d'un chien* (1957), and the beginning of the series of *Lexiques*.

The second part of the *Entretiens*, entitled 'Existence et destinée', similarly displays concern with human reality and not only with intellectual argument. Indeed Grenier somewhat teasingly disparages his achievement in the first part, introducing a brief summary of its scope and conclusions with the remark that 'On a souvent beau jeu de parler de la liberté comme s'il s'agissait d'une chose abstraite' (*EBL*, 79). The types of people whose attitude he has analysed are rarely found, he claims, in the pure state. Man finds himself in a given situation, he tries to move to another situation. He is an actor, not a spectator: 'Ce n'est pas un esprit pur qui décide en l'air de choses intemporelles.' His existence is provided with a framework. Grenier therefore proposes to ask, 'quelle est la part du cadre dans l'existence, après nous être demandé quelle est celle du tableau' (*EBL*, 80). *Les Grèves* and *Voir Naples* bear the traces of this meditation.

Grenier distinguishes between *le Destin*, Fate, which is impersonal and external to man, and quite inflexible, and the modern understanding of *la destinée*, destiny, which is personal, internal, and, within limits, governable. 'J'appellerai donc *destinée* la direction que prend l'existence d'un individu lorsqu'il est entraîné à faire quelque chose par suite d'une force intérieure, lorsqu'il est dominé par elle au point d'en être le prisonnier' (*EBL*, 81). Something may be learned about the direction of this destiny through characterology and psycho-analysis; in any case, it must be understood if any control is to be exerted over it. The existentialist claim to be free, at any moment, 'non seulement de faire, mais encore de me faire' (*EBL*, 85), simply does not take account of the facts. Grenier does not appeal here, as he does in the first part of the *Entretiens*, to the doctrine of *karma* to supply what is lacking in the existentialist system, but he does speak of the importance of having a 'point

d'appui stable en moi-même', in relation to which the desire to change can have some meaning. He quotes with approval from *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (v, ii): 'Chacun apporte en naissant un tempérament particulier qui détermine son génie et son caractère, et qu'il s'agit ni de changer ni de contraindre, mais de former et de perfectionner' (*EBL*, 88). This is similar to the point of view put forward in the second 'méditation' of the second 'entretien'. In this sense, 'Être libre, c'est ne dépendre que de soi, c'est-à-dire de sa nécessité native.' However, while the theory is perfectly respectable, Grenier is evidently not a practitioner of it. The verb *devoir* plays a large part in this section, and the inclusion of two 'examens de conscience' indicates still more clearly that he is aware of having failed to live up to his own precepts:

1^er^ examen de conscience.

Or je puis me demander si j'ai tout mis en œuvre pour parvenir à cette connaissance indispensable de moi-même. N'ai-je pas traîné trop longtemps dans le marécage du quotidien, donc de l'éphémère? J'ai lu des journaux au lieu de livres, j'ai rendu des visites à des hommes au lieu d'en attendre des dieux. J'ai éparpillé ma vie en tâches inutiles et me suis informé de toutes sortes de choses qui ne me concernaient pas. Je n'ai pas cherché à connaître ma nature intime, j'ignore ce que je possède et je vis sans savoir pourquoi, à l'aveugle. Encore un jour inutile, un matin sans travail, un soir sans fruit. J'ai été porté par la vague, je ne me suis pas fait irremplaçable . . . (*EBL*, 85–86)

2^e^ examen de conscience.

Ai-je fait tout ce que j'ai pu pour permettre à ceux qui m'entourent ce libre élan vers leur destinée personnelle qui leur donne le bonheur? . . . (*EBL*, 89–91)

If Grenier can claim with some justice that he has

essayé d'orienter ceux que j'ai approchés vers l'action qui me paraissait la plus propre à la fois à satisfaire leurs penchants originels et leurs ambitions les plus secrètes — vers les églises les mieux établies ou les partis les plus extrémistes

he has, by his own admission, failed to build decisively on his own 'point d'appui'. Like Franz in *Voir Naples*, he has allowed himself to be 'emporté par le courant' (*VN*, 223); or like the narrator of *Les Grèves*, he has appreciated the *cadre* of his existence but has not been open to the *appel* that will evoke a truly creative impulse from him. The problem, although Grenier does not admit it explicitly in this chapter, is that he is not convinced that a personal *destinée* is an adequate replacement for the older concept of an external *Destin*. As he says,

La pensée de l'éternité, qu'il s'agisse du retour éternel ou d'un Dieu éternel, ne cadre pas bien avec la croyance au progrès infini sur une même ligne. Il faudrait opter, parier carrément pour l'homme ou pour Dieu, pour les possibilités ou l'arrêt implacable (*EBL*, 92)

but he himself is unable to sacrifice either term. He seeks the *solitude* of individuality, but shuns the complete *isolement* of the perfectly responsible

contingent being.[17] A partial solution may be found in a new concept that is more flexible than that of *Destin* but also more tolerable than that of *destinée* with its stern demand for full responsibility. That concept is of *la destination* (the title of the second chapter of 'Existence et destinée'). A god can take pleasure in the spectacle of pure existence, and indeed some men seem to have been able to adopt something of the same attitude: Augustus, Goethe, Gide's Thésée, 'les poètes de l'instantané et les mystiques de la quiétude'. But human existence is not an *instant*, it is 'plongée dans le temps' (*EBL*, 102), and man expects his existence to have a direction and a destination, even when he sees them being frustrated. Indeed, he sees the realization of his *destinée* in terms of reaching the *destination* in which he believes. This last is based on values that are ultimately subjective, for while they may be universally accepted in a particular culture, they will be contradicted by others outside that culture. However, the transcendent act involved in setting up these values implies the possibility of evaluation: and that in turn implies that it is not purely subjective but is dependent upon some higher reality:

> Autrement dit, l'homme crée, mais il ne crée pas volontairement. S'il *fait* sa destinée, c'est en se *laissant faire* par cet être intérieur qui le contraint à des actes qui dépassent sa nature. La destination de l'homme en général est de s'accomplir en tant qu'homme et puis de se nier en tant que tel. L'humanité n'a pas sa fin en elle-même; à force d'évaluer, elle voit bien que tout vaut relativement et donc que rien ne vaut absolument. C'est ce relatif qui nous instruit de l'absolu. (*EBL*, 114–15)[18]

Grenier is correcting the existentialists' use of Lequier's motto: 'Faire, et en faisant, se faire', by returning to Lequier's own understanding of a transcendent reality whose role is 'Faire faire'. For Lequier that reality was the Christian God: Grenier is only prepared, for the moment, to speak in terms of the Absolute.

The place of the *cadre* of human existence, then, is to provide a framework within which man can 'se laisser faire' towards the fulfilment of his *destinée* and the attainment of his *destination* (*EBL*, 114). The appeal to the Absolute, however, is far from solving the problem, for it begs the whole question of human existence. Grenier's attitude to the concept of a *destination* is two-sided. On the one hand he considers that his humanity prevents him from adopting attitudes based on a rejection of any such *destination*, and he pursues his acceptance of it to a conclusion which points to the Absolute: but on the other hand he finds himself confronted with an absence:

> Mais l'existence de l'absolu se cache et bouge derrière la tapisserie du monde. On ne la voit pas, elle se manifeste par une absence qui est plus active que les présences, comme à une soirée à laquelle manque le maître de maison. (*EBL*, 115)

The importance of the part played by man is severely reduced by the appeal to the Absolute, but at the same time the guarantee of any reality beyond man is

withheld, so that he is in danger of being abandoned to a sterile, drifting existence. He is 'in-between', neither one thing nor the other. The tension inherent in human existence is a constant of Grenier's thought, and it is significant that he returns to it at the end of 'Existence et destinée', which marks the end of the *Entretiens* proper. He concludes by suggesting that 'l'homme était surtout (je ne dis pas uniquement) fait pour se donner parce que, tout compte fait, il n'avait presque rien (je ne dis pas rien) à perdre' (ibid.). All the reservations here are designed to preserve the complexity and ambiguity of Grenier's understanding of man as both a free creative agent and also a finite being dependent on an Absolute Being. The exquisite agony of this metaphysical gamble prevents Grenier from settling for any solution that would definitively put an end to it. Indeed, he was later to claim that what attracted him above all in Taoism was that while the most advanced quietistic and mystical doctrines of the West always held out the ultimate certainty that 'il y a quelqu'un derrière la porte . . . et qu'on va trouver quelqu'un', in Taoism, on the contrary, 'il me semble justement, et c'est ce qui d'ailleurs m'attire et m'effraie beaucoup dans le taoïsme, c'est que derrière la porte il n'y a rien'.[19]

The value of 'Existence et destinée' lies not so much in the actual arguments concerning *Destin, destinée* and *destination*, but in the conviction that the isolated *destinée* of the contingent individual must be founded on the pursuit of a *destination* underwritten by the Absolute, whose absence, however, makes the isolation more intense than ever. In the two parts of the *Entretiens* Grenier has done much more than speak about 'le bon usage de la liberté'. By illustration, evocation and demonstration he has presented the impossible situation of the human being who is aware not only of his own contingency but of the conflicting ambitions to which that contingency gives rise. In a more thorough way than is possible in the lyrical essays and novels, and in a more intensely human way than in *Le Choix*, Grenier has laid bare his own acute metaphysical preoccupations, without sacrificing the elusiveness that characterizes the other writings. His method itself represents a 'bon usage de la liberté', quite apart from his exploration of the dimensions of freedom and possibility.

CHAPTER 4

INDIFFERENCE AND THE TAOIST EXPERIENCE

In Chapters 2 and 3 it has been shown how Grenier's thought hovers around the twin problems of freedom and choice, reluctant either to make an irrevocable decision or to exclude decisions altogether. Abstention and indifference have inevitably come within the bounds of his meditation, but so far the attraction they hold for him has not been analysed in detail.

It is possible to analyse Grenier's treatment of indifference by means of a study of his imagery, in particular the imagery of the sea. Georges Sebbag, in an article entitled 'L'Indifférence',[1] makes good use of Grenier's images in what is essentially a phenomenological survey. Grenier himself, while quite capable of adopting a phenomenological approach when that suits his purpose,[2] prefers increasingly to study the theme of indifference from another perspective. He is careful to emphasize its close links with the concept of the Absolute, or rather to show that if it does not have those close links then it is not true indifference.

Grenier, in fact, moves towards a limited interpretation of indifference which excludes many of the attitudes and states that are popularly considered to be indifferent. The imagery with which Sebbag is concerned, and which he considers under the headings 'Paysages' and 'La Nature morte', is by no means always consonant with indifference as Grenier understands it. The sustained image of the sea, and of a boat drifting on the sea, such as is found in *Voir Naples*, is for Grenier a representation of something other than what he wants to call indifference: it is more an image of possibility. In his writings which precede *Le Choix* (1941), however, there is a certain amount of overlap, and these must be examined first. They will provide the background against which to see Grenier's increasing preoccupation with a particular type of indifference, deliberate, studied and radical.

There is no mention of indifference in the three major lyrical essays published in the period up to 1930: 'Interiora rerum' (1927), 'Portrait de Mouloud' (1929) and 'Cum apparuerit' (1930). The first and the third already announce the contrasting theme of Mediterranean humanism. The second draws much of its inspiration from the pantheism of the Upanishads, but the emphasis is on the abolition of 'cette distance qui, à chaque réveil, renaît entre le monde et moi' (*LI*, 16 (36)),[3] rather than on the abolition of difference

within an indifferent universe. It is a positive message: 'sa présence me redonnait confiance (une présence qui contenait tout)'. Not surprisingly, however, it is the same India of the Upanishads that also stimulates Grenier's meditation on indifference. The contemplation of 'Cela' inevitably gives rise to an attitude of indifference. The positive, vital presence of Mouloud is eclipsed. In the *Nouvelle Revue française* in 1930 Grenier writes: 'Le monde me dit absent au seul moment où je suis éveillé . . . Si je dors je me rapproche de Cela, si je meurs, je tends à me confondre avec lui.' That is indeed what constitutes the fascination of India. 'Ce qui fait à nos yeux le génie de l'Inde (et pour nous le mot Inde est bien entendu un symbole) c'est son adoration de l'unité et son indifférence à l'homme.'[4] In 1933, for the first edition of *Les Îles*, Grenier was to add further references to indifference in his essay entitled 'L'Inde (l'Homme et l'Absolu)': 'Toute pensée est sans valeur et par conséquent égale en indifférence à son contraire: $+0 = -0$' (*LI*, 144 (133)) (this in a section entitled 'L'Inde d'après les psychiatres', which foreshadows the later essay on indifference); and, underlining the symbolic value of India, 'Il ne comprenait pas qu'il me fût indifférent de connaître la terre de l'indifférence' (*LI*, 148 (136)). Indifference, then, at this stage in Grenier's thinking, is closely connected with India and in particular with Indian metaphysics, but is nevertheless not confined geographically to the East. It is already linked to the concepts of 'l'Absolu' and 'l'Unité', which will continue to be important. In the section which closes the essay, consisting of a conversation between 'Cornélius' and 'Moi' entitled 'La Réalisation', the following exchange takes place: 'CORNÉLIUS — Cet Absolu dont nous parlons, qui fait la gloire de l'Inde à tes yeux, crois-tu que nous ne l'avons pas recherché en Europe? . . . MOI — Mais eux l'ont *réalisé*' (*LI*, 150 (138)). Indifference as an attitude, while not necessarily desirable in itself, is the corollary of an exclusive cult of the Absolute, a cult which abolishes distance and leads to a practical understanding of what to the West are still mysteries: 'la communion, l'incarnation, la rédemption'.

It seems, then, that Grenier's understanding of indifference fluctuates during the 1930s. From an initial fascination with its Indian expression he moves to a wider awareness of similar experiences of indifference in other cultural contexts, and indeed in his own. However, there is almost always a strong link with the Absolute. The exceptions which prove the rule are those essays[5] in which Grenier deliberately ignores the call of the Absolute in order to establish a relative and provisional system of values — something which, as he is only too well aware, is invalidated by the exclusive claims of the Absolute — in the tradition of a Mediterranean humanism. The inevitable tension between these two positions is best expressed in the 'Cornélius' writings of 1939–41.

The first edition of *Les Îles* in 1933 had already presented Cornélius in two short exchanges with 'Moi' in the final essay, 'L'Inde'. 'Moi' represents that part of Grenier that is attracted by the uncompromising cult of the Absolute

that is found in India, while Cornélius, evidently a Dutchman,[6] stands for the traditional Western *via media* between exclusive devotion and total *laisser-aller*. In the second exchange, already quoted, Cornélius claims that the Absolute has been the goal of Europe just as much as of India. The reply is that only India has managed to suppres the *écart* between man and the Absolute. The third exchange is much fuller, and takes the form of a long letter to Cornélius and the reply to it, both published in 1939, together with fragments of a second letter, published in 1941.[7] The problem is now no longer posed exclusively, or even mainly, in terms of India, given the development of Grenier's thought in the 1930s. It is seen as much more immediate. Cornélius complains that no sooner has his correspondent extricated himself from the 'sables mouvants' (a reference to the passage from 'Un Soir à Biskra' quoted above) than he dreams of sinking back again: 'toi tu veux du premier coup te précipiter dans l'éternité', whereas the right course is to act and so to create one's own order: 'toi-même penses-tu te connaître si tu n'as commencé par agir et par te faire ce que tu es?' (*IM*, 179–82) (181–84)).

This is the problem in a nutshell, and the lyrical essays of the 1930s have been approaching it from different angles. In 'Santa-Cruz' and 'La Villa d'Hadrien' the 'sables mouvants' have been an initial state from which Grenier has indeed extricated himself, but then the question of the exact nature and significance of the *bonheur* or *félicité* that is said to be obtained is bound to lead on to that of ultimate value. If an answer is given, as Grenier is always tempted to give it, in terms of the Absolute, then of course he will plunge back into indifference. That indifference will then be final rather than initial, and the adoption of it will have been dependent, if not on an actual choice, at least on a confrontation with the Absolute which can occur only at a stage beyond that of an initial pre-conscious state. Even so, however, the recognition of the Absolute is not the end of the matter, as Grenier accepts in the 'Lettre à Cornélius': 'Mon ami, je devrais avec tout cela être parfaitement indifférent. Il n'en est rien.' He recognizes that life, 'ce spectacle dont je perce à chaque instant la vanité', is of no ultimate value, and yet he remains irresistibly attracted by it. He is torn between 'un être inaccessible et un amour que je ne puis dissimuler' (in 1939: 'un songe que je ne puis dissiper') (*IM*, 167–69 (171–72): the later version gives more weight to the human *entre-deux*).

A similar tension is expressed, but with a significantly different emphasis, in 'L'Attrait du vide' (1946): 'Comment se fait-il qu'avec un pareil tempérament je n'aie pas été indifférent à tout? Or tout me blessait . . .' This time it is the other pan of the scales that is more heavily weighted. It is not the positive value of life that touches him despite its transience, as in the 1930s, but a more complex sentiment, that of annoyance caused by the 'mille petits accidents de la vie' which, while infinitely inferior to 'ce qui seul comptait pour moi', at the same time refuse to be assimilated to the 'vacuité du monde'. Existence then

ceases to be indifferent. 'Je passe malgré moi de l'instant de *l'indifférence* à celui du *choix*. Je me prends au jeu, je cherche dans un éphémère un absolu qui n'y est pas; au lieu du silence et du dédain, j'entretiens en moi un tumulte' (*LI* (2), 14–15 (27–28)). The tension here has a different quality. Whereas the 'Cornélius' letters are concerned with creation (and the alternative to a tyrannical and unjustifiable creation *ex nihilo* is seen as a metamorphosis rather than as total inactivity), with the attempt to 'percer les abîmes d'oubli et d'indifférence' (*IM*, 160 (164)) even if that same indifference proves to exercise too strong an attraction, 'L'Attrait du vide' reveals a nostalgia for childhood states of 'une quasi parfaite indifférence, une apathie sereine — l'état du dormeur éveillé'. It being impossible to return to those states, the goal of 'les courses, les voyages' is perfection, which is an avatar of the Absolute (*LI* (2), 13, 15 (26, 29)). In 'Les Îles Borromées' (also 1946), although the conclusion is different, there is the same idea of an unending quest: 'A quoi bon voyager? . . . Je n'en aurai jamais fini et ne trouverai jamais ma Dulcinée' (*APH*, 179; *LI* (3), 155). The fact of the quest precludes an attitude of total indifference, of course: but then the very need for it is seen as a disruption of the ideal state of a perfectly indifferent contemplation of the Absolute. 'L'Humain' (1950) states explicitly: 'Une métaphysique de l'Absolu, celle à laquelle j'adhère, tourne le dos à l'humain et cherche la délivrance dans la rupture des liens qui attachent à la vie' (*APH*, 198).

These later texts[8] seem to indicate that between 1939 and 1946 Grenier's understanding of indifference narrowed again, excluding the open-ended sense of creative possibility and returning to the close association with the Absolute which had been present as a theme all the time but which had had to compete with the other. This is the period when Grenier published two important pieces of work which deal with indifference. One is the book *Le Choix* (1941), the other an essay called simply 'L'Indifférence' in *L'Existence* (1945) (reprinted in *A propos de l'humain* (1955) as 'Les Tentatives d'indifférence'). Having looked, during the 1930s, both at cults of the Absolute which lead to an attitude of indifference and at states of indifference in common experience, he now examines particular historical and social instances of indifference in order to discover whether or not a truly radical indifference is possible, and what the connection is with the Absolute.

Grenier's discussion of indifference in *Le Choix* depends on the concept of the Absolute to which he has come in the course of the preceding pages. The experience of contingency, that is, the sense that the conscious individual has of 'le vide, le manque — en général l'intervalle qui sépare l'être nécessaire — que l'intelligence conçoit — du sensible toujours mouvant et contingent que les sens appréhendent', leads him to pose the problem of how to 'situer ce vide qui est au centre de la pensée' (*C*, 15 (23)). By considering whether or not thought exists as a thing in the sense that other things exist, Grenier is brought to the

conclusion that 'la pensée ne s'ajoute pas au monde; elle s'en retranche'. He continues: 'De même s'il doit y avoir un Lien et un Soutien de toutes les pensées individuelles, un Absolu, si l'on veut, il ne s'obtiendra pas par l'addition des parties du monde; ou encore par sa superposition au Relatif, mais par sa soustraction au monde manifesté' (*C*, 32 (36)). This Absolute, then, partakes of the nature of non-being, of *vide*, or *néant*, while at the same time underlying the being of the world. For the mind to reach the Absolute by a sudden intuition, or by a mystical union, or by any other means, 'ne signifie pas que l'esprit nous ait paru s'attacher au Néant d'abord, puis à l'Être; mais que la même réalité se soit manifestée à lui sous ses deux faces'. It is beyond the categories of being, which are relative. 'Il a un nom négatif: ce qui est délié, ce qui est délivré', for it is Ab-solu, 'un être libéré de tout lien'. It cannot therefore be named, and indeed, as the Vedântists recognized, 'nous ne pouvons le connaître que par une négation' (*C*, 40–42 (43–44)). At the same time, however, this ineffable Absolute is a reality to which the human spirit is irresistibly drawn. What is more, the contemplation of the Absolute 'a pour effet, plus que tout autre, de paralyser l'homme et de lui rendre non seulement inexplicable mais étranger le monde où il est condamné à vivre'. Man oscillates between 'une ivresse mystique qui le rend incapable d'agir' and 'un fatalisme qui l'en dégoûte d'avance'. Action is sterilized by the 'pensée de l'Absolu', or else it becomes entirely indiscriminate. In either case, the corollary is 'un sentiment de *totale indifférence*' (*C*, 88–89, 135–37, n. 29 (71–73)).

That, at least, is the theory. Grenier has been showing all through this second part of the book, entitled 'L'Absolu et le monde', that it is impossible to argue from the Absolute to the world. He asked at the outset: 'comment la pensée peut-elle se délivrer de l'Un?' (*C*, 63 (47)), and now he is replying that it cannot, or not justifiably. That is the only answer that does justice to the complete otherness of the Absolute over against the relative world. It is at this point that historical examples must be considered. What forms of indifference have been advocated, and to what extent has the practice in fact corresponded to the theory?

Grenier makes no claim to conduct an exhaustive survey. He takes a handful of examples from different ages and cultures: Vedântists, Stoics, Scholastics, and certain contemporary French writers (Gide, Valéry, Montherlant, Malraux, Morand). All these propound theories of indifference. In the case of both Stoics and Scholastics it is reason that destroys indifference in practice. For the Stoics it is 'la raison du sage', for the Scholastics, the reason of the Creator God. In both cases, the concept of reason as an accessible value, and therefore constitutive of a moral system, serves to outlaw indifference.

In his search for a historical example of true indifference, Grenier therefore turns to the other two traditions he has found which advocate indifference as an attitude. They fall into a separate category, opposed to that which comprises

the Stoics and the Scholastics in that they do not respect the concept of accessible value. However, the rigorous non-dualism of the Vedânta degenerates into an incarnationalism in which the all-important distinction is entirely lost. As for the modern Nihilists, the emphasis has been increasingly placed *on* action, on creation, on success, which all too easily leads to the establishment of a system of values, an 'ordre humain'. What began with an uncompromising absolute, seen either as *the* Absolute, the sole value, or conversely as a negative absolute, the absolute absence of value, finishes in the domain of the relative.

Just as the Vedântists prefer to speak of Brahman only in the negative, Grenier has so far been defining indifference in negative terms, by disqualifying those expressions of it which fail to correspond to a pure conception of the Absolute. In 'Les Tentatives d'indifférence' he undertakes a more systematic analysis of types of indifference, building up to what he terms 'l'indifférence par désintérêt', which, he claims, 'n'implique pas une méthode mais un système, elle n'est ni provisoire ni partielle mais totale et définitive' (*APH*, 108). The other types which he considers are all, in some way, either provisional or partial or both.

It would be a mistake, however, to see indifference 'par désintérêt' as the only form that exercises any fascination over Grenier. Examples of several forms of indifference may be found in his own writings: but the point is that they do not satisfy his need for an absolute ideal. In the case of 'l'indifférence par apathie', for instance, Grenier would find it more appropriate to speak in terms of possibility than in terms of indifference. Where apathy really does seem to turn into indifference is in the morbid state. 'Les déments précoces' are truly indifferent in that they construct for themselves a separate existence, hiding from the external world behind a barrier. Grenier hints at a connection with the religious mystic: 'c'est une image déformée de l'ermite pour qui le monde n'existe plus et qui s'est réfugié en lui-même' (*APH*, 102). There is an important distinction, however, which is brought out both in this passage and in a similar passage in *Le Choix* headed 'L'Indifférence du point de vue pathologique' (*C*, 92–93 (75–76)). Dementia, melancholia, constitutional depression and schizophrenia may all at times gives rise to states of indifference, but such states are never seen as an ideal. 'L'indifférence par apathie est un cas-limite de l'existence: je ne puis pas dire qu'elle soit du domaine idéal de l'Être (ou de la surexistence), car le sujet ne fait pas d'effort conscient pour dépasser le plan de son existence.' The ideal, the absolute, must be recognized and aimed at consciously. True indifference, then, is not to be equated with some kind of preconscious natural pantheism, or with the desire to return to the womb. The definition is becoming clearer.

Grenier's demand for lucidity is seen again in his discussion of the next type of indifference, that which is 'par égoïsme' (*APH*, 103–04). The egoist is lucid enough, indeed he is hyperconscious of particular areas of existence: however,

such indifference as he displays is partial. It is not the world as a whole that is scorned. Even the Epicurean so-called sage is selective in his attitudes: his is 'un égoïsme plus raffiné, à base de résignation et de fierté', given his claim to possess 'les moyens de ne pas souffrir et de jouir'. Grenier is not only refusing to accept common definitions of indifference, he is also rejecting the popular understanding of the sage as one who somehow rises above the world and attains a degree of serenity. Once again he demands a much greater stress on the conscious pursuit of an ideal that lies beyond the world.

Another reason for what is generally called indifference is the inability or unwillingness to commit oneself to a firm judgement. Grenier devotes only a few lines to 'l'indifférence par impartialité', but it bulks large in his thinking in other places, particularly in the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* and in *L'Existence malheureuse* (*APH*, 104–05).[9] Every course of action, every opinion, has arguments both for and against it. In the case of the judge, his indifference is bound to be provisional, and indeed is significant only in so far as it is so, at any rate in theory. In practice Grenier's reasoning anticipates what he will say in *L'Existence malheureuse* about explanations of the problem of evil. His contention there is that the particular explanation given by any individual will depend on the metaphysical framework which he has already chosen to accept (*EM*, 139–40). In the present passage, he continues: 'De toute façon, l'homme n'a pas les éléments pour juger en dernier ressort; il faut qu'il s'en rapporte à une autorité supérieure à lui . . . Que s'il ne le fait pas, il est condamné à ne pas aboutir' (*APH*, 105). Once again the question of value, and hence of the Absolute, is seen to be basic to Grenier's understanding of indifference. In any case, indifference through impartiality can be only a temporary state: either it will lead to an actual judgement, or else the impossibility of arriving at a satisfactory judgement will raise the whole question of value, which in turn may lead to a much more radical indifference.

It is at this point that Grenier considers the attitude of the sceptic, one who would like to reach a conclusion but finds himself unable to. Surely here is someone who has arrived at a state of true indifference through the full exercise of his conscious intelligence? 'Attiré et repoussé par des forces venant de toutes directions, il ne peut juger parce qu'il n'a pas de critérium interne qui puisse faire pencher la balance' (*APH*, 105). His indifference, though provisional in theory, is in practice definitive. Has Grenier then discovered an expression of true indifference in the attitude of the sceptic, even before he reaches his final category of 'l'indifférence par désintérêt'? In order to answer that question it is necessary to anticipate a little and refer to his investigation of Taoism.

The view of the sceptic that emerges from passages in *Le Choix* (1941), *L'Existence malheureuse* (1957), *Absolu et choix* (1961) and *Mémoires intimes de X.* (1971), as well as from 'Les Tentatives d'indifférence' (1945/1955), is interesting both for the obvious attraction that Grenier finds in Pyrrhonian

scepticism and for the sense of incompleteness which it gives him when measured against the doctrine of the Taoist masters. Before 1941, that is before he became deeply interested in Taoism, Grenier had written in general terms of Greek attitudes to life and death (e.g. in 'Interiora rerum', 1927), and had commented on the 'désespoir stoïque' which is to be regarded as a 'résignation' but not as 'indifférence' ('Dans la campagne romaine', 1936) (*IM*, 64 (65)), but he had not turned his attention specifically to the Sceptics. His interest in Scepticism and in Taoism grew side by side, and the year 1948 saw the publication both of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*, with its long section on 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao', and of a volume of the writings of Sextus Empiricus, translated by Grenier and J. Goron, and with a preface by Grenier. Already in 1941 he gave some attention to the Sceptics in *Le Choix* (*C*, 96 (79–80)): according to him, they considered the things of this world as 'découlant d'archétypes', and as having no value in themselves. The only criterion of value was the ideal world of 'les Êtres et les Formes'. That world being inaccessible, their attitude was one of nostalgia. At the same time, 'tout ce qui ne gardait pas un reflet de l'Absolu était entaché de nullité', and therefore the real world could hardly be taken seriously. So far the indifference of the Sceptics would seem to answer perfectly to Grenier's criteria: total concentration on the Absolute, total scorn for the world. However, after 1941, as Grenier became better acquainted with both Scepticism and Taoism, the limitations of the former began to emerge. Scepticism is neither one thing nor the other. The Taoist is superior to the Sceptic in that 'il ne s'attarde pas à des réfutations, il ne suppose pas que la vérité soit à trouver par l'intelligence ni même à chercher, ni qu'il faille, pour arriver au but, suivre une longue route' (1948) (*EBL*, 127). Again, the Taoist 'tire du scepticisme les conséquences que Pyrrhon et ses disciples n'ont jamais osé appliquer à l'action puisqu'ils s'accommodent d'un état de choses social qu'il ne valait pas la peine, selon eux, de changer, abdiquant en pratique ce qu'ils avaient revendiqué en théorie'. The Taoist goes further, scorning all values and therefore having no scruples about transgressing the laws (*EBL*, 135–36). In 1957 Grenier recommends an attitude of systematic annihilation of the world through doubt, thus going far beyond a mere philosophical criticism like that of the Sceptics who found in the world 'une foule de contradictions internes' (*EM*, 48).[10] In 1961 he notes that 'le Sceptique ne pouvant atteindre la vérité (tout en la cherchant) ne peut déterminer une valeur; mais il est forcé par les exigences de la vie quotidienne d'agir' (*C* (2), 109 (113)). In all these passages, the emphasis is on the intellectual aspect of Scepticism. The concept of value, in the form of truth, is retained, even if it is regarded as inaccessible. The merit of the Taoist, according to Grenier, is to discard that concept altogether. In the first part of the *Entretiens* he does not even use Scepticism as an intermediate doctrine on the way to what he calls a 'dégagement de toute valeur', but goes straight to Taoism.

In *Le Choix* it seemed as though value was going to be the important factor in distinguishing those historical traditions which have achieved an attitude of true indifference from those which have failed to do so; and indeed, although there may have been a failure at the point of translating theory into consistent practice, the distinction is not thereby invalidated. The quest for an actual historical example of a consistent, radical indifference is still to be pursued. Perhaps in *Le Choix* the preparation for the empirical examination of historical instances was too theoretical, and the procedure itself too summary. In 'Les Tentatives d'indifférence' Grenier has been building up to his final category of 'l'indifférence par désintérêt' more carefully, with closer attention given to actual experience. Does the rejection of value now seem any more feasible?

Grenier proceeds in two stages. First of all he considers what he calls 'le sentiment d'équivalence'. In comparison with the other attitudes examined so far, equivalence may qualify for consideration as an attitude of radical indifference. However, it is too unstable and impure to satisfy him. He traces its cause to 'un mélange de désespoir raffiné et d'épicurisme vulgaire', and suggests that it leads to dilettantism. In *Le Choix* the passage in which it is discussed is part of a section in which the indifference born of nihilism is shown to lead to violent action, and then action leads to the establishment of an 'ordre humain'. The only way to prevent this is to go further than a mere 'sentiment d'équivalence' and anchor the 'désintérêt' in a 'sentiment d'*inadéquation*' (*APH*, 109).

Here Grenier rejoins the argument of the first two parts of *Le Choix*: 'aucune existence ne vaut par rapport à l'Existence; aucune ne compte par rapport à ce qui seul doit compter . . . Vis-à-vis d'un Absolu les choses les plus différentes perdent leur différence; elles deviennent non-différentes (je ne dis pas identiques).' The whole of contingent existence, the human spirit as well as the outside world, becomes non-different, losing its diversity and its value, in the full moral sense, at the same time. The attitude of indifference is a conscious acceptance and embracing of this non-difference, 'au nom de l'Être'. 'L'indifférence peut être un idéal positif (c'est le cas du Tao) ou le signe négatif d'un attachement supérieur' (as in the Christian, or indeed the Stoic or the Sceptic tradition) (*EBL*, 152, 142).

'Sortir de l'humanité' (*APH*, 111): 'Voilà bien le grand mot sur le point d'être lâché: *inhumanité*', as Grenier had written as early as 1930 in his essay on India (art. cit., p. 351, *LI*, 131 (123)). It explains why the concept, and therefore the practice, of total indifference is foreign to the Greek tradition:

> La clarté qui baigne Endymion n'est pas froide, le rêve de Pygmalion n'est pas stérile, et Orphée ne peut s'empêcher de se détourner pour regarder Eurydice. Ce dernier mythe est typique du génie grec qui aspire à l'indifférence métaphysique, et ne peut pas et ne veut pas se détacher de l'humanité. (*APH*, 113)

It is to the *Bhagavad Gitâ*, and, farther East, to the Taoist tradition of China, that Grenier finds himself drawn for examples of a truly radical indifference.

And although he does not at this point undertake an exhaustive investigation of the actual practice of the Taoists, he devotes two pages to quotations from three of the sages, and then deliberately omits them from his predictable demonstration that claims to an attitude of total indifference are almost inevitably compromised in practice. He underlines the unsatisfactoriness of any such compromise once the Absolute has been glimpsed and its complete otherness even so much as suspected. 'L'essentiel est de *ne pas confondre les plans* . . . le mélange des genres est inadmissible, et l'action qui devrait se fonder sur la pensée ne peut pas le faire' (*APH*, 121). The logical sequel is a study of Taoism, and indeed this essay is at least as good an introduction to 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao' as are 'Existence et liberté' and 'Existence et destinée', the first two parts of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*. Indeed, the word *indifférence* as such is hardly ever used in these first two parts, but occurs frequently in 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao'. Moreover, the argument of the fourth and final section of 'Existence et liberté', 'Le Dégagement', is much more ambiguous than the comparatively direct line taken in 'Les Tentatives d'indifférence', since, as has been indicated, one text is about freedom and the preservation of possibility, while the other is about indifference as a conscious and consistent attitude.

Grenier's interest in Taoism was aroused in the late 1930s. It was in 1936 that Étiemble lent Paulhan a copy of the *Tao-tê-ching* of Lao Tzu, and Paulhan must have communicated his enthusiasm to Grenier, the two being in close contact through the *Nouvelle Revue française*.[11] The earliest reference to the Taoist sages in his published works is in 1941, in *Le Choix* (128 (108–09)), where Grenier quotes a passage from Lie Tzu taken from L. Wieger's *Textes philosophiques* (2nd edition, 1930), as an illustration of an attitude which he characterizes as being 'en deçà du choix', an attitude of complete indifference in the face of life and death, fortune and misfortune. A text published in 1945, but developing the substance of a paper given at the end of 1941,[12] gives further examples from Taoist literature of this same 'radicale indifférence'. Grenier does not distinguish clearly between this Taoist position and that of the Indian yogi: indeed, in both passages referred to he juxtaposes the quotations from the Taoist writers with the same passage from the *Bhagavad Gitâ*: 'Le yogi, uni avec Dieu, tient pour égaux le caillou, la terre et l'or — il aime également ennemis, amis, indifférents; seul et sans espoir il ressemble à une lumière dans un lieu où il ne souffle pas de vent.' He even states explicitly, after the quotation from Lao Tzu illustrating the attitude of the sage: 'Portrait, on le voit, tout pareil à celui du yogi' (*C*, 128 (109); *APH*, 113, 114). The reason is that Grenier has no need at this stage to distinguish between Indian and Chinese versions of indifference: he is using them simply as an extreme example of human claims, and he recognizes that 'une pareille attitude ne peut malheureusement être que celle d'individus d'exception, et encore n'est-elle

possible qu'à des moments exceptionnels' (*C*, 128–29, (109)). However, it is also clear that Grenier is fascinated by the idea of something even more radical than this, total indifference, the more so because his own meditation on the Absolute leads him to the conclusion that 'l'Absolu . . . engendre en effet une totale indifférence' (*C*, 108–09 (91–92)). Hence, although he has to admit reluctantly the very exceptional character of such an experience, he finds himself drawn to investigate more fully what the Taoist sages have to say about it.

The first result of his researches is the long section in the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* (1948) entitled 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao'. For this he acknowledges having made extensive use of Marcel Granet's notes for a course of lectures given at the Collège de France (*EBL*, 126 n.). He also quotes from four translations of the *Tao-tê-ching*, and from published works by the Orientalists Wilhelm, Wieger, and Maspero, as well as from Granet's *La Religion des Chinois*.

Grenier's declared purpose in this essay is to demonstrate that there is an actual historical example of the extreme attitude of 'absence d'engagement' and 'négation de toutes les valeurs', that it is not only possible but has indeed been held in the highest esteem by millions of people for centuries, and that useful lessons can be learned from it. The historical details which he gives are necessary for a first approach to a system of thought so alien to anyone formed in the Western tradition, but he in no way sets out to provide a scholarly interpretation of Taoism in general or of the *Tao-tê-ching* in particular.[13] He does not take sides with either Granet or Maspero in the argument over whether Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and their school were primarily mystics or primarily philosophers.[14] He ignores or quickly passes over many of the more obvious external features of Taoism, such as the complex dietary or respiratory techniques, and focusses his attention on the concept of *wu wei*, for which he adopts the standard translation *non-agir*.[15] At the same time he attempts to understand the Taoist attitude in terms of the concept of freedom, which has no exact parallel in ancient China: later on, in *L'Esprit du Tao* (1957), he quotes a modern Chinese scholar as saying that 'dans le vocabulaire chinois actuel . . . le mot "freedom" est rendu par un mot composé qui semble avoir été forgé au début du XIXe siècle' (*ET*, 189). Grenier is well aware that he is approaching Chinese thought from the point of view of a European, seeking not to become a Chinese Taoist himself but to assimilate what he can while remaining a Westerner. That concern dictates his whole approach, leading him not only to sketch in the historical background (which to the Chinese way of thinking is irrelevant: the historicity of most of the early Taoist sages is to say the least doubtful) but to attempt comparisons between Taoism and other, more familiar doctrines, with the intention of pointing up fruitful lessons from both the similarities and the differences.

The Taoism of the 'masters', the school associated with the names of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, is to be distinguished from the popular religious system known as Taoism. It is characterized by a concentration on the inner life, although external observances are not ruled out. Scholars disagree over whether the inner life of the sage is primarily concerned with philosophical meditation or with mystical experience, but Grenier is more interested in the attitude adopted, be it considered as a means or as a consequence, than in the actual intention, although this is by no means neglected.

In his exposition of the attitude known as *wu wei*, Grenier restricts himself to the *Tao-tê-ching*, the book traditionally attributed to Lao Tzu. He interprets the title as meaning 'Livre de la raison suprême et de la vertu', but claims that the exact meaning of the title and the often cryptic text is less important than is usually believed.

> Ce qui importe, ce n'est pas ce qu'il dit, mais ce qu'il suggère; non ce qu'il suggère de penser, mais ce qu'il suggère de faire; non ce qu'il suggère de faire, mais ce qu'il suggère de réaliser. Il a pour but de mettre le lecteur dans un certain état, ou plutôt de le pousser sur une certaine pente qu'il n'aurait plus qu'à descendre. (*EBL*, 122–23)

Now Granet certainly makes more of the connection of Taoism with earlier shamanistic practices than does Maspero, although both follow Masson-Oursel in recognizing the link with the *Yi-ching*, the book of divination.[16] Grenier, however, goes beyond any of them in his insistence that the *Tao-tê-ching* is a 'livre initiatique'. He adopts the explanation that best suits his own purpose, using the Taoist writings, as he had used those of the Vedânta, as a springboard for his own meditation. Nor is he consistent in his interpretation: while recognizing, with Granet, that the aim of the Taoist sage is to obtain and preserve a quality of life that is characterized by *puissance*,[17] he leaves on one side the explanation of this in terms of the shamanistic emphasis on prolonging life in an attempt to obtain immortality, and interprets it instead in Spinozist metaphysical terms more comprehensible to European readers: 'Il ne s'agit rien moins que de participer au Premier Principe pour jouer un rôle actif (*natura naturans*) au lieu de se contenter de lui servir d'instrument (*natura naturata*)' (*EBL*, 128). This is taking liberties with the material, but is in line with his declared intention; and he is to go further still.

How does one participate in the Tao, the First Principle? The Taoist tradition emphasizes breathing exercises, alchemical recipes and many other means. But Grenier is interested not so much in the means as in the quality of participation. What does participating in the Tao involve? The Principle itself can be expressed in terms of 'une harmonie de contraires', of Yang and Yin, and Tao and Tê (the 'efficace concentré'[18] and 'efficace particularisé' respectively), and the Taoist ideal is to conform to this perfect harmony, this

alternation of opposites. *Puissance* is understood as potential energy, possessed in the highest degree by, for instance, water: 'sans rien faire, par le seul fait qu'elle se repose, elle possède le monde entier' (*EBL*, 130).[19] Grenier interprets this as true freedom: 'La liberté, c'est donc d'abord l'acquisition de la puissance; puis, plus précisément, d'une puissance qui ne s'exerce pas' (*EBL*, 129). He has not explained this sudden introduction of the concept of freedom, but he is evidently drawing a parallel between the Western 'liberté d'indifférence' and the Taoist *wu wei*. 'Moins on agit, plus on domine. Voilà le principe qu'il ne faut pas perdre de vue' (*EBL*, 131). Nothing but bad can come from interfering with the course of Nature in any way. On the contrary, since Nature is simply an expression of the Principle, entirely determined by it, the more one is conformed to Nature, and so to the Principle, the more potential energy one will possess, and the more one will dominate. This may be related to magical ideas of the universe as being based on continuity rather than contiguity, but the magic of the Tao is not 'une vulgaire sorcellerie'.

Elle consiste à méditer sur la nécessité naturelle, et particulièrement sur notre propre nécessité intérieure, et à nous y conformer de toutes nos forces; pareils à l'oiseau dont tout l'effort tend à se laisser porter par l'air.

Grenier sums up the attitude of the Taoist in the terms he has used in an earlier section of the book: it is 'la méthode la plus radicale qui ait jamais été conçue de fusion de la destinée individuelle avec le Destin cosmique' (*EBL*, 132).

One significant consequence of such an attitude is in the realm of value. Grenier has a four-page section entitled 'Libération par rapport aux valeurs', which is to be compared with the title 'La Liberté contre les valeurs' given to the chapter on 'le dégagement' when it was published separately in the *Cahiers de la Pléiade*. In the West there have been revolutionaries who have overthrown the accepted values, but it has always been in the name of something better. 'Or il n'y a de liberté totale que s'il y a affranchissement de tout, c'est-à-dire liberté d'indifférence.' It is in this sense that Grenier can speak of the Taoist attitude as exemplifying the highest degree of 'liberté d'indifférence' (*EBL*, 133). There is no value-distinction between people and things for the Taoist. Indeed, 'le sage n'a qu'une ambition: c'est de passer de l'état d'homme à celui de brute et de celui d'organisme à celui d'élément'. He is free, not to submit himself to some moral or religious ideal, as in the case of the 'liberté rationnelle des Stoïciens, de Spinoza et de beaucoup de moralistes', but to go beyond all ideas of morality and of value, and indeed beyond his own desires. He is totally liberated (*EBL*, 134 ff.). This is the 'attitude radicale' proposed in the chapter 'Le Dégagement': 'se délivrer entièrement des valeurs, les jeter par-dessus bord' (*EBL*, 72).

It is clearly a very different idea of freedom from that of the Western tradition, which, despite its many and varied expressions, is always essentially a freedom *for* something. It is from this very 'for-something' that the Taoist sage

is liberated. But is Grenier not idealizing the actual situation? Granet, whose notes he used extensively in preparing the essay, maintains that in fact there is a definite goal: the Taoist strips himself of misleading ideas of value and participates in the Tao in order to obtain long life and vitality. 'Il s'agit non de se *mortifier*, mais de se *vivifier* . . . Pour se sanctifier, il faut d'abord s'abêtir — entendez: apprendre des enfants, des bêtes, des plantes, l'art simple et joyeux de ne vivre qu'en vue de la vie' (*La Pensée chinoise*, pp. 572–73). Maspero, while holding a totally different view, is no less convinced that there is a real aim: for him it is mystical union with the Tao. This is closer to the position Grenier adopts in *Le Choix*, and to that of the *malamâtiyya* described in the first part of the *Entretiens*: in the face of the Absolute, which alone had value, indeed is itself Value, everything else is unimportant, indifferent. But in the present essay it is another interpretation that Grenier offers. His point of reference here is freedom, not the Absolute, and he speaks of freedom as having been 'conquise par l'indifférence' (*EBL*, 136). It seems then, that he is seeing freedom as being itself the supreme value.[20] Granet in fact uses similar language, claiming that the Taoist response to Confucianism is 'un plaidoyer mystique en faveur de la liberté pure, qui, pour eux, se confond avec la pleine puissance et la Sainteté' (*La Pensée chinoise*, p. 507), and that, 'arrivé à n'être plus qu'une puissance pure . . . le Saint va jouant en toute liberté, à travers les éléments, dont aucun ne le peut heurter' (p. 516), and Grenier has been influenced by his interpretation of the evidence. For both of them, Taoism ultimately professes a humanism that transcends indifference. 'Si puissante qu'ait été l'inspiration *naturiste* qui les animait, ils restaient, tout autant que leurs adversaires, sous l'empire de préoccupations *humanistes*' (p. 525). In claiming that the best use to be made of freedom is 'aucun', Grenier adds: 'L'homme n'en est que plus puissant et heureux' (*EBL*, 136).

Does this not mean that values, so firmly excluded, are now creeping in again by the back door? Grenier does not deal with this point explicitly, but he recognizes that for the Taoist, Nature is fundamentally good.[21] This is not Nature in its organized expression in society, as it is for the Confucian school. 'Le Tao considère que cette organisation n'est même pas nécessaire; qu'aucune différence de plan n'est à envisager entre la Nature brute, celle des éléments, et la Nature civilisée, celle de l'homme.' Expressing himself in Western terms, Grenier maintains that

> un optimisme est *acquis* par le sage, acquis en passant à travers l'indifférence et un état qui pour nous serait le désespoir. En aucune manière cet optimisme ne suppose une Providence corrigeant les arrêts du Destin. Au contraire, c'est plutôt le Destin qui prend pour le sage figure de Providence. (*EBL*, 144–46)

Fate and Nature are in fact expressions of the eternal Tao itself, although Grenier does not say so explicitly. It would be legitimate to continue his

explanation by pointing out that what the sage has done in effect is to reject all values in order to transcend the resulting state of indifference and adhere to the Tao, which alone is value, embracing it in all its manifestations. But Grenier is deliberately avoiding any mention of the Absolute.[22] He is concentrating at this point on the Taoist attitude of embracing the world, and he finds it impossible to include the Absolute and the relative in the same perspective. For him, the Absolute is indissociable from the concept of value, and he can preserve the vital distinction between the Taoist approach and that of Western mystics only by refusing to label as 'l'Absolu' what he here calls 'le bloc compact qui constitue non pas l'homme même, mais l'être indifférencié et équivalent de toutes choses'. He avoids any suggestion of a mystical union, speaking rather in terms of a 'sympathie', a 'connivence avec les choses, non pour les assujettir, mais pour parvenir au but en même temps qu'elles, avec elles'. This involves the exercise of a 'volonté de dépossession' (*EBL*, 146–47).

Grenier frequently fails to define his terms, and the result is that a single word will often acquire a wide-ranging content, drawn from different Oriental traditions as well as from those of the West. What is this 'être indifférencié et équivalent de toutes choses'? Is it the Absolute? Is it the Tao? Is it the One of Plotinus, or the That of the Upanishads? Grenier is evidently escaping from the constraints imposed by a particular world-view, even one as apparently indeterminate and flexible as that of Taoism. The position he is developing is one that has been familiar to him for a long time. After his attempt to define more closely the particular emphasis of Taoism, Grenier is returning to his earlier approach in which he did not distinguish between the attitude of the Taoist sage and that of the Indian yogi. Indeed, his concluding remarks on Taoism are now followed by two lines from a Christian mystic, St John of the Cross, with the presumable intention of showing their essential agreement. However, this is not Grenier's last word. He appends an extended note on 'Quiétude et Wou-wei' (148–56), in which, after examining briefly the doctrine of two seventeenth-century Frenchmen, Piny and Fénelon, and also Bossuet's objections, he comes to the conclusion that there is 'une très grande différence entre la quiétude chrétienne (hérétique) et le non-agir taoïste'. His main reason is that Christian 'indifference' does not exclude desire of the right kind, being in reality nothing but 'le désintéressement de l'amour'. Taoism, on the other hand, is a doctrine of total indifference. As Grenier commented in an interview, 'Ce qui m'attire et m'effraie beaucoup dans le taoïsme, c'est que derrière la porte il n'y a rien.' He must finally discard two interpretations of Taoism which he has entertained and which are in closer agreement with his own previous meditations: that of a pantheistic doctrine based firmly on Being, and that of a search for an Absolute underlying the universe, which alone is value, and with which union may be hoped for. Typically, however, Grenier pulls himself back at the last moment from a position that would prove fatal to his

own continuing meditation. In the very last sentence of the note 'Quiétude et Wou-wei', after quoting at length from Étiemble's *Six essais sur trois tyrannies* (Paris, 1947) to show that the concept of Yin and Yang in Taoism is not comparable to the Marxian dialectic, he notes: 'Quant au Premier Principe du Tao, les sinologues s'accordent pour y voir un Absolu impersonnel et fatal' (*EBL*, 156). It is the only occasion on which the word 'Absolu' is used in the whole of 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao', and it cannot but take up the theme of the end of 'Existence et destinée': 'l'existence de l'absolu se cache et bouge derrière la tapisserie du monde' (*EBL*, 115). Grenier's exploration of Taoism, while provoking deep reflection, has thus not led him to any firm doctrinal statement, and he has succeeded in keeping open the less stultifying ways of Western mysticism and of his own cult of the Absolute.

When he came to devote a whole book to Taoism (*L'Esprit du Tao* (Paris, 1957)), Grenier ran the risk of becoming over-academic and losing his earlier insights in a mass of detail. The choice of 'L'Esprit du Tao' as a title is an attempt to guard against this by concentrating on the essence of Taoism rather than on its outward manifestations, as Maspero, for instance, had preferred to do. In fact Grenier gives a comparatively large proportion of the book over to the aspect of *wu wei* and its implications, and to comparisons with other doctrines of quietude, just as he had in 1948.[23] However, he can no longer approach his subject from the point of view of freedom and indifference. He is obliged to begin with more than a cursory examination of the concept of the Tao itself, and that of freedom is left until the last chapter. His treatment of freedom is notably different. In the *Entretiens*, as M-J. Lefebve noticed,[24] Grenier follows an itinerary that is the reverse of that of an Oriental. His starting-point is a reflection on the possible modes of action. When he comes to consider the Taoist attitude, therefore, he is already equipped with a concept of freedom, which he carries over into his new field of investigation. He can still speak in terms of obtaining or using freedom. In *L'Esprit du Tao*, however, Grenier adopts a Chinese perspective. His point of reference is no longer freedom but the Tao, the Principle itself. When he comes to compare the Taoist attitude of *wu wei* with other doctrines of quietude, more familiar to Western readers, he is obliged to recognize that the existence and nature of freedom are not questions that occur to Chinese thinkers of antiquity. There is no word in classical Chinese to express freedom in the sense of free-will, of the power to choose between different courses of action. Consent and participation are the nearest concepts: 'L'homme est déterminé par la Voie, comme il participe à la Voie, il est libre.' *Wu wei* is not the result of a deliberate decision to make no use of a freedom that has somehow been obtained: it is simply an expression of the essence of the Principle. In the *Entretiens*, Grenier is examining the way of the Taoist sage from the outside, as it appears to Western eyes; in *L'Esprit du Tao* he endeavours to let Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and Lie Tzu

speak for themselves. Being more closely identified with his subject, he gives the impression of being on the inside. Grenier's familiar voice comes through more faintly.

It is significant, however, that Grenier should have allowed himself to come so close to the spirit of Taoism that he could no longer simply stand outside it and assess it from a Western point of view. He was moving, at the age of sixty, into a new phase in his carer as a writer. He was aiming more and more to enter into the personality of other creative artists, mainly writers and painters. It was in 1955 that he began to write on artists in *L'Œil* and *L'Express*, and it was in the same year that the first of his prefaces for the Club du Meilleur Livre was published. The technique of espousing the contours of a creative mind, rather than standing back and making a critical assessment, was of course not new to him: it had already been put to good effect in the theses on Renouvier and Lequier. However, the discovery of a similar ideal in Taoism seems to have encouraged Grenier to go farther in the same direction, to the extent of almost submerging his own personality in the portrayal of the Taoist sage, or of Chagall, or of Dostoyevsky. In the *Lexiques* the most striking device is the constant use of quotations and definitions borrowed from others in such a way that Grenier himself is almost absent from the text. It is also significant that the largest number of entries in each *Lexique* is found, with only one exception, under the heading 'Wou-wei' or 'Non-agir'.[25] His debt to Taoism, or at least to concepts closely associated with Taoism, thus continued to be acknowledged both explicitly and in his whole approach to other creative artists, even if his active interest in the *Tao-tê-ching* was comparatively short-lived.[26] What happened between 1941 and 1957 was that he discovered and explored to his satisfaction a doctrine which had for him a twin advantage: it took to its extreme statement an attitude which had long attracted him, and at the same time it provided a clear record of the acceptability, in historical terms, of such a doctrine. It is the historical fact of Taoism that serves to legitimize Grenier's intuition of the Absolute and its claims. If he recognized that a 'glissement de l'Absolu à l'individu' is *almost* inevitable in practice, yet he now possessed one example of an intransigent refusal to compromise. In a way, indeed, this knowledge set him free to explore the Western forms of mystical indifference, by providing him with an absolute criterion against which to measure them. As with his investigation of the Vedânta, Grenier found that a certain familiarity with a tradition so far removed from that of the West encouraged a more flexible and more questioning attitude towards some of the central problems of existence. He complained to Louis Foucher that 'l'Européen se contente trop facilement. Quand il doute, c'est trop peu et de trop peu de chose' (*EBL*, 74). The East could not only teach an attitude of systematic doubt, thus emphasizing the heritage of Descartes and Lequier, but could propose quite different methods of thinking, anecdotal and parabolic rather than discursive. Grenier's

own teaching methods were not dissimilar, as Étiemble notes: 'Cela ressemblait à tout, sauf à une conférence.'[27] Taoism, for Grenier, then, was not an end in itself, but contact with it both broadened and deepened his own meditation on freedom and existence.

CHAPTER 5

GRENIER, MYSTICISM AND RELIGION: TOWARDS COMMITMENT

Taoism had a particular interest for Grenier because it offered a historical example of a doctrine of the Absolute taken to its logical conclusion in terms of an attitude of total indifference. Other religions and philosophies of the Absolute all seemed to him to reveal serious compromise when compared with Taoism. That did not mean, however, that he lost interest in them. Indeed, he was well aware that Taoism represented an esoteric Oriental attitude, and he did not propose either to become a Taoist himself or to encourage other Westerners to follow that path (*EBL*, 72–74). His study of Taoism encouraged him to explore elements of more accessible Western traditions that showed similarities with it, especially in the areas of an immediate contact with the Absolute and of an accompanying attitude of indifference to the world.

When Grenier writes about mystical experience in the Christian and Islamic traditions, he feels himself to be both attracted and disappointed. The attraction comes from the hope of enjoying an immediate contact with that Divine Reality which corresponds to his own intuition of an Absolute underlying the contingency of the world. In 'Un Soir à Biskra' he interprets two texts of Jalâl-ud-Din (Rûmi) in this way: 'C'est qu'un être attire tous ces êtres et les force à le proclamer' (*IM*, 33 (35–36)). He accepts willingly the suggestion that 'il suffit parfois de détourner la tête . . . il suffit de "l'écart" d'un cheval' to attain the desired end of a mystical contact with 'ce que nous cherchons' si infatigablement et à travers tant de déceptions . . . l'Unité' (*IM*, 36, 38 (38, 40)). This disappointment, on the other hand, is inherent in that same hope. There is the real possibility that one will fail to attain the desired end, and indeed be worse off than before. 'Un beau texte d'Al Hallâj nous révèle qu'une allusion divine est cachée au sein de l'ivresse la plus animale, et que ce qui devrait nous entraîner le plus haut risque aussi de nous faire tomber le plus bas' (*IM*, 32 (35)). If ecstasy may miss the target, so also may the way of renunciation favoured by other mystics, which often leads to barrenness and *acedia*. 'Durant quinze ans la Mère Angélique eut beau transporter ses familiers, elle souffrit d'une complète privation de la présence divine' (*IM*, 153 (158)). Not only that, but the enjoyment of mystical union is inevitably followed by an even greater disappointment. In *Le Choix* Grenier notes that in

their descriptions of union, the mystics 'insistent sur son caractère éphémère, sur les afflictions qui le suivent parfois, sur la déréliction dans laquelle ils se sentent après ces états trop élevés' (*C*, 41 (44)). In the much later *Troisième Lexique* he comments: 'L'extase, oui. Mais comment parvenir à relier entre elles les extases? Or la vie mystique, c'est cela' (*TL*, art. 'Mystique'). This is not merely a theoretical problem for Grenier. Without ever claiming to be a mystic, he evidently sees close parallels between certain of his own experiences and those of the mystics. It is through the in-betweenness of his own experience, never able to settle either for a total indifference or for a firm commitment, that he explores the nature and the meaning of what it is to be human in the world: the mystics are also 'in between'.

Grenier's experiences of what he calls *états, instants* and *moments* have already been discussed to some extent in the context of the Absolute and the basic 'sentiment philosophique', and in that of possibility, and they will require further consideration in the context of artistic creation. At this point it will be useful to relate them to the field of mystical experience in order to draw out certain similarities and certain distinctions. Without listing the references exhaustively (*Inspirations méditerranéennes* and *Les Grèves* are the richest sources), it may be suggested that the corpus of experiences described by Grenier comprises two major types. Both are induced by, or at least closely associated with, the contemplation of nature, but one type is characterized by a sense of belonging, of *plénitude*, of victory, of union, while the other is a revelation of alienation, of emptiness, of loss, of separation. The first type is associated with an intuition of the necessity of existence, the second with an intuition of its contingency. Examples of the first may be found in 'Interiora rerum': 'Une minute devient sacrée quand elle est une ouverture sur l'immuable, un contact avec le nécessaire . . . Certains prétendent à épuiser la plénitude de l'instant. Le peuvent-ils?' (*IM*, 131 (135)) and in 'Les Îles Fortunées':

> Et lorsque lentement sonnaient les coups de midi et que tonnait le canon du Fort Saint-Elme, un sentiment de plénitude, non pas un sentiment de bonheur, mais un sentiment de présence réelle et totale, comme si toutes les fissures de l'être étaient bouchées, s'emparait de moi et de tout ce qui était autour de moi (*LI*, 88–89 (89–90))

and of the second in 'La Nuit à la Medina': 'Le vertige métaphysique prend l'homme et lui fait douter de sa condition d'homme. Rien ne compte plus de ce qu'il est. Il faut passer par ces états de suprême dénuement pour savoir ce que c'est que le néant' (*IM*, 39–40 (41)), and in 'L'Attrait du vide': 'j'ai vu ce ciel basculer et s'engloutir dans le vide: ç'a été ma première impression du néant' (*LI* (2), 12 (25)).

These two types of experience appear to correspond to what Marghanita Laski has called 'intensity ecstasies' and 'withdrawal ecstasies' respectively.[1] It

is interesting to note that Laski associates certain features of withdrawal ecstasies with the Eastern mystical tradition and with those mystics in the West, like Eckhart, who came closest to the Eastern tradition (pp. 71, 74). The cast of Grenier's thinking is heavily influenced by the East. He follows the Vedântists in preferring to speak of the Absolute in negative terms, and his intuition of absence and of *le Néant* is not compensated for by an equal stress on presence and *l'Être* for that very reason. The withdrawal ecstasy, for him, is associated with the realization of the absence of the Absolute, the absence of that necessity which underlies his contingency. He is unable to go on from that point to rejoice in the assurance of either a pantheistic union ('adamic' for Laski, 'pan-en-henic' for Zaehner)[2] or a union with the personal God of the Christian or Islamic tradition. He prefers to see his experiences as metaphysical rather than as mystical (*MIX*, 77–80; *C*, 6 (9–10)), but the area with which he is most concerned would seem to correspond to Zaehner's third category, that of the 'monistic' mystical experiences. At the same time, his sustained interest in Quietism, despite its obvious failure to measure up to the extreme criteria of Taoism where the Absolute and indifference are concerned, suggests that his 'metaphysical' perspective may at times overlap with the 'mystical' even as far as theism.[3] Is this the point at which a bridge may be discerned in Grenier's thought between indifference and commitment? Two possible lines of investigation here are, firstly, Grenier's interpretation of Quietism, and secondly, his own religious experience (where he may be prepared to allow that it is more than just 'metaphysical').

In the section of the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* devoted to 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao', Grenier makes the point that in Christianity

> la quiétude est un état mystique ignoré par le simple fidèle; elle ne dispense pas des devoirs d'obligation; et même, en tant qu'état mystique, elle est une étape dernière à laquelle on n'a le droit d'accéder qu'après avoir traversé l'étape de la méditation (où la pensée est agissante) . . . Oui, c'est naturel, c'est même indispensable, mais seulement pour l'âme qui est parvenue à un certain degré. (*EBL*, 140–41)

Even then, the passivity of the soul bears only a superficial resemblance to that of the Taoist. The *laisser-faire* of the Christian mystic 'réalise le paradoxe de l'oisiveté agissante'. It is a question of cooperation, of allowing the personal God to move the soul as He wills. Piny and Fénelon, whom he quotes,[4] may be suspect from a strictly orthodox Roman Catholic point of view, but they are none the less still in the mainstream of Christian tradition in their emphasis on the will of God as the principle of action on the part of the believer. Action as such is not condemned. Elsewhere Grenier points out that Meister Eckhart himself had the same doctrine.[5] He is less certain about Molinos, whom he understands to be putting forward the possibility (though not the necessity) of making no effort in the act of union with God. Although Molinos speaks of

God in personal terms, as do other Christian mystics, he seems to Grenier to be closer than most to the mystics of non-theistic (particularly monistic) traditions, and a link may also be perceived with his own experience. In his introduction to *Le Guide spirituel* (Paris, 1970)[6] Grenier singles out for comment the passage (III §§iv–vi) in which Molinos contrasts two types of purification: '1° par les afflictions — qui consistent dans la souffrance due à l'absence; 2° par le feu d'un amour ardent et insatiable — qui consiste dans l'accablement par présence (*sic*). La deuxième est le privilège de quelques-uns qui savent se détacher de tous liens et marcher vers l'anéantissement.' In this summary he has suppressed the personal element — for Molinos speaks of 'l'absence du Seigneur', 'l'âme éloignée de son Bien-aimé', 'Sa Présence' — and he is left with the abstract concepts of *absence* and *présence* which are of frequent occurrence in his own writings.[7] His conclusion is equally impersonal. The heresy of Molinos, he maintains, was not that he insisted that the soul should make no effort, but that he claimed that '*elle peut ne pas faire effort* dans l'acte d'union à Dieu'. In that case, 'il s'agit plutôt d'une vue théorique et métaphysique de la plus haute importance que d'une question de morale et de casuistique'. Grenier is concerned with the attitude of indifference as a viable possibility, just as in his investigation of Taoism. Indeed, in 'Le Non-agir d'après le Tao', his claim that 'on a vu en tout cas combien, même avec Fénelon, le catholicisme était loin du quiétisme véritable, et combien celui de Molinos lui-même était loin du quiétisme taoïste' (*EBL*, 153–54), is simply without basis as far as the second half of it is concerned, and Grenier's introduction to the *Guide spirituel* does little to strengthen the argument. Grenier's interest in Quietism leads back to Taoism and indifference rather than on to an exploration of religious commitment or even of the possibility of faith. R. Campbell's suggestion that

> cette indifférence, totale et définitive, dont Grenier nous entretient au cours de son œuvre, n'est que la transposition sur le plan métaphysique de l'attitude de l'Amant délaissé . . .; la position philosophique de J. Grenier pourrait être . . . caractérisée comme *discours sur l'absence de Dieu* (art. cit., pp. 696–99)

may prove to be perceptive, but so far little evidence has been found to support it.

Christian Quietism, however, is by no means the only religious tradition to which Grenier was exposed. Many of the major influences on his thinking throughout his life were associated with religious traditions. His schooling took place entirely within a particular Christian tradition, that of the Marianites. Lequier and Renouvier both adopted a Christian framework for their thought, one remaining a Roman Catholic and the other yielding to the attractions of liberal Protestantism. Grenier's philosophical training gave him, in addition, a certain familiarity with the work of Aquinas and the Scholastic theologians,

and he was also acquainted with the Neo-Thomists of his own day.[8] Beyond Christianity, he was interested in the mystics of all traditions, and in Eastern metaphysical systems which are as much religious as philosophical. What then was his attitude not only to elements of these various traditions which he incorporated into his own personal meditation, but to the whole issue of religious faith and commitment?

We possess two important testimonies to his reaction to the kind of faith that was preached at his school, in *Les Grèves* and the *Mémoires intimes de X*. The Institution Saint-Charles in Saint-Brieuc was a Marianite foundation, run officially since the Separation (about the time that Grenier started there) by diocesan clergy, but still with about one third of the staff consisting of lay brothers of the Order.[9] The religious education which they dispensed was 'd'un rigorisme quasi-janséniste' (*MIX*, 21). Much of what Grenier has to say about it is concerned with the preparation for the solemn first communion at the age of eleven. The emphasis on the *examen de conscience* aggravated his natural tendency to over-scrupulousness and feelings of guilt, to the point of being at least partly responsible for his later nervous illnesses (*MIX*, 20). His attachment to the religion in which he was brought up (at school, if not so much at home) was based in some measure on fear of death and hell (*MIX*, 64). At the same time, his natural sense of pessimism found confirmation in religion, the joyful side of which was never apparent to him as a child. If it held positive attractions for him, they were to be found in the aesthetic qualities of the liturgy and the poetry of the cult of Mary (*MIX*, 55–56). There was enough, then, in the Roman Catholic tradition that was sympathetic to Grenier's character for him to feel at home in it. In the *Mémoires intimes de X.* he says in passing: 'Comment je me détachai de la religion pour ensuite y revenir est une autre question' (*MIX*, 64); that period seems to have come later.

For the 1920s we possess several contemporary testimonies to Grenier's religious evolution in the form of letters, and also later passages in *Voir Naples* which clearly refer to this period. Lambert's letters contain phrases such as: 'une certaine couleur protestante', 'étrangement protestant', 'ô pasteur par-paillot', 'sensibilité catholique me disiez-vous? Creusez *là*', and 'Dites, pendant quelles heures de la journée vous passez-vous du désir de Dieu?'[10] while on the other hand Max Jacob, writing to Cocteau in 1926, says of Grenier: 'Il est pétri de sentiment et de foi en toutes choses (sauf peut-être en Dieu).'[11] Grenier offers a personal perspective on his attitude while in Italy (1924–26) in a passage in *Voir Naples*. The demonstrative nature of religious practice in Italy shocked him, as a man of the north accustomed to the emphasis being placed on the inner life. 'Maintenant je me demande si dans notre religiosité n'entre pas un certain esprit de routine . . . Pour moi ma religion était tellement spirituelle, elle était si bien sublimée qu'elle ne me gênait plus du tout.' The religious practice of his Italian fiancée, however, reassured him. 'Je pense aussi

que j'étais touché par un idéal . . . Et cette religion même dont je m'étais écarté par suite de cette usure qui détruit mieux une croyance que n'importe quel doute — cette religion avait gardé sur moi son prestige dans les cérémonies et les rites' (*VN*, 231–32). It seems, then, that in the 1920s Grenier abandoned formal religious practice but retained a deeply spiritual, if not necessarily religious, sensitivity. Despite what he says in the *Mémoires intimes de X.* about his aspirations being more philosophical and intellectual than religious, he was well aware of the inadequacy and the dangers of intellectualism (*MIX*, 62, 64) (as indeed was Lambert, e.g. in letters of 4 May 1925 and 10 October 1925). The passage in *Voir Naples* quoted above concludes with a *caveat* in that sense. 'L'"intellectuel" croit . . . dégager le sens caché des mystères des religions; il se juge supérieur . . . Or c'est cet "intellectuel" qui a des chances de se tromper le plus lourdement' (*VN*, 233).

Grenier's discovery of Greece and India in the 1920s helped to fix this undogmatic spirituality as the climate that was to continue to inform his thought in the next decade. Indeed, the nature of Grenier's religious beliefs is not something that can be isolated from the rest of his thought. The basic datum for him is the Absolute, 'cette notion d'un être qui ne doit son existence qu'à lui-même' (*ELF*, 64–65). The Absolute is not definable or knowable, and it is for that reason that Grenier is reluctant to introduce a false impression of human knowledge of the Absolute by using the term 'God'. Moreover, his meditation on the Absolute is by no means confined to the Christian or other theistic traditions, as has been shown. The realm of the Absolute is the realm of unity, of perfection, of value, of eternity, and it has been seen how the logical response to it takes the form of an exclusive cult, which would present to the world a mask of total indifference. However, while allowing himself to be fascinated and attracted by the various instances that he found of what promised to be such an exclusive cult of the Absolute, in practice Grenier himself never followed that path. He recognized that he was not 'né impunément dans un pays où l'on est fixé au sol depuis des siècles, où les traditions ne sont pas effacées, où les institutions nous entourent depuis la naissance jusqu'à la mort' (*IM*, 98–99 (101): cf. *ELF*, 73–74). His contact with Islam in North Africa led him to think that 'élevé dans cette religion où le dogme est réduit au minimum et où Dieu est si éloigné de l'homme, j'y aurais adhéré et persisté dans cette adhésion avec plus de conviction' (*MIX*, 62), but the initial condition was of course not fulfilled. The only authentic way forward for him was to accept the framework of his own heredity and environment, the *cadre* that was his, and seek to work out his intuitions of ultimate reality within those dimensions. Two possibilities then seemed to be open to him.

One possibility was to accept the inaccessibility of the Absolute, or at least the practical inability of man to prolong or link together those momentary experiences of mystical or metaphysical illumination which seem to represent a

union with the Absolute. Grenier cannot escape from the nostalgia associated with such an acceptance, but within the *cadre* of the Mediterranean heritage claimed by Grenier as his own he finds that he can express a limited faith in a certain humanism. The nature and the limitations of this faith will be seen in a later chapter. Grenier expresses his understanding of the problem in an important statement which appeared in *Messages* in 1942 under the significant titles 'Actes de foi':[12]

1 Il y a quelque chose de divin dans le monde.
2 Qui est inévaluable, et par contre évalue toutes choses.
3 Nous ne pouvons le toucher que par l'instant; mais nous pouvons le faire.
4 Convertir cet instant en durée c'est l'œuvre de la grâce (artistique) et de la grâce (religieuse).
5 Jamais nous ne sentons mieux qu'à cet instant que tout nous est donné.
6 Le spectacle de l'*élémentaire* (le sommeil d'un enfant, le reflet du soleil dans une vague, le vent dans la forêt, l'ivresse du sage) nous rapproche de lui.
7 L'élémentaire n'a pas de commune mesure avec *l'humain* qui est un mixte.
8 Et pourtant l'humain existe et se manifeste dans la rapprochement et le déchirement.
9 Mieux que cela: On n'a pas le droit de choisir entre la vérité et la vie, entre une pureté irréelle et une réalité sans valeur:
10 Aussi le divin aspire-t-il à travers nous à Dieu.

'On n'a pas le droit de choisir entre la vérité et la vie': the two must be recognized and accepted together, although they never coincide. That is also the message that comes through *Le Choix*, published in the previous year. It is a message of tension taken to the extreme of *écartèlement* (*C* (1), 49, n. 4; *C* (3), 5). The way of Mediterranean humanism is not an easy way for Grenier, and it leads him back, as will be seen, to the painful way of the creative artist.

But there is also a second possibility. In 'Actes de foi' Grenier speaks not only of 'la grâce (artistique)' but also of 'la grâce (religieuse)'. Can religion in its more orthodox acceptation, as opposed to Grenier's rather cerebral and eclectic spirituality, not provide some help at least, if not an actual solution? Does historic Christianity not in fact claim to bring together the two terms represented by *vérité* and *vie*? Grenier more than once recognizes explicitly that that is so. In an admittedly much later passage in the *Mémoires intimes de X.* he writes: 'Qu'est-ce que l'essence de la religion, sinon le fait de donner l'importance suprême à des sentiments qui, du point de vue de l'absolu, demeurent sans valeur?' (*MIX*, 107). Yes indeed, and therein lies the difficulty.

Tout mon problème est de savoir comment l'une et l'autre positions peuvent être vraies — comment Dieu le père, synonyme d'Absolu, peut engendrer le Fils, Dieu

qui se fait homme à telle époque et dans tel corps, comment de l'indifférence totale peut naître l'amour et le sacrifice.

Once again, he avows himself 'écartelé' and 'plein d'angoisse quand je subis au-dedans de moi ce conflit' (*MIX*, 107–08). He had used the same term *écartèlement* in an essay published in *La Table ronde* in 1950, 'Sagesse et christianisme':[13]

l'équilibre que le christianisme essaie de maintenir entre des facultés très différentes de l'homme, est instable et toujours menacé . . . La sagesse chrétienne consistera-t-elle donc dans un compromis? Non, au contraire, elle consistera à pousser jusqu'au bout l'homme dans le sens de sa misère et dans celui de sa grandeur, comme font les deux branches de la Croix.

Ce n'est pas une neutralité, c'est un écartèlement de toutes les puissances de l'être.

However, in that essay he was prepared to go one step further and envisage a solution. That very *écartèlement*, 'par un paradoxe inouï doit aboutir au bonheur et à la paix parce qu'il a pour centre d'unité et comme point de rassemblement non pas un principe abstrait mais un médiateur, un Dieu-homme' (art. cit., pp. 58–59; *APH*, 79–80). It is only in the concept of a mediator, which he allows himself to glimpse from time to time,[14] that Grenier sees any hope of a resolution of the tension. In the Preface to the third edition of *Absolu et choix* (1970) he came as near as he ever did to a positive statement of this belief:

Je ne crois pas qu'il faille atténuer ces contrastes: ce sont les signes de la misère et de la grandeur de l'Homme. Mais je ne crois pas non plus qu'il faille passer sous silence comme je l'ai fait la solution religieuse d'un Médiateur, proposée par Pascal. Elle respecte les extrêmes, mais à un écartèlement elle substitue une union. (*C* (3), 5)

It was because Grenier was at least able to envisage that solution, even if he could not fully commit himself to it, that the 'usure qui détruit mieux une croyance que n'importe quel doute' (*VN*, 232) was to some extent counteracted. He was to remain a member of the Church in which he was brought up. In the *Mémoires intimes de X.* he wrote: 'Quelqu'un disait de moi que j'étais un croyant mais pas un *dévot*' (*MIX*, 68). His faith was 'une conquête sans cesse à reprendre', and he felt himself to be far removed from those who accepted a whole body of doctrine along with their faith (*MIX*, 100).[15] His faith, however, was a genuine response and not merely a question of habit or intellectual acknowledgement of facts:

Il est souvent vrai, il n'est pas toujours vrai, que l'on soit attaché à la religion par faiblesse — habitude du passé, espoir de salut — on peut l'être *aussi* parce qu'on se sent appelé à croire, parce qu'on est touché par quelque chose qui n'est pas simplement humain mais qui n'est pas non plus inhumain. (*MIX*, 148)

Can one then speak of a religious commitment in Grenier's case? Commitment is not necessarily the same as choice, or rather, as is becoming clear from this study, choice is not necessarily to be seen exclusively in its starkest form, that of a first beginning, a voluntary act set against a background of *vide*, a creative act which is at the same time destructive of possibility. It is legitimate to choose a path to which one is already destined, to work on the material that is already there in order to prepare a *cadre* for the spark of divine revelation which will come sooner or later.[16] Grenier's religious commitment is a choice in that sense. While remaining fully open to the attractions of more firmly uncompromising metaphysical traditions, he has adopted that to which his own character and upbringing have predestined him (see *C*, 119–20 (98–100)). Within that commitment he remains free to express his doubts and uncertainties, thus making provision for his double need: 'J'ai beau croire à la nécessité de courir un risque et de choisir parmi les incertitudes, je n'ai qu'un désir: c'est que la vérité me soit imposée' (*MIX*, 146). An entry in the *Nouveau Lexique* (1969) sums up this position and, from the vantage-point of Grenier's mature years, corrects the perspective of the demand for the preservation of possibility:

SOLLICITUDE 'C'est une sollicitude intolérable d'être toujours contraint d'avoir une volonté quand on ne sait pas sur quoi la régler.'
Sénancour a raison: le manque de contrainte intérieure est pire que l'existence d'une contrainte extérieure.

P. Lelong, in his homage to Jean Grenier,[17] claims that he was in no way 'un chrétien plus ou moins marginal'. In evidence he quotes a number of short prayers written by Grenier, and compares them to Pascal's 'Memorial'. They are in fact by no means all of Christian inspiration, some of them being frankly pantheistic, and others monistic, but there are lines which reveal at least a religious aspiration that is not incompatible with the Christian revelation:

Au Dieu inconnu: Dis-moi pourquoi tu te refuses à m'apparaître et ne me laisses pas ignorer ta présence.
Mon Dieu, je suis affreusement tenté de croire que ce n'est pas le même dieu qui règne à la fois sur les immondices et sur les étoiles.
Puisque tu m'inspires le besoin d'aimer, permets-moi de te découvrir dans tout ce que j'aime; empêche-moi de confondre la sécheresse de cœur avec la vérité.
Dans la journée: Donnez-moi la confiance en vous qui me permettra d'avoir confiance dans les autres.
Si les autres se détournent de moi,
Que je ne me détourne pas de vous

and the longer 'Prière pour obtenir de passer du Dieu des philosophes au Dieu des chrétiens'.[18] There are other similar prayers or thoughts in Grenier's unpublished notebooks (and therefore not quoted by Lelong):

A Jésus Toi qui n'as voulu naître que pour m'empêcher de mourir, fais que chaque instant de ce jour soit une naissance avec toi.

Priez avec le peu de lumière qui vous a été donné.
Le doute emplit la nef de son obscurité, mais un rayon de lumière suffit non à le dissiper mais à permettre de voir.

Je *crois*, Seigneur, venez au secours de mon *incrédulité*.
(Marc IX, 23)

Je m'éveille, le brouillard se dissipe —
Tout est égaré, rien n'est perdu.

Mon Dieu, éclairez-moi dans les ténèbres.
Je prie avec le peu de lumière qui m'a été donné.

L'heure la plus obscure de la nuit
est celle qui précède le jour.[19]

These examples seem to point to a different kind of faith from that claimed for Grenier by Lelong. Lelong speaks of a confidence in eternity, and he even sees Grenier's emphasis on indifference as the other side of such a confidence. That is his interpretation of Grenier's dying words 'Comme tout cela est inutile! Comme tout cela est superflu!' (cf. *EM*, 51). It is perhaps because of this interpretation that he does not draw attention to the significant theme of grace that runs through Grenier's writings. Grenier does not see grace exclusively or even primarily in orthodox Christian terms. He uses the word in the context of poetic inspiration, of a momentary experience of acceptance of self and the world, and of artistic creation.[20] Robert Campbell is to that extent justified in noting that 'son "style" est celui de la *Grâce*' (art. cit., p. 890). But if that is the style of his creative thinking, it is also the style of his religious awareness. His comment on the diametrically opposite style of the preparation he was given for his first communion is relevant to more than that isolated instance: 'je pense maintenant que cette gymnastique de l'effort était mal appliquée dans un domaine qui aurait dû être celui de la grâce avant tout' (*C*, 222). The distance between Creator and creature is too great to be bridged other than by what he calls 'une générosité' on the part of the former (*G*, 223).[21] There is, in one of Grenier's unpublished notebooks dating from 1945, a meditation on Christmas which sums up his faith, in a comment on a local turn of phrase used in Egypt: 'Avec un merci, c'est bien cela qu'il faut vous répéter, car nous ne tenons rien de nous-mêmes, avec un merci.' In a letter to Roger Quesnoy in 1968 he expressed in terms of freedom and grace the mature preference noted above: 'je mets la grâce au-dessus de la liberté'.[22]

It would be misleading, however, to conclude on that note. Grenier's understanding of grace, real though it undoubtedly was, never outweighed his expressions of uncertainty, doubt and anguish. It must be seen in its proper context. Two complementary volumes published together in 1957, *L'Existence malheureuse* and *Sur la mort d'un chien*, provide that context. Both end with

tentative expressions of hope, but not as a conclusion: rather, as one element in a broad, complex meditation in which the problems of freedom and choice are once again considered, this time from the point of view of the question of suffering and evil.

CHAPTER 6

FROM INDIFFERENCE TO HUMANISM: *L'EXISTENCE MALHEUREUSE*

It was through investigating the problem of evil in the thought of Renouvier that Grenier had initially come to see the importance of the idea of human freedom. In the writings of Lequier that idea was fundamental, for in his search for a 'première vérité' Lequier was led to posit freedom, indeed to affirm it, as being itself that first truth. Grenier continued to meditate on freedom, linking it closely with the experience of contingency. In the *Entretiens* (1948) he examined the problem of freedom in relation to consciousness and value. In that work he noted: 'Il n'entre pas dans nos vues de traiter du problème du mal'; but he found himself obliged to refer to the place of evil in human existence in the context of the impossibility of making a rational decision about what is the best option in any situation:

> L'homme ignore même si le *mauvais* ne fait pas partie intégrante du bon . . .
> Il se peut même que le mal franchement recherché comme tel découvre un bien . . .
> Du point de vue de l'efficacité, le mauvais peut donc prendre la place du meilleur. (*EBL*, 22–23)

Freedom is involved here only at the stage of response. Grenier had not, however, forgotten Renouvier's examination of the origin of evil and of the part played by freedom in that origin. In *L'Existence malheureuse* (1957) he was to return to the problem of evil and consider it from these two main angles: the origin of evil and the response to it.[1]

Grenier does not offer his own philosophy of evil, but examines several different approaches to the problem. As in the *Entretiens*, his own insights and suggestions are to be found in fragmentary form, and are not necessarily susceptible of being compressed into a homogeneous whole. After an introduction in which he notes, like Renouvier, that the human spirit seems to be made for immortality, and, like Camus, that suffering and death present an absurd contrast to that destiny, he begins in the first chapter by asking whether it is not possible to consider *le mal* and *le bien* as necessary and complementary aspects of the whole of existence. What is good for one person is bad for another; life, which is good, can be preserved only at the cost of destroying life; the extension

of something which is in itself good may produce a bad effect; and so on. A true recognition of this fact will lead to an acceptance of the world as it is, with all its inconveniences and risks. It must be Nature as a whole that is contemplated, not simply the minute fragment of it that we ourselves represent: and Nature not only in its spatial totality, but in its temporal continuity. This attitude is not confined to any one tradition, but Grenier associates it in particular with India. It is an attitude in which the concept of hope plays no part, and it may even be described as 'un état inhumain' (*EM*, 27).[2] It has intellectual and aesthetic interest,[3] and is at least worthy of consideration. It may also be seen as heroic and even super-human in its resolute suppression of hope: 'l'homme qui accomplit cet acte de non-espoir renonce à perpétuer ce divorce qui conduit l'être à toujours devenir autre chose. Il rentre dans le bloc de l'être' (*EM*, 27). It is an attitude similar to that of 'abandon', discussed in the *Entretiens*, by its emphasis on acceptance, and similar to that of 'dégagement' by its deliberate transcendence of values. It differs from the former by the conscious renunciation of any contingent *surabondance*, and from the latter by the lack of any apparent 'domination sur la Nature qui suit la domination sur soi' (*EBL*, 75). The resulting 'vertu négative' is said to be 'bien plus noble que celle qui mène à protester et à agir' (*EM*, 29). This is an oblique reference to those passages in *Le Choix* and the *Entretiens* in which Grenier warns that those doctrines which affirm the importance of liberation and action are deceptive. On the contrary, the attitude which he is advocating has both intellectual appeal and grandeur. The latter quality was always important for Grenier, from his early encounter with the 'hypothèse suprême en théodicée' of Renouvier onwards, and it is no accident that he should be drawn to the extreme attitudes of the sage and the hero, admitting that: 'Il est vrai que l'homme moyen n'offre pas d'intérêt' (*EBL*, 80). In the present instance, he claims that: 'Quoi que je puisse dire par la suite, je ne renierai pas ce premier point de vue qui est celui de l'immaculée connaissance' (*EM*, 29). Immaculate, because it seems to him to represent a pure attitude, worthy of the sage, uncorrupted by the weakness of contingency, which is the mark of the human. The word *connaissance* evidently has a double sense here. It means knowledge, because the universe is apprehended in its totality, and the misconceptions that result from partial knowledge are swept aside. It must also, however, have the Claudelian sense of *co-naissance*,[4] for there is an intentional reference to the Immaculate Conception. Here it is a pantheistic version of that doctrine: the sage has gone through an experience of rebirth in which he coincides with the universe, having abolished the 'divorce' or 'hiatus' (*EBL*, 20; *MIX*, 88) that would keep his existence distinct.

This explanation of evil as being merely another and equally necessary aspect of existence, and the attitude to which it leads, are self-consistent, and they exercise an undeniable attraction, but they do not meet the need of the individual human being. The solution of an intellectual problem does not

necessarily bring with it the 'apaisement' of a torment. That is true as much for the 'mal de l'activité, ou mal moral' as it is for the 'mal de la sensibilité' or 'mal . . . empirique'. In the 'immaculée connaissance' of the sage there is no room for the contingency of the individual human existence, and he deliberately sacrifices his own.[5] In the realm of activity, on the other hand, it is the freedom of contingency that is primary. The conscious exercise of freedom is the important thing: values are of significance only in that their recognition guarantees the reality of freedom. Grenier has thus opened up new fields of enquiry, begging more questions than he answers. Indeed, this chapter is a good example of the way his personal meditation unfolds. He has posed a question, 'pourquoi le mal?'; he immediately indicates that it is necessary first of all to ask, 'qu'est-ce que le mal?'; and he then proceeds to explain it away, by reference to philosophy, literature, art, music . . ., and not only in the Western tradition. He indicates two main lines of thought based on opposite premises, both of which are pursued elsewhere in his writings; but he does not develop them at this point, preferring to begin again from a different starting-place. This in itself shows a different approach from that followed in *Le Choix* and the *Entretiens*, in both of which the intellectual level was regarded as the most important. Here, while still giving full recognition to that level, Grenier suggests that other levels of response to the problem of evil may be at least as appropriate.

Grenier's new starting-place is the experience of the individual. He rewrote the second chapter extensively between 1949 and 1957, in order to emphasize even more strongly the fundamental experience of contingency which makes it impossible to see oneself simply as part of the Whole, except at rare moments of illumination. The situation of man is that he lives *à l'écart*, for if he is conscious of 'cet être, dont la seule chose que je puisse affirmer, c'est qu'il est ineffable' (*EM*, 40),[6] then he is not one with it. He is exiled, separated by a *fissure*, subject to a *dualité*, a *dédoublement:*

> l'existence individuelle est contaminée par le néant, par ceci même qu'elle est conscience et action, par conséquent dualité . . .; j'existe à peu près comme je marche . . . mais la conscience que je prends de pouvoir tomber crée un malaise au sein de ma promenade. C'est ce malaise qui est l'angoisse, c'est cette conscience qui menace la sérénité de l'être comme le soupçon non formulé de la jalousie ou la muette amertume de l'exil.[7]

Each individual, then, has a unique existence and a unique importance. The universe does not consist of a certain number of interchangeable units added together, but of a 'cohésion des sujets': the real problem to be faced is not that of evil in general, but of the suffering subject, 'l'être malheureux' (*EM*, 46–47).

As Grenier himself points out, this is a peculiarly contemporary problem, and his statement of it is not strikingly original. However, his next move is unexpected. He does not go on to offer a contemporary solution in the tradition

of Nietzsche or in that of Kierkegaard. Instead, he suggests a radical solution that might be called, by analogy with that of the fourth chapter of the *Entretiens*, 'le dégagement de toute existence'. It is a global refusal of the universe: not a revolt against it, nor even a sceptical analysis of it, but an intellectual annihilation or *annulation*. In this process of decomposition, the unique individual subject is set up as the sole reality. Given such a thoroughgoing solipsism, 'le mal s'éteint, il est jeté dehors avec le bien', for what can touch those who have learned to 'frapper de nullité ce qui les entoure'? (*EM*, 49–50)[8] However, while individual existence is preserved by such an attitude, and not swallowed up in some impersonal Whole, there can be no qualifications (nor, therefore, is there any possibility of evaluation, which Grenier elsewhere sees as a primary necessity). The possibility of friendship, for instance, is ruled out. 'Le néant est l'absence de bien comme de mal, étant la négation de l'existence qualifiée' (*EM*, 50). From the point of view of practical action, the corollary of this intellectual decomposition of the universe is a *dévalorisation*, such that no value is attached to the results of any action that may be performed. This is still to some extent a compromise:

> Évidemment, il vaudrait mieux ne rien faire, ne pas agir; mais c'est impossible à l'homme; et, quand il ne fait rien, il fait toujours autre chose, mais seulement autre chose que ce qu'il devait faire. Le néant absolu est impossible. (*EM*, 52)[9]

Grenier is repeating here the same idea that underlies the theory of the *acte divergent* and that also informs his discussion of *engagement* and *libération*.[10] The aim of attaining 'le néant absolu' is unrealizable. That is true whether it is seen in terms of a complete liberation from constraint or as a more positive goal, since the absolute presents itself under the twin aspects of 'le néant' and 'l'être'. Any course of action which supposedly consists in 'ne rien faire' in fact involves a betrayal of that ideal. The only acceptable solution is to act quite unequivocally, but at the same time to deny any importance to that action.

In these first two chapters, Grenier has considered two principal attitudes to evil, both of which involve recognizing it as a necessary part of existence, as the complement of good and not as a threat to it. One is an attitude of total acceptance, the other of total refusal. Both show heroic qualities, and both are also characteristic of the contemplative sage: the two extremes almost meet. In this conclusion to the first two chapters of *L'Existence malheureuse*, Grenier apparently offers a choice between the two attitudes: one, 'la voie héroïque', which 'dit *oui* à la vie et accepte à cause de cela, sans récrimination, ce qui paraît inacceptable'; the other, the 'voie d'anéantissement', which 'dit *non* à la vie et refuse à cause de cela, sans crainte, ce qui paraît impossible à refuser' (*ME*, 53–54). However, just as in *Le Choix* he had to adjust his focus to 'nous qui ne pouvons prétendre à des états aussi sublimes que celui du sage ou de héros' (*C*, 131 (111)), so now he has to recognize that

il se trouve que la plupart des hommes, tout au moins dans nos pays, répugnent à suivre ces deux voies, aussi bien l'une que l'autre, et qu'ils ne veulent imiter ni César ni Gandhi; ou qu'ils ne peuvent pas le faire. (*EM*, 54)

The way this is put implies a certain weakness on the part of such people, and this weakness is connected with the admission of differences, values and choices, as opposed to the total apprehension of an undifferentiated world. It is, once again, the weakness of a contingent consciousness. It is at this point that freedom begins to have real meaning: until now, Grenier has envisaged only the freedom to accept or reject the whole of existence.

If good and evil *are* distinguishable, if suffering *is* real, if some future recompense may be expected for the tribulations of present existence, whether in historical or spiritual terms, then what is required is not an intellectual explanation but a remedy. It will be found in the context of a faith, and will involve hope, whereas the extreme attitudes examined earlier suppressed hope. Such a conception of existence

rend le mal plus aigu, mais aussi elle lui procure un remède plus efficace que celui de l'héroïsme ou de l'abandon. Elle suppose que finalement le mal a sa source dans l'exercice de la liberté et peut être guéri par l'exercice de la liberté. (*EM*, 55)

This consideration leads into the third chapter, in which it seems that Grenier will at last examine the relationship between evil and freedom. Like Lequier, however, he is only too well aware of the limitations on personal freedom; and unlike Lequier, he cannot bring himself to break out by means of a free affirmation. His intellectual appreciation of possibility must be translated into practical terms, must be fitted into the *cadre* of normal existence. That operation involves a considerable reduction of the responsibility attached to existential action: not a complete abolition of it, but a reduction that minimizes the hiatus between the contingent individual and the background against which he exists.

The fourth chapter, despite its apparently different intention, is concerned with the same themes. Freedom is not mentioned explicitly, but the chapter could well be entitled 'Le Bon Usage de la liberté'. Grenier recommends modest aims and 'l'expression réticente' (*EM*, 89), and, in the case of a decision to be made, the search for 'la terre où elle s'enracinera, le tuteur le long duquel elle grandira', for 'C'est cet ensemble de choses médiates qui transforme la faiblesse humaine en force' (*EM*, 94).[11] His argument, essentially, is this: it is a mistake to be too bold and aim too high, because 'the best' will never be achieved in any case, and 'the better' is bound to disappoint the hopes that were placed in it. It is preferable to respect the distance between weak, contingent humanity and the unattainable absolute (represented by 'the best'), and, instead, to keep close to the background or framework of human existence. Progress may then be made, but it would be misleading to speak of 'getting

better': 'Nous soulignons que si un progrès s'est effectué, c'est vers le *moins mal*, . . . ce n'est pas vers le *mieux*. Tout ce dont l'homme est capable c'est de rectifier' (*EM*, 94–95). That is the 'profonde sagesse humaine' of Rieux in Camus's *La Peste* (*EM*, 93). Grenier is thus admitting a certain human value, which he was excluding in earlier chapters. This is the 'marge de l'humain', the 'presque' which he discusses elsewhere. However, he is careful to stress the need to avoid trying to compete with absolute value. It may be true from one point of view that 'le Bien est morcelé', but in absolute terms 'il n'existe pas de degrés dans le Bien'. Indeed,

> l'homme a l'idée du meilleur et il n'en peut réaliser que des contrefaçons. Il fabrique de la fausse monnaie et rend hommage sans le vouloir, à la bonne. Aussi, notre thèse, loin de nier l'existence du parfait, n'en est qu'un corollaire. (*EM*, 95)[12]

Thus, even in a chapter which appears to end on a warm note of positive humanism, Grenier is still maintaining the uncompromising position put forward in *Le Choix*:

> Le choix a une immense importance par suite des conséquences qu'il comporte dans le temps et pour l'individu. Mais il n'a qu'une valeur de second plan par rapport à ce qui est véritablement. Aussi faut-il maintenir la distinction entre ce qui vaut en soi et ce qui vaut pour nous à l'instant donné. Ce qui est évalué ne peut entrer en concurrence avec l'Inévaluable. (*C*, 127 (108))

This underlying thought explains how Grenier is able, in the conclusion to the first part of *L'Existence malheureuse*, to turn from the apparent humanism of the fourth chapter and adopt a position which calls for the devaluation of action, as counselled by the *Bhagavad Gitâ* and by Lao Tzu. The role of freedom and choice has been minimized throughout this first part, and the problem of evil has been restated as the simple fact of existence. However, Grenier has at times spoken of the need to take the scandal of personal suffering into account, and in the second and third parts he develops that theme more fully.

In the two chapters of Part Two and in the third and final chapter of Part Three (the first two chapters of Part Three constituting a parenthesis), Grenier considers three traditions which provide an answer to the problem of evil in terms of justice, transcendent (religious), immanent, and historical. In the Christian tradition, evil is attributed partly to the very order of the world, and partly to the misuse of freedom on the part of human beings. However, God created both the order of the world and man, so that human responsibility would seem to be at least attenuated. The answer to that paradox is not intellectual but practical: man is to humble himself before God. No explanation is given which satisfies human reason (*EM*, 124). In an attempt to avoid the problems raised by the duality between God and man, Grenier turns again, in the second chapter of Part Two, to the doctrine of *karma*, according to which

good and evil are direct products of human freedom. Here again, however, the role of freedom is not what it at first appears to be: freedom operates only within the context of a fixed nature which is itself determined by previous free acts, so that the system is in fact one of global determinism. It has intellectual appeal, but on closer examination is seen to be based on beliefs which are simply unacceptable in the West. Grenier instances not only the belief in *samsâra* or transmigration, the over-simplified concept of determinism, and the philosophy of action which involves a refusal of life, but also the totally different cast of thinking (*EM*, 130–35). His argument here is related to that of an earlier chapter in which he emphasized the need of a *cadre* and of a modest aim within that *cadre*. It is unrealistic to attempt to exercise one's freedom by making a completely fresh start, in thought just as much as in action. Grenier himself is certainly tempted by extreme attitudes found in other cultures besides his own; but his reply to Louis Foucher is unequivocal:

— Vous n'avez pas eu la velléité de vous convertir ou simplement d'adhérer à une des philosophies ou religions extrême-orientales?
— Non. Et quand même j'en aurais eu le désir je n'aurais pas pu le réaliser. On ne peut pas, à volonté, quitter une tradition séculaire dans laquelle on a été nourri pour en adopter une autre, complètement étrangère . . . Les Orientaux eux-mêmes sont les premiers à vous déconseiller ce saut périlleux et à vous encourager à persévérer dans votre voie. (*EBL*, 73–74)

On the same principle as that which has just been stated, however, if the two solutions of the problem of evil in terms of transcendent and immanent justice are both to some extent unsatisfactory, it may yet not be necessary to jettison them. A modest attitude, which does not demand an absolute justification of evil, may be the best — or the least bad — that can be achieved: 'il semble que chacune d'entre elles ait une valeur propre et qu'elle ne perde celle-ci que lorsqu'elle cherche à s'appliquer trop loin de son point de départ' (*EM*, 137). In the 'Conclusion de la deuxième partie' Grenier makes the important suggestion that the place of freedom in any understanding of the problem of evil is not so much within particular solutions as in the attitude that is adopted towards them.

Le mot 'choix' convient bien en effet à la prise de position initiale d'où dépendra chaque sorte d'explications. Et le choix est fait indépendamment des raisons que l'on a de choisir. Les raisons viennent ensuite . . . l'élection divine commandant aussi la prédestination.

La réponse que l'on donnera à la question: D'où vient le mal? sera donc une réponse peu réfléchie, parce qu'elle dépendra de l'orientation générale qu'aura prise celui qui répond, à propos de questions de principe qu'on appelle métaphysiques ou religieuses. (*EM*, 139–40)

Here the *cadre* has assumed an importance at least as great as for action and for creative expression: it is central to Grenier's understanding of the use of

freedom, even if he can envisage an absolute freedom anterior to the exercise of conscious choice. The initial choice of the *cadre* will be largely determined by cultural and hereditary factors, and the *cadre* itself will in turn largely determine thought and action. The place allowed to freedom at each stage is minimal, although that margin represents the human element and is therefore of vital importance. If it becomes too great, however, it delivers the individual concerned over to an existence characterized by lack of definition and lack of creativity. That is the situation which Grenier explores at length in *Les Grèves* and *Voir Naples*.

The appeal to historical justice, after the appeals to transcendent and immanent justice, seems to provide a helpful *cadre* for thought and action. However, the theoretical basis of the belief in 'le sens de l'Histoire' involves an explanation and a justification of evil that 'risquent de faire perdre de vue le tragique de la question posée' (*EM*, 209), and its practical expression gives free rein to violence. It seems that Grenier's main objection to this doctrine is that it constitutes what he attacks elsewhere as an 'orthodoxy': it demands assent to a system of beliefs and values which are at the very least questionable, and it allows no room for manœuvre. It explains the existence of evil as the necessary corollary of the 'passage de l'état d'innocence animale . . . à celui de la connaissance avec ce qu'elle implique de dualité consciente et de retour sur soi'. It is neither sufficiently human nor sufficiently inhuman.

> Nous n'en sommes pas plus avancés, nous le sommes même moins du fait que nous croyons savoir *ce* que nous devrions savoir que nous croyons ou imaginons, du fait que nous hypostasions comme 'moments' dans un flux intelligible *ce* qui nous paraîtra toujours incompréhensible ou scandaleux. (*EM*, 202–03)

For Grenier, a *cadre* is indispensable, but it must be recognized to be provisional. Otherwise it will be in competition with the Absolute, which in his eyes is absurd. It is important to admit, with Franz in *Voir Naples*, that the 'point fixe' of which men see their need, 'ne l'est qu'en apparence, que lui aussi s'en va au fil du courant' (*VN*, 223).

In the chapter entitled 'L'Existence contingente', Grenier examines the contemporary attempt to solve the problem of evil by throwing off the *cadre* of existence, seen in terms of physical, theological and historical determinism, and so achieving liberation from all values except that of freedom itself. His discussion is similar to that of 'engagement' in the *Entretiens*. He points to the moment of glorious exaltation, followed inevitably by 'l'embarras qu'a cet affranchi pour jouir d'une liberté à laquelle il n'était pas préparé'. Indeed, even before choosing the particular system to adopt, modern man has opted for the orientation provided by 'la hantise de l'action à accomplir et de l'engagement à prendre' (*EM*, 164), and it is that which is responsible for the acuteness of the problem of evil. If he had opted differently, the problem would disappear.

Grenier harks back to his earlier suggestions: 'A notre époque un affranchissement total pourrait entraîner un renouvellement du sentiment de la nature grâce à celui de l'isolement' (*EM*, 153). This is the kind of 'dégagement' put forward in the *Entretiens*, in which freedom is preserved rather than being immediately sacrificed to the need for action and commitment. Once again, the concept of freedom is employed at the stage of *situating the problem* of evil, rather than in explaining or justifying the existence of evil itself.[13]

The remaining chapter, 'La Liberté absolue', examines two views according to which the source of evil is to be found in the exercise of freedom. Grenier is sympathetic, in principle, to the theory of absolute freedom as illustrated by Dostoyevsky.[14] Man, according to Dostoyevsky, 'désire cette liberté, qui est sa nature même, en la payant au besoin de la souffrance et de la mort'. He demands the freedom to do evil and the freedom to suffer evil, if only for the sake of demonstrating that he is indeed free: 'le paradis acquis sans liberté et privé de liberté ne vaut rien parce qu'il ne satisfait aucunement la plus haute aspiration de l'homme, sans laquelle il n'est plus un homme' (*EM*, 181–82). Yet although such an attitude may account for certain human behaviour, it does not do justice to reality. If the attempt to reach absolute perfection is doomed to failure (and Grenier quotes: 'ce n'est pas le souterrain qui vaut mieux, mais quelque chose d'autre, quelque chose après quoi je soupire, mais que je ne puis trouver' (*EM*, 182)), then the absolute freedom of indetermination may be claimed in compensation, but from the perspective of Dostoyevsky himself[15] and from that of the ordinary human existent it does not override all values. It may be the 'marque propre' of man, but it is not his 'bien le plus précieux': 'la simplicité d'un cœur pur, comme celui d'Aliocha, la rend inutile.'[16] Grenier concludes:

> Que Nietzsche, Dostoïevski . . . aient raison de vouloir émanciper l'homme, c'est une question; c'en est une autre de savoir si le malheur de l'existence n'en est pas (comme nous l'avons suggéré précédemment) redoublé. (*EM*, 184–85)[17]

The solutions of 'l'existence contingente' and 'la liberté absolue' are in fact simply 'prétextes à évasions spectaculaires', and provide neither an explanation nor a remedy for the problem of evil. Both seek to set up freedom as the sole value, but both fail to achieve that absolute goal and are forced back to the sphere of relative human existence, in which the problem of evil reappears even more strongly than before. In being too ambitious, they fail to do justice to the modest but real needs of man (*EM*, 208, and n. 1).

In his discussion of various attitudes that may be adopted towards the problem of evil, Grenier has let it be seen that in his view only two, broadly speaking, are worthy of consideration. One is that which calls for a global appreciation of the totality of existence (whether it is totally accepted or totally rejected), in which case the problem disappears; the other is that which

involves seeing humanity as capable of making modest progress 'vers le moins mal'. In the context of this second attitude, any long-term justification that is sought in religious or political terms must be recognized to be based on a *pari* and not on demonstrable evidence (*EM*, 209). Hence the call for modesty, in the realization that such a solution can never be more than a poor second-best.

L'insensibilité nous étant interdite par notre qualité d'être vivant et conscient, nous devons nous résigner à l'espoir; l'inertie nous étant odieuse par suite de notre éducation occidentale nous devons nous résigner à l'action. (*EM*, 209–10)

Once again the question is posed: 'Quel espoir? Quelle action?' Grenier has no hesitation in preferring the pessimism of Schopenhauer to the optimism of Spencer and Bergson, and he therefore turns once more to the first of two possible attitudes: 'Le parti le plus héroïque en apparence serait d'adhérer à une doctrine qui, dépouillant l'homme au profit d'un Neutre indifférencié, aboutirait à une attitude d'indifférence absolue.' Grenier aligns himself with Tarrou in *La Peste*. He is no longer counselling the 'profonde sagesse humaine' of Rieux, but claims that:

De ce Neutre on pourrait dire . . . que c'est 'quelque chose qui est par-dessus l'homme, à quoi les hommes s'adressent et qu'ils n'imaginent même pas. Aussi les hommes n'en reçoivent-ils pas de réponse'. Nous ne devons pas nous en étonner puisque la nature même de l'objet questionné est d'être sans réponse et que la paix entre en l'homme à partir du moment où il comprend qu'il n'y a pas de réponse. (*EM*, 211–12)

What Camus says, however, is this:

Pour tous ceux, au contraire, qui s'étaient adressés par-dessus l'homme à quelque chose qu'ils n'imaginaient même pas, il n'y avait pas eu de réponse. Tarrou avait semblé rejoindre cette paix difficile dont il avait parlé, mais ne l'avait trouvé que dans la mort, à l'heure où elle ne pouvait lui servir de rien.[18]

Grenier is advocating an attitude which, he claims, leads to peace: for Camus, that peace is found only in death. Grenier's intellect makes him incline towards an Absolute which leaves no room for the human, while Camus is more sensitive to 'la tendresse humaine', to the value of those human beings who 'avaient demandé la seule chose qui dépendît d'eux' (*La Peste*, loc. cit.). Grenier himself has to recognize that

Une doctrine qui ne tient pas compte de la faiblesse, si sublime que soit cette doctrine, n'est pas satisfaisante. Il faut se demander, en effet, si la faiblesse humaine ne comporte pas une signification, *même malgré nous*. (*EM*, 212)

That meaning may be that the second term of the *acte divergent*, supposedly 'une attitude d'indifférence absolue', turns out to have another aspect altogether, involving 'un appel au proche et au présent'. It may even be that there is

after all some relationship between the Absolute and man. There may be a 'Dieu proche' . . . (*EM*, 213).[19]

In his advocacy of extreme attitudes, those of the hero and the sage; in his mercurial elusiveness, which makes him continually duck the question of the relation between freedom and evil; and in his constant references, explicit or implicit, to the Absolute and to the infinite distance between that Absolute and the domain of relative human existence, Grenier displays an approach that is strongly reminiscent of *Le Choix* and the *Entretiens*. However, *L'Existence malheureuse* marks a step forward in the place given to 'l'humain'. It is admittedly still small, but it is none the less significant. Freedom is a part of 'la faiblesse humaine', and unless limited by a firm *cadre* its exercise will merely aggravate the suffering of the human condition. Within an appropriate *cadre*, however, freedom allows man to achieve a certain limited development, essentially by the discovery of 'quelque chose de plus en plus attachant' in 'ce *bien* qui est à la portée de tout le monde' (*EM*, 98, 97). That is one reason for Grenier's continuing interest in, and concern for, everyday objects, the vegetable and mineral worlds, and animals.[20] *L'Existence malheureuse*, despite its recognition of 'l'humain', is still largely concerned with intellectual attempts to resolve the problem of evil: it is in the context of the suffering and death of an animal that Grenier is able to express something of the connection between 'la marge de l'humain' and the existence of evil, in a book which 'n'a été écrit que pour les esprits naïfs et les cœurs simples', and which is presented as an 'élégie' rather than as an 'essai' (*SMC*, back cover).

The contrast between *Sur la mort d'un chien* and 'L'Île de Pâques' is striking. His discussion of the fact of suffering and death in that essay revealed Grenier to be ill at ease, unwilling to accept the responsibility that is the corollary of human solidarity.[21] The relationship between a man and a dog, however, simplifies matters. In the first place, like Mouloud the cat, Taïaut the dog offers the spectacle of an existence that is to a large extent free of agonizing contingency. Animals ask no questions, practise no deceit. They simply fulfil their allotted role, whereas man realizes at some point that one role has been allotted to him, and he longs to change. Animals do not waste time striving towards a future which never comes: their existence is a series of states, each of which is a 'présent immobile' (*SMC*, §xxi, 21) and so may be enjoyed and exploited to the full. In the second place, and from a rather different point of view, the relationship between Grenier and Taïaut illustrates the importance of the *cadre*: the choice of it involves the exercise, and therefore in some measure the sacrifice, of freedom, and it then exercises a determinative influence on both thought and action. This is established before the question of suffering itself is reached, and thus Grenier's suggestion in *L'Existence malheureuse* about the place of freedom in any understanding of the problem of evil is confirmed. Both the man and the dog have freely consented to a relationship

which limits the freedom of both parties (*SMC*, §IV, 9; §XXVI, 24–25). When the dog was stolen and managed to escape, he did not remain free but returned to his master: 'Il n'avait donc pas seulement besoin de liberté?' (*SMC*, §XXII, 22). This is a parable which illustrates what was said in the *Entretiens* about the incompatibility of freedom and value: rather than remain 'libre et malheureux', the dog has opted for the values of human affection, a home and regular food.

The third lesson of this relationship is that of the fundamental paradox of human existence, so often discussed by Grenier in different contexts and under different aspects. Human existence is torn between presence and absence, and the gulf between them is the 'divorce' of consciousness. Grenier only becomes fully aware of the bond of affection, and in particular of his need of it, after the dog's death, that is, in his absence. 'Si le chien vivait, je ne parlerais pas de lui. Je serais heureux (ou malheureux) de vivre avec lui, cela suffirait' (*SMC*, §XXIV, 23). Robert Campbell saw in the idea of absence the pivot of Grenier's thought and the source of his indifference, pointing out the connection with the theme of the absent loved one, and showing that for Grenier it is the Absolute that is felt as being absent (cf. *SMC*, §LXXXIV, 52). That is undeniably important, and certainly in *L'Existence malheureuse* the yearning for the Absolute often seems to override other, more modest aspirations. However, it would be wrong to neglect the other term, that of presence. The contingency of human existence may point to the infinitely distant Absolute, but it also points to the material environment which is *proche*. If the exercise of consciousness aggravates the divorce from that environment and turns the individual towards the distant Absolute, then if any constructive progress is to be made in the realm of 'l'humain', the scope of consciousness must be limited by the acceptance of a *cadre* which ties it down to that which is *proche*.

Given these lessons, the suffering of Taïaut gives rise to a tension in Grenier's mind between the two types of attitude that emerged from *L'Existence malheureuse* as being possible, and which might be called the total and the partial. There is a gulf between them, and he oscillates from one to the other. In the first place, belief in a transcendent reality does not explain away the problem: we can and must use what freedom we have to conquer a destiny that is by no means all foreordained and inevitable. On the other hand, in the particular case under consideration there was nothing that could be done, and regrets change nothing. It is tempting to refuse all consciousness of a particular evil, and to adopt an attitude of acceptance, or to find some form of escapism. However, human values are inescapable. In 'Existence et destinée' Grenier found that his humanity obliged him to abandon certain extreme attitudes:

> je ne puis l'adopter puisque je suis un homme, je le regrette . . .
>
> . . . je ne puis pas m'y arrêter, car mon existence est plongée dans le temps, et que si je continue de vivre, je me ressouviens d'être homme.

Etant un homme, je ne puis pas faire autrement que de chercher une destination à toutes choses. (*EBL*, 101, 102)

Here, too, although it is only a glimmer, it is not to be ignored — nor, of course, is it to be allowed to shine too brightly, raising hopes that are bound to be disappointed.

Toutes les pensées qui me viennent sont, je le vois, des pensées de désespoir, d'incrédulité, de révolte. Et cependant, je ne puis m'empêcher de croire. Deux êtres sont en conflit en moi; il me faudrait un secours tout-puissant pour me faire apercevoir ce que ma nuit me cache si obstinément, pas assez pourtant pour m'aveugler tout à fait. (*SMC*, §XLV, 33–34)

The answer is to express this glimmer of light and hope by responding to love, using one's freedom to display solidarity in small ways, if not to commit oneself fully. The *cadre* is that of the inevitable progress of illness, but within it there is a small margin for the exercise of freedom.

J'aime ces prévenances qu'ont leurs proches pour les malades, leurs enfants pour les vieillards et certaines garde-malades pour leurs patients. Changer l'oreiller est peu de chose; mais quand on ne peut rien faire d'autre? On laisse à la Nature (je ne dis pas à Dieu) le soin de tuer à petit feu, et on la contrarie dans la mesure du possible, c'est-à-dire de presque rien. Ce 'presque rien' me touche, c'est la marge de l'humain. (*SMC*, §LXXIV, 47)[22]

The concept of the 'presque rien' has occurred before. It expresses the element of contingency, small though it may be, in human existence. There is an infinite distance between the individual being and the Absolute, but there is also an interval between the individual being and the necessary world. It is this interval of freedom that is his burden and his privilege. 'Que l'homme appartienne à la Nature, pas de doute. Dans la mesure où il ne lui appartient pas, c'est son malheur' (*SMC*, §LXXVI, 48: cf. *C*, 3 (7)); but it is also his opportunity to express his true humanity by the right use of what freedom he has. Paradoxically, the 'amour' of which Grenier spoke in the fourth chapter of *L'Existence malheureuse*, or the 'besoin vital de faire du bien' (*SMC*, §LXXXIII, 51), expressions of humanity, are aroused less by other human beings than by animals, because of the inequality that is involved. The realization of this truth gives grounds for a belief in a 'Dieu proche': if man feels pity for animals, surely God cannot but feel pity for man in his utter wretchedness, and rescue him (*SMC*, §XXXI, 27)? The possibility of such compassionate love may be not only the 'marge de l'humain', but also the margin of divine activity in the human world. At the end of *L'Existence malheureuse* Grenier had noted: 'Il faut se demander . . . si la faiblesse humaine ne comporte pas une signification', and in the final paragraph of *Sur la mort d'un chien* he offers a fuller understanding of that meaning:

N'usons pas nos faibles forces à convaincre. Ne croyons pas à nos mérites. Acceptons avec empressement la faveur insolite qui nous est accordée. Une main

écarte le rideau qui nous isole, elle se tend vers nous; hâtons-nous de la saisir et de la baiser. (*SMC*, §xc, 55)[23]

In the context of such an *appel*, representing the irruption of absolute value into human existence, human freedom in the sense of contingency, independence, indetermination, undergoes the same kind of *dévalorisation* that the individual with a different attitude could apply to all his actions.[24] If the hand is the hand of love, then, 'Si elle se retire tu n'as plus rien, car tu n'es toi-même rien que par cet acte d'amour' (*SMC*, §xc, 55).

Sur la mort d'un chien makes no claim to be an intellectual treatise, and it differs from the more formal essays in its approach to the problem of suffering. The theoretical solutions, such as that of 'l'immaculée connaissance', still hold a strong attraction for Grenier, and they are not absent from this work, but more practical and human considerations are given greater prominence. Published at the same time as *L'Existence malheureuse*, it is strictly complementary to it, and neither marks an advance on the other. Indeed, both works exhibit a similar understanding of freedom, and it is only a slight variation in emphasis that makes the balance tip one way rather than the other. Possibility is played down, but that is not to say that Grenier has now moved beyond the concept of freedom as possibility. It is found throughout *Les Grèves*: and *Les Grèves* was published simultaneously with the two books discussed here. Indeed, Grenier has found a new way of preserving possibility, of keeping his options open: by publishing a 'simultaneous trilogy' of essay, elegy and novel in which similar problems are investigated in different ways, and somewhat different solutions are proposed.

CHAPTER 7

MEDITERRANEAN HUMANISM

The ideals of possibility, of freedom, of a consistent indifference, all militate against anything that could be called commitment. The Absolute itself, while in one sense demanding a total commitment, at the same time denies its adepts the right to any positive commitment in the world of material things and human society. It has been suggested, however, that there is a case to be made out for adopting a provisional set of values which allow for some significant, if limited, human action, and that that set of values is not to be created *ex nihilo* (which would be to usurp the privileges of an Absolute Creator) or chosen arbitrarily (which would undermine even its provisional status), but found within a living, familiar tradition. The tradition is that of a Mediterranean humanism, in which man does not take the place of the Absolute, but lives, works and creates within a limited realm which Grenier calls 'la marge de l'humain'.

Born in Paris, and settled in Brittany by the time he was two, Grenier did not discover the Mediterranean until the spring of 1923, when he was twenty-five. He had already been to Rome in 1921 but it was Provence that first revealed to him, in that year, the special quality of the Mediterranean lands. Having obtained his *agrégation* in 1922, Grenier was appointed to a temporary post at the Lycée d'Avignon for May and June of the following year. Not only did he discover Provence in 1923, but later that summer he visited Venice with Louis Guilloux, and in October he sailed for Algiers to take up a teaching post there. Although he had spent much of his life since 1915 in Paris, he had thought of himself as belonging to Brittany. It was those three trips undertaken in 1923 that weaned him away from

> le pays qui, avec ses landes perdues et ses brumes traînantes, avec tout ce qu'il a d'informe et d'indéfini, a suggéré les rêves vaporeux de Chateaubriand, les oscillations intellectuelles de Renan, un équilibre instable de l'esprit, une émotion sans contour. (*IM*, 100 (102))

The Mediterranean world presented him, by contrast, with, first of all, an affirmation of life in its physical aspect, and secondly, a sense of definition and proportion.

> Une configuration sensible au cœur, voilà ce qui fait l'esprit méditerranéen. L'espace? C'est la courbe d'une épaule, l'ovale d'un visage. Le temps? C'est la

course d'un jeune homme d'un bout de la plage à l'autre. La lumière découpe les traits et engendre les nombres. Tout concourt à la gloire de l'homme. (*IM*, 88 (90–91))

Grenier had left Brittany behind, had deliberately rejected it, for the time being at least, in favour of the lands of the Mediterranean, and the metaphysical meditations to which Brittany lent itself were forgotten. The world was no longer some great Whole from which man was separated by his consciousness, but rather the very domain of humanity, in which there could be experienced a true 'coincidence de moi-même avec l'homme' (*IM*, 89 (92)). There is also an important element of what could be called nature-mysticism, with emphasis on the experience of 'extases', but the emotion is strongly positive. The expression of triumphant affirmation has little in common with the ideas of absorption or of waking out of a dream which Brittany inspired. In 'Les Îles Fortunées' the affirmation is 'J'ai gagné' (*LI*, 91–92 (91–92)). The human individual is at the centre, and the moment, the instant, is everything. The sense of joy, of glory, of sheer happiness, eclipses, at least momentarily, all feelings of disquiet. The Mediterranean peoples possess a land which is reassuring in its sheer physical presence and permanence.

Humanism, however, is based on more than mere physical presence. The perfect contours of Nature may be stifling rather than satisfying and restful. Grenier finds in the Mediterranean a further quality, that of definition and proportion, exemplified in man's dominion over Nature and particularly in the achievements of the Golden Age of Greece.[1] In 'La Même Lumière' he exalts the Greek tradition of *retenue*, preserved, despite the extravagance of Rome, in the Romanesque architecture of Provence (*APH*, 163–65: cf. *IM*, 91 (94)). It is to this Greek tradition that 'Cornélius' appeals to combat the apparently negative attitude of his correspondent. In reply to the maxim: 'Tout s'équivaut, donc ne faisons rien', he argues: 'Si tout est égal, pourquoi pas une œuvre plutôt qu'une contemplation?' (*IM*, 176 (179)). Instancing the architecture of Athens, he claims that 'ces édifices . . . commencent par créer leur ordre, et la vie leur est donnée par surcroît' (*IM*, 180 (182)). Humanism is not only a question of having an anthropocentric understanding of the world, there is a creative element to it as well. In 'Cum apparuerit' Grenier proclaims that in Provence 'L'homme ne s'unit à l'homme que pour fonder . . . Tout le monde ici naît architecte . . . Et le paysage est une construction' (*IM*, 91 (93–94)). The verbs *construire* and *créer* are inseparable from Grenier's understanding of Mediterranean humanism, but they must be seen in terms of the whole tradition of *retenue*: this is not the place for a display of man's *surabondance*.

The year 1935 marks the peak of Grenier's enthusiasm for the tradition of Mediterranean humanism. It was in that year that he addressed the First Congress of the Académie Méditerranéenne in Monaco, the theme of which was 'L'Humanisme et la Méditerranée'.[2] He emphasized the importance of a

rediscovery of a true Mediterranean humanism, on condition that it was rooted in the life of the people, informed by 'la sagesse populaire' rather than by an academic formalism. That is also the argument of 'Sagesse de Lourmarin', published in 1936 but probably written in 1935, the year of the Congress: that essay will be discussed more fully later, when the context of Grenier's understanding of humanism has been more firmly established. For the moment, the important point to notice is that Grenier's paper goes on to lay special emphasis on the Greek tradition of humanism, 'car l'héritage hellénique est le seul universel'. In other words his appreciation of this Greek tradition is fundamental to his idea of humanism, and it would be a serious mistake to see him as another Gide, fleeing the cold, repressive North and exalting the warmth and physical joys of the Mediterranean lands in general.

Grenier's response to Greece, already touched on in passing, is best illustrated in the essay 'Interiora rerum'. In April 1926 Grenier had visited Athens from Naples, where he was teaching, and had remained in Greece for a month. On reading one of his letters from there, Lambert commented: 'Je devine: vous vivez l'époque décisive de votre vie.' Later that year, the same correspondent wrote: 'Vous traînerez toute votre vie le mois que vous avez vécu en Grèce.'[3] 'Interiora rerum' was composed probably in the late summer of 1926, when the memory of his visit to Greece was still fresh in Grenier's mind, and published in March of the following year by Daniel Halévy in the series 'Les Cahiers verts'.[4] The overwhelming impression that remained with him was that of 'ce point ténu entre tous où l'esprit et le cœur se tiennent en échec, où l'amour de la vie et la soumission au destin s'équilibrent de manière à prévenir un orgueil ou une humilité sans mesure' (*IM*, 133 (137)). The lesson of Ancient Greece is one of balance, between a total acceptance of life in all its profusion and all its contrasts, and what Grenier calls a 'rectitude', an order, imposed by man on that life. 'Voilà l'équilibre grec, je veux dire l'équilibre humain, je veux dire notre équilibre' (*IM*, 120–21 (125)).[5] It comes from a right understanding of the situation of man, of the relation in which he stands to eternity. Man is not devalued by this perspective, but he is clearly seen to be finite. It is the consciousness of that finitude that is the source of the disciplined order which offers so stark a contrast to the imprecision of Indian sculpture and architecture. For the Greeks, 'la vie humaine n'est vraiment qu'un emblème de quelque chose d'éternel . . .; dans le regard humain s'entrecroisent deux mondes' (*IM*, 125 (129–30)), and man is fully aware that he exists at that point of intersection. For the Indians, there is no such clear boundary, so that sculpture and architecture merge into each other. 'Ce sont des bourgeonnements de la pierre, comme celle-ci, de la Nature. Rochers, bas-reliefs, statues, fresques: un seul bloc' (*IM*, 126 (130)). Humanity then has no place of its own in this latter conception of the universe. Instead of a tension there is a continuity. 'Où est-elle la fragilité de nos amours toujours menacées?' (*IM*, 128

(132)). Greece on the other hand preserves this sense of passion and fragility which finds its expression in the unmistakable definition of Greek art. Definition speaks of what is not there, what is beyond and unknown, as much as of what is present and represented.[6] Grenier therefore naturally turns, in the concluding paragraphs of his essay, to the Greek attitude to death.

> Ces figures méditatives et tendres . . . nous conseillent d'accepter . . . Nous ne pouvons nous dépasser que dans nos frontières . . . Quelle beauté dans un regard qui sait ne pas se détourner de l'inévitable et qui sait n'y pas trop insister. (*IM*, 131–32 (134–36)

The appeal of Mediterranean humanism as exemplified by Greece stems not only from its creative vitality, then, but also from an awareness of the limits within which that vitality is expressed.

It is against this background that the affirmations of 'Cum apparuerit', of 'Les Îles Fortunées' and of other essays must be understood. In 'L'Humain' (1950) Grenier proclaims that 'l'humain réside dans une fissure', that 'l'humain ne porte . . . pas le caractère de l'accomplissement . . . L'échec est la marque de l'humain' (*APH*, 192, 196, 197); in *Sur la mort d'un chien* (1957) he speaks of the 'marge de l'humain'. Man is mortal, finite: incomplete, since his nature is so evidently unfulfilled by death.[7] The certainty of death and the unrequited presumption of the Absolute underlie the constructive humanism of the Mediterranean, giving its positive values a foundation of despair. This is the 'tremblement qui court dans *Les Îles*' that attracted the young Albert Camus:

> Il nous fallait des maîtres plus subtils et qu'un homme, par exemple, né sur d'autres rivages, amoureux lui aussi de la lumière et de la splendeur des corps vînt nous dire, dans un langage inimitable, que ces apparences étaient belles, mais qu'elles devaient périr et qu'il fallait alors les aimer désespérément . . . Il fallait qu'on me rappelât . . . la finitude de l'homme. (*LI* (3), 10–12)

To Grenier Camus owed 'un doute, qui n'en finira pas et qui m'a empêché, par exemple, d'être un humaniste au sens où on l'entend aujourd'hui, je veux dire un homme aveuglé par de courtes certitudes' (*LI* (3), 12). The humanism that he learned from him was not divorced from a true sense of perspective. The Mediterranean affirms life, and at the same time it affirms death. Life is apparently the only value, and yet it is already undermined by the inescapable fact of death. Hence light, too, is ambiguous. It represents the fullness of life, yet its uncompromising brightness both underlines the fragility and mortality of man and acts as a reminder of the uncompromising perfection of the Absolute. In 'Les Îles Fortunées' Grenier speaks of 'une lumière sans espoir' which has caused makind to take refuge in various forms of humanistic religion in order to endure it: the alternative is to succumb and give oneself totally to a contemplation of the Absolute which may issue in suicide or in complete indifference to the world.[8] If this alternative is resisted, Grenier suggests that the most that can

be hoped for is the momentary experience of *grandeur* in which man coincides with himself. 'Ne vivons que pour ces instants où la frêle pellicule qui nous cache tous les jours notre mystère intérieur est crevée. Du fond de cette désolation un chant jaillira' (*IM*, 70 (70));

> Toujours il faudra bénir . . . ces pudeurs, ces renoncements, ces sacrifices qui ajoutent à l'homme, en soi méprisable, la consécration du malheur; qui changent notre volonté en destin et nous donnent enfin — seul moment qui compte — le sentiment de la grandeur. (*IM*, 77–78 (78))

Human life is essentially a desolation, but it may become the setting for something glorious.

Grenier is never under any illusion about the fragility, indeed the essential nothingness, of human life, but under certain circumstances he is prepared to consider it as having a provisional, secondary reality. If it is dwelt upon at any length, it is seen all too clearly to be illusory, and so it can be enjoyed only in fleeting moments. 'Si je m'attarde à ce qui est humain, j'ai le malheur de voir ce qui me plaisait le plus s'en aller en morceaux' (*IM*, 99 (102)); the pleasure is not denied or renounced, but rather kept within due limits. In what sense, then, may we speak of humanism in Grenier's writings? That is the question raised in the important essay 'Sagesse de Lourmarin', from which the last quotation is taken.

Often, when Grenier attempts to tackle the problem of choice and commitment, he finds himself unable to refute the arguments against ever coming to the point of making a choice. In 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' he adopts a different starting-point, and considers the accomplished fact of his attachment to Lourmarin. He begins by analysing the cost of that particular commitment, and evokes the sacrifices which it demanded. In the first place, to opt for Lourmarin is to reject the sea. The north coast of Brittany, where Grenier grew up, naturally had a strong influence on him. There, the ocean retreats at low tide as far as the eye can see, until there is no longer any clear boundary between water and sky. The verb *pénétrer* comes to Grenier's mind as he recalls how he used to lie on the shingle, but he is unable to define what it was that penetrated him. He likens himself to sponges that offer nothing substantial to the observer, but only 'ce je ne sais quoi des choses qui se sont longuement imprégnées de toutes les traces de l'univers'. He continues: 'Peut-être un tel esprit n'est-il qu'un lieu de rencontre, un point d'intersection, un symbole mathématique?' (*IM*, 95–98 (98–100)). This is a much more passive understanding of the status of the human individual than is found in 'Interiora rerum', despite the similar formulation. There the Greek, as represented in statuary, knew himself to be at the point of intersection of two worlds, the present and the eternal. Here the Breton child is aware of no such binary polarization, but is open to the ebb and flow of the ocean of universal being. This inability to perceive anything as

coherent, and hence able to be retained and enjoyed, extends to all domains: 'tout est pour moi comme cette fleur des champs', which withers as soon as it is picked. A fixed role, a party orthodoxy, an acceptance of irreconcilable oppositions and incurable separations, all these are foreign to the environment in which Grenier grew up. Of course he is deliberately exaggerating the contrast with the Mediterranean here, and passing over those aspects of Brittany which do lend themselves to clarity and definition. In 'Interiora rerum' he indeed aligns Brittany with Greece against India:

> l'Inde n'eût jamais pu créer la ligne si pure de ce bras d'adolescent en bronze que je vis au musée de Delphes. La fermeté d'un tel dessin plaît à un homme de ma race pour qui les possibilités se confondent avec les devoirs. Le granit et l'océan, si bruts à côté du marbre et de la mer Égée sont des écoles de résistance. (*IM*, 128–29 (132–33))

For the moment, however, he is concentrating on his intuitive grasp of the complex unity of reality, and the corollary of that, which is the avoidance of strict categorization and of choice. Is it simply that he is attracted by many things at once and is unwilling to opt for any one of them at the expense of the rest? Or is it that, at a deep level, he is not in fact sufficiently attracted by any of them at all? Grenier returns to the image of the flower of the field, but he adds a significant comment. No longer are the flowers that he picks by the wayside 'ce qui me plaisait le plus', by virtue of representing 'ce qui est humain'. Now he recognizes that 'cela ne dure pas, cela est trop à la mesure de l'homme, périssable et mensonger'. At the very heart of this essay on Mediterranean humanism, sounding the inescapable theme against which any theory of humanism must be tested, is the familiar concept of indifference, of the radical devaluation of all that is human for the very reason that it *is* human and therefore imperfect in comparison with the unnamed Absolute. 'Montez un peu plus haut, vous verrez les montagnes s'aplatir et se confondre avec les vallées': a little higher still, and the eyes may find themselves being drawn upwards rather than downwards (*IM*, 102–02 (104–05)).

But to opt for Lourmarin means to renounce these perceptions, fruit of the grey northern ocean and the mists of Brittany. How can Grenier renounce the universalism that he has been setting forth so persuasively? He pictures himself again out for a walk, as at the beginning of the essay. Now, however, instead of a gentle evening stroll in the darkening countryside around Lourmarin, on a 'sentier . . . imprécis et brouillé' which served to turn his thoughts back to Brittany, the walk takes on a new significance. As in the conclusion to 'Cum apparuerit', where the affirmation of life is the deciding factor ('la vie m'apparaît souvent affreuse. Mais ses commencements sont si beaux! Et elle recommence tous les jours' (*IM*, 93 (97): cf. *APH*, 165)), so now 'L'obscurité dans laquelle j'étais plongé ne va pas durer; bientôt, continuant à marcher et

parvenant dans un pays inconnu, je vais voir, à l'aube, des routes entre lesquelles il me faudra choisir' (*IM*, 103 (105–106)). It is not the first time that the verb *choisir* has figured in this essay, but it is the first time that Grenier has faced up to the actual nature of choice. He evokes some of the familiar obstacles which stand in the way of making a choice, but his approach is significantly different. In the first place, he takes hold of the clear opposition between night and day, rejecting the grey, indeterminate tones of Brittany; and secondly, he replaces the sterile couple of possibility and choice by two new terms.

Grenier begins by adducing a parable reminiscent of Lequier's 'Feuille de charmille', but which indicates the new cast of his thought:

> Juliette, dans l'épaisseur sensuelle de la nuit, dans sa prolifération de formes et d'êtres, croit encore que *tout est possible* . . . A peine a-t-elle entendu, à peine a-t-elle reconnu le chant de l'alouette qu'il lui faut choisir, qu'il leur faut choisir, à elle et à lui. Il y a une heure, la trame n'était pas nouée, et le rossignol chantait sur le grenadier. Mais maintenant . . .
>
> Si Roméo accepte de vivre, il lui faut refuser tout ce qui porte atteinte à *sa* vie — il lui faut choisir. (*IM*, 103–04 (106))

The drama of choice is summed up in the opposition between 'tout est possible' and 'refuser': an act of choice eliminates at one stroke the wealth of possibility. Possibility, or potential, and action are radically contrasted by Grenier: 'je vois tout ce que je perds en écartant ce qui peut être vrai à sa manière, tout ce qui, non choisi, peut me dispenser commodément de l'action' (*IM*, 104 (106)). His sympathy is, predictably, with the former, at least initially. Action has no value in itself, whether it is seen as a creative first beginning or in terms of what he stigmatizes elsewhere as orthopraxy.[9] Possibility, on the other hand, the infinite and intoxicating range of human potential, has evident value, representing all the assets of freedom, intact and unsullied by practical use. Much of Grenier's writing is concerned with the need to preserve that potential, whether through the practice of the *acte divergent*, or through the indifference of the Taoist sage, or through the drifting of Franz in *Voir Naples* (the last example being a warning against going to extremes).[10] At this point, however, in line with his chosen image of the emergence from night into day, Grenier takes a more realistic view of potential as expressed in actual living experience, and to that end recasts the terms of the problem. The contrast is now no longer seen as being between possibility and action, but rather between what might be thought of as realized potential and frustrated potential. The terms Grenier uses are *attachement* and *agitation*. 'Ai-je donc d'ailleurs tellement à regretter de ne pas me laisser aller à tous les vagabondages de la pensée?', he asks. The practical consequence of attempting to preserve possibility is precisely that. 'Que pourrais-je attendre de cette agitation qui est la stérilité même?' Grenier allows not only the accusation of sterility but also that of being 'né nulle part'

against those who seek to remain entirely free: they are in danger of losing 'le sens de la terre' (*IM*, 104 (106–07)). This is not a general plea either for Barresian roots or for a slavish attitude of commitment. What he is doing is simply to offer a justification for his own personal decision to adopt Provence, and Lourmarin in particular, as a 'terre de patrie'.

Grenier's point is that the object of his attachment is not unknown and is indeed not alien to him. There is already some kind of natural bond which authenticates its appeal to him. 'De Cadenet à Lourmarin, par les crêtes, tout est proche de l'homme, tout lui est fraternel et consentant. Cette terre ne manque pas à l'homme, c'est l'homme qui lui a manqué. Elle lui inspire une fidélité qu'il n'a pas su toujours respecter' (105 (107)).[11] It is in favour of this land, and not through any existential revolt, that Grenier is prepared to renounce the ties which bind him to Brittany.[12] 'Cum apparuerit' speaks in similar terms of his recognition of a natural affinity between himself and the Mediterranean lands: 'Il existe je ne sais quel composé de ciel, de terre et d'eau, variable avec chacun, qui fait notre climat . . . Il me fallait partir à la recherche de mon climat' (*IM*, 86 (89)). It is indeed a question of recognition rather than of choice. Elsewhere Grenier gives one of the main aims of travelling as being to recognize oneself, 'se reconnaître' (*LI*, 81 (84–89)), and his present argument is an extension of that understanding. The recognition, of course, comes only when things are well under way, and the period of vain agitation has been left behind. In 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' Grenier notes, as a counter to the desire to be dispensed from the need for action: 'Mais je suis embarqué' (*LI*, 104 (106)). In 'La Même Lumière' he extends the idea: 'Et puis nous sommes embarqués, nous ne pouvons faire autrement que d'accepter ce qui nous est imposé et d'en tirer le parti le meilleur; le choix ne commence pas avant, mais après' (*APH*, 165). The attachment has already begun, and because in Grenier's case it is to a tradition that is creative and constructive, he finds that his potential is released rather than destroyed, that, in fact, 'un choix nous libère' (*IM*, 105–06 (108)). The presence of a tradition, of a past, indeed of anything concrete as opposed to the nothingness of a supposedly total, uncommitted freedom, is the basis for the exercise of that creativity of which man, limited as he is, is capable. Grenier's association with the Mediterranean is not to be separated from his vocation as a creative artist. The paragraph just quoted concludes, significantly: 'C'est lorsqu'on est adossé à un obstacle que l'on peut le mieux se mettre à l'œuvre.'

That, indeed, is the key to the essay under discussion. Lourmarin is not just a representative village in Provence. Grenier's allusion to 'la volonté qui a construit le château de Lourmarin, qui l'a maintenu, qui l'a restauré plus tard et en a fait un centre spirituel' (*IM*, 106 (109)), indicates that he is thinking of the cultural Fondation de Lourmarin Laurent-Vibert. Having been married at Lourmarin in 1928, he was in the following year elected one of the first three

pensionnaires of the Fondation, in the company of the novelist and poet André de Richaud and the painter Louis Riou.[13] At the time of his lecture to the Congress of the Académie Méditerranéenne in 1935 he was described as being 'de la fondation de Lourmarin'. During the 1930s he was involved with Henri Bosco, Noël Vesper and others in publishing several series of *plaquettes* under the general title *Les Terrasses de Lourmarin*. His practical commitment to the tradition of Mediterranean humanism, expressed as a response to the 'sagesse de Lourmarin', was therefore cultural and artistic, and it requires to be considered in the context of the wider theme of artistic creation.

Despite the constant reminders that any positive commitment to human values must be seen against the background of finitude, of death, and ultimately of the Absolute, there is still a danger of taking Grenier's expressions of Mediterranean humanism as more advanced, because more positive, than his metaphysical speculations about the Absolute, indifference, possibility and so on: to see his thought as rising to a difficult but none the less firm statement of faith in these values. The simplest corrective to such a view is that based on the chronology of his writings. 'Cum apparuerit' was published in 1930, 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' in 1936, 'La Même Lumière' in 1952, *A propos de l'humain* in 1955. The more extreme writings on indifference come in the middle of that spread: *Le Choix* in 1941, 'L'Indifférence' in 1945, the *Entretiens* in 1948. Neither group can be said to have superseded the other at a given period, and both emphases continue to be present in Grenier's subsequent writings. Each is necessary to balance the other: the tension between them is never resolved, and it underlies all Grenier's conscious and unconscious expressions of the themes of freedom and choice.

CHAPTER 8

GRENIER AND CAMUS: HUMANISM AND INDIFFERENCE

Almost every study of Camus includes a note on the influence of Grenier, often with particular reference to *Les Îles*. A comparison of their expressions of Mediterranean humanism will help to bring out Grenier's distinctive emphasis, and will also clarify the relationship between humanism and indifference in the thought of both writers.[1]

Grenier and Camus first met in the autumn of 1930. Grenier had just been nominated to the Lycée d'Alger as *professeur de philosophie*, and Camus was in the *classe de philosophie* of the same school. He was to spend two years in that class, having been forced by tuberculosis to miss much of the first year. It was during one of his bouts of illness that Grenier visited him at his home, as described in *Albert Camus (souvenirs)*, and from that time dates the beginning of their friendship.[2]

It was probably on a later occasion, when Camus repaid his teacher's visit, that Grenier lent him a novel that had just been published: *La Douleur*, by André de Richaud, a fellow *pensionnaire* of the Fondation de Lourmarin. This book, as Camus was later to write, 'dénouait au fond de moi un nœud de liens obscurs, me délivrait d'entraves dont je sentais la gêne sans pouvoir les nommer'.[3] It opened up the way for him to appreciate Gide, and undoubtedly influenced the development of his own lyrical talent. But Grenier's own influence was to become more direct in the following year. Camus felt drawn to both literature and philosophy, but showed no taste for the discipline of literary history, and no 'esprit de système' either. Yet he was encouraged by the example of his teacher, who taught philosophy in a stimulating, open-ended manner,[4] and who was also becoming known as a talented writer for Jean Paulhan's *Nouvelle Revue française*.[5] Grenier's case showed that it was possible to combine a certain instinct for philosophy with the practice of creative writing.

By the time Grenier's second major collection of essays, *Santa-Cruz et autres paysages africains*, was published in May 1937 — the same month as *L'Envers et l'endroit* — Camus could have read the following: in *Les Îles* (1933): 'Le Chat' (part of which was published in the *Nouvelle Revue française* in 1929), 'Les Îles Kerguélen' (*NRF*, 1931), 'Les Îles Fortunées' (*NRF*, 1932), 'L'Île de

Pâques' (*Europe*, 1932), 'Sur l'Inde' (*NRF*, 1930); in *Santa-Cruz* . . . (1937): 'Santa-Cruz', 'Casino Bastrana', 'Kasbah d'Alger' (originally 'Dans la Kasbah'), 'Un Soir à Biskra', 'La Nuit à la Medina', and several other pieces not incorporated into *Inspirations méditerranéennes* (1941), some of which had appeared initially in *Alger-Étudiant*;[6] other essays collected in *Inspirations méditerranéennes*: 'Interiora rerum' (already in *Écrits*, 1927, but now in an expanded form and with a new title: 'Penser à la figure humaine'), 'Cum apparuerit' (*NRF*, 1930, also published separately in the collection 'Les Terrasses de Lourmarin', 1930, and now reprinted as 'Initiation à la Provence'), 'De Vérone à Séville' (*NRF*, 1935), 'La Rose sans épines' (*NRF*, 1935), 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' (*Cahiers du Sud*, 1936, also in the collection 'Terrasses de Lourmarin', 1939, now reprinted as 'L'Herbe des champs'), 'Dans la campagne romaine' (*Mesures*, 1936). Grenier had also published 'Les Grandes Manoeuvres' (*Europe*, 1934: to be reprinted in *A propos de l'humain*, 1955), and several short pieces of lyrical prose in Aldo Capasso's review *Lirica*: 'L'Ivresse des villes', 'Depuis des années' and 'Les Pèlerins d'Emmaüs' (all 1935), 'Ce qui est perdu' and 'Paysages' (both 1937). All these had appeared in reviews or in book form, or both, by May 1937, and there are unmistakable echoes of some of them in *L'Envers et l'endroit* and *Noces*.

One way of assessing the extent of Grenier's influence is to study the use made by both writers of common themes in their lyrical essays.[7] One such theme is that of the cloister. Grenier finds in the cloister of a convent a refuge from the constant need for action and for the expending of energy. It offers him a renewal of contact with the life of eternity:

> Mais quand, l'après-midi écoulée, l'homme a besoin de se recueillir . . ., quand il veut trouver un repos, une solitude, un lieu où renouer d'un fil invisible ses actions dérisoires du jour avec son destin éternel, où pourrait-il se diriger? . . . En ce moment je pense à ces ruines . . ., à ces vieux couvents abandonnés comme on en trouve un peu partout en Italie et où l'herbe croît autour de la fontaine, à Saint-Jean des Ermites à Palerme par exemple . . .; je sais bien qu'il faut vivre pour agir, tout cela je l'accorde mais laissez un jardin désert, quelque chose d'inutile et d'imprévu, une terrasse surplombant la mer où l'on puisse s'isoler, laissez (mais impossible) un espace où à la rigueur on ne fasse qu'entrer et sortir . . . Cinq minutes de rêve, un moment d'absence. (*SC*, 23–26)

For Grenier, the cloister represents deliverance: from possessions, from the world, from relativity: 'Cloîtres de San Miniato, San Lorenzo, Santa Maria Novella, grêles colonnettes, ombre fraîche, cour où pousse l'herbe, dans votre étroite prison le cœur se sent enfin délivré.' If he looks out from the cloister, he is tempted by a pantheistic desire for union with that very world from which he has been experiencing deliverance: 'Du couvent de Saint-François à Fiesole: je veux étreindre ce paysage, me confondre en lui, l'anéantir en moi.' But the reality of that outside world is soon dissolved again. 'Et après quelques heures

de contemplation et d'amour, les traits s'effacent, la lumière faiblit, la brume monte jusqu'à moi. Rien n'est plus' (*IM*, 82–83 (83–84)). The temptation of the world, the human world this time, is represented again by the architecture of the cloister:

qu'il est beau cet angle droit que font les cyprès avec le sol! A leur approche et à celle des ruines antiques et des cloîtres romans mon désir de négation, mon dégoût des formes sociales s'apaisent. (*IM*, 91 (94))

But the response is equally found in the cloister:

Inscriptions. Toutes disent la vanité de la gloire et du monde. La plus belle est celle que j'ai lue l'été dernier à Vérone: au cloître de San Zeno. (*IM*, 72 (73))

Camus, for his part, finds inspiration in the cloister of San Francisco in Palma: it is surely significant that Grenier's 'De Vérone à Séville' appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue française* shortly before Camus and his first wife left for the Balearic Islands in the summer of 1935, a trip which inspired the writing of 'Amour de vivre' in the following year. The cloister is beautiful and peaceful. However, it is not 'la douceur de vivre' that Camus learns there: rather, it is the fragility of each moment of beauty, peace or happiness. 'Dans une heure, une minute, une seconde, maintenant peut-être, tout pouvait crouler. Et pourtant le miracle se poursuivait.' He goes on:

si le langage de ces pays s'accordait à ce qui résonnait profondément en moi, ce n'est pas parce qu'il répondait à mes questions, mais parce qu'il les rendait inutiles. Ce n'était pas des actions de grâces qui pouvaient me monter aux lèvres, mais ce *Nada* qui n'a pu naître que devant des paysages écrasés de soleil. Il n'y a pas d'amour de vivre sans désespoir de vivre. (*Essais*, p. 44)

This is close to Grenier's reflection: "Tous mes bonheurs ne sont que des grains dont je n'arrive pas à faire un chapelet. Je puis posséder tout, un instant après il ne me reste rien. *Todo, pues nada*' (*IM*, 82 (83): the paragraph preceding 'Cloîtres de San Miniato . . .'). Yet even at this stage there is for Camus a positive message of 'vivre le plus', live life to the full. These meditations on mortality, fragility, *nada*, reveal an important part of the truth, certainly, but ultimately only a part: 'un moment venait toujours où ma soif renaissait' (*Essais*, p. 45). Camus cannot remain long in a state of suspended activity, whereas Grenier cannot abandon such a state for long.

In 'La Mort dans l'âme', written in 1937 and based on a trip to Central Europe and Italy in June 1936, Camus returns to the theme of the cloister. Alone in a strange, cold city, he tries to escape from his solitude.

Une fois . . . dans un cloître baroque, à l'extrémité de la ville, la douceur de l'heure, les cloches qui tintaient lentement, des grappes de pigeons se détachant de la vieille tour, quelque chose aussi comme un parfum d'herbes et de néant, fit naître en mois un silence tout peuplé de larmes qui me mit à deux doigts de la délivrance. (*Essais*, p. 33)

What *délivrance* is this? The word recalls Grenier's meditation on the 'cloîtres de San Miniato . . .', and indeed it is a deliverance from the world, from 'une vie quotidienne où mon angoisse donne son prix à chaque chose', that Camus is seeking. But he recognizes that the temptation must be resisted. His situation seems impossible: 'L'homme est face à face avec lui-même: je le défie d'être heureux . . . Et c'est pourtant par là que le voyage l'illumine' (*Essais*, p. 34). He is learning to face up to the bad things as well as the good things in life, and that is a step forward. When he returns to the lands of the Mediterranean, he finds he is no longer the same. In the country near Vicenza, he spies an inscription (and once again the influence of Grenier is detectable here) on the front of a villa: 'In magnificentiâ naturae, resurgit spiritus'. But his is an unexpected kind of resurrection. He feels a 'paix sans joie': 'c'était l'angoisse de Prague et ce n'était pas elle'.

> A cette extrême point de l'extrême conscience, tout se rejoignait et ma vie m'apparaissait comme un bloc à rejeter ou à recevoir. J'avais besoin d'une grandeur. Je la trouvais dans la confrontation de mon désespoir profond et de l'indifférence secrète d'un des plus beaux paysages du monde. J'y puisais la force d'être courageux et conscient à la fois. (*Essais*, p. 39)

For him the cloister of Palma or of Prague is only a temporary escape. The sun and landscape of the Mediterranean announce not hope but rather indifference and even despair, *and yet* the right response is that of those who 'préfèrent regarder leur destin dans les yeux' and do not try to run away from it.

It is important at this point to distinguish between different senses of the word *indifférence*. In the present instance Camus speaks of the indifference of a landscape. He links it with death, *inhumanité*, despair, and 'plénitude sans joie'. He clarifies his meaning by specifying: 'Pour moi, aucune promesse d'immortalité dans ce pays.' The plain of Vicenza and the ruins of Djémila are indifferent, and provoke indifference in the spectator, in that they offer no hope of escaping from mortality (cf. *LI*, 85 (87)). This kind of indifference is a fact, a reality, and by extension the recognition of that reality; as such it is only a starting-point. For Camus it is part of the essential foundation of lucidity, for it helps to create 'des morts conscientes'. It does not in itself constitute a possible attitude to life, as it does for a Taoist or indeed for Grenier. Indifference in this sense is to be contrasted with that spoken of in the preface to *L'Envers et l'endroit*, 'cette profonde indifférence qui est en moi comme une infirmité de nature', where it is indeed an attitude and not a simple fact that is in question. Such an attitude is pre-lucid, indeed entirely pre-conscious and instinctive. It is trusting, unquestioning. Camus admits the existence within his nature of this instinctive attitude of indifference, but it is no more possible as an attitude to existence than is the simple recognition of the indifference of the world. Both are prior and inferior to the lucid consciousness which for Camus forms the basis of an acceptable response to existence.

Two kinds of indifference: one instinctive, entirely pre-conscious, linked with a sense of belonging, of security; the other marking the beginning of lucidity, linked with the recognition of mortality and of the absurdity of man's confrontation with the inhuman, impersonal world. These two correspond to different levels of choice. When Camus writes: 'je ne veux pas me résoudre à choisir', he is referring to the choice between, on the one hand, 'mon amour de la lumière et de la vie', and on the other, 'mon secret attachement pour l'expérience désespérée que j'ai voulu décrire', that is, the recognition of the harshness and indifference of the world (whether in Prague, or Vicenza, or indeed Djémila). His courageous conclusion is that he will hold both together in a lucid consciousness. He is no idealist, staking all on one side to the exclusion of the other. His refusal to choose is therefore in no sense an adoption of indifference, but on the contrary a manifesto for practical, lucid, realistic action. Camus lives 'devant ce monde' — his house in Algiers was called 'la Maison devant le Monde' — and he boldly proclaims: 'Que m'importe l'éternité'. The last word in 'Le Vent à Djémila' is of the 'visage *vivant* d'un dieu à cornes au fronton d'un autel' (*Essais*, p. 66: my italics), in stark contrast to that of 'Les Îles Kerguélen': 'la vie y fait totalement défaut' (*LI*, 75 (79)). 'L'Île de Pâques', too, which is built round a confrontation with death in much the same way as 'Le Vent à Djémila', leaves the reader with a picture of human isolation and of an associated indifference. Grenier and Camus have fundamentally different approaches to similar themes.

If it is true for the lyrical essays that indifference operates at a much lower level for Camus than for Grenier, in such a way that it never appears as a viable alternative, what about *Caligula* and *L'Étranger*? In *L'Envers et l'endroit* and *Noces* the 'soif d'idéal' is present but never dominates: in *Caligula* it forms the whole subject of the play.[8] In *L'Étranger*, on the other hand, 'Meursault ne peut rien concilier puisqu'il ne prend pas conscience de la totalité des tendances de l'homme'[9]: his actions are situated on the level of pre-lucid consciousness. The characters of Caligula and Meursault therefore each reveal a certain indifference, corresponding to two major types of indifference alluded to in the essays. There is now no longer the perpetual toning down and qualification of these that was a feature of *l'Envers et l'endroit* and *Noces*, but at the same time they are presented on a level that could well be called theoretical rather than practical.

Both Caligula and Meursault show affinities with Grenier's thought. Caligula reveals a dual nature: on the one hand he is not totally indifferent to nature and humanity, and indeed identifies himself with Scipion's poetic reverie:

LE JEUNE SCIPION: J'y parlais d'un certain accord de la terre . . .
CALIGULA, *l'interrompant, d'un ton absorbé*: . . . de la terre et du pied. (Act II, Scene 14)[10]

but then he continues: 'je sais trop la force de ma passion pour la vie, elle ne se satisfera pas de la nature'. His passion is for more than human life, it is for an absolute: absolute freedom, expressed in absolute power. He is in a position to be totally free, and he is going to exercise that freedom independently of all conventional values. He justifies his intention by claiming that 'il n'y a qu'une liberté, celle du condamné à mort. Parce que celui-là, tout lui est indifférent, en dehors du coup qui fera gicler son sang' (Act I, Scene 11). He alone is free, because he alone has faced the reality of death. In attempting to live out an absolute freedom, he is aiming for absolute purity, characterized by Cherea as 'poésie' and as a 'lyrisme inhumain' (Act II, Scene 2). As Grenier was to write in *Le Choix*, 'La contemplation de l'Absolu a pour effet, plus que toute autre, de paralyser l'homme et de lui rendre non seulement inexplicable mais étranger le monde où il est condamné à vivre' (*C*, 136, n. 29 (71)). Yet at the same time Caligula's case is different from that envisaged by Grenier, since the object of his desire is not a distant Absolute, but rather himself, Caligula, with whom the Absolute is to be identified. The order here is important, for it marks the distinction between an essentially humble attitude and one that is uncompromisingly proud. The two attitudes lead to quite different experiences of freedom. Caligula thinks that he has conquered a total freedom, and Camus certainly has considerable sympathy with him, but even in the earliest versions Caligula's project ultimately fails, and in the later versions he is made to recognize it himself: 'Je n'ai pas pris la voie qu'il fallait, je n'aboutis à rien. Ma liberté n'est pas la bonne' (Act IV, Scene 14). 'Il suffirait que l'impossible soit', but alas, the impossible simply is not. In the conclusion to his thesis, Gélinas quotes Camus as saying that 'tous les possibles réunis ne constituent pas la liberté': there must be a 'soumission intérieure', an 'auto-détermination provoquée par la présence d'une valeur' (op. cit., pp. 170–71). Neither the indifference nor the freedom experienced by Caligula is authentic, despite his hyper-lucid consciousness. That, at least, is Camus's growing conviction. Grenier has a somewhat different attitude. He claims that 'Albert Camus a ajouté au personnage de Caligula, déjà transposé, un côté profondément humain qui lui donne un caractère bouleversant.' His own conception of Caligula, as presented to the pupils of the *classe de première supérieure* in 1932–33, was less human:

> Un Nietzsche barbare — voilà quel était pour moi cet empereur (et pas seulement un malade ou un fou).
>
> Je voyais aussi en lui la marque d'une nostalgie de l'absolu — vis-à-vis duquel toutes les choses les plus différentes perdaient leurs différences et toutes choses se ressemblaient. C'était une exaltation panthéistique qui faisait bon marché de la morale. (*AC*, 59)

In the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* Grenier quotes with admiration Flaubert's description of the period in which Caligula lived: 'Les dieux n'étant

plus et le Christ n'étant pas encore, il y a eu, de Cicéron à Marc-Aurèle, un moment unique où l'homme seul a été. Je ne trouve nulle part cette grandeur . . .' (*EBL*, 55). Caligula clearly does not represent Grenier's idea of *le sage*, but he does represent *le héros*, who holds for him an equally strong fascination. He is one of those who live 'au delà du choix'.

Is Meursault then the complement of Caligula, that is to say one who lives 'en deçà du choix'? Certainly he makes few if any decisions. Gélinas describes his life as 'pure potentialité, subordonnée aux impressions venant de l'extérieur' (op. cit., p. 53). Meursault is, however, intensely human, in opposition to the material world, even if society judges him to be inhuman by its own conventional standards. He does notice, in the funeral procession, that 'le soleil débordant qui faisait tressaillir le paysage le rendait inhumain et déprimant' (*Théâtre, récits, ...*, p. 1135). It is not so much that he is indifferent as that he is purely passive, although he undoubtedly operates at a low level of consciousness. However, there is a change in the closing pages of the novel. Indifference is explicitly mentioned three times, after sentence has been passed on Meursault. He is alternating between the two hypotheses of the success or the failure of his appeal. He teaches himself resignation in the latter case, sober restraint in the former. After one such exercise:

> Je venais de rejeter mon pourvoi et je pouvais sentir les ondes de mon sang circuler régulièrement en moi . . . Pour la première fois depuis bien longtemps, j'ai pensé à Marie . . . L'idée m'est venue . . . qu'elle était peut-être malade ou morte. C'est dans l'ordre des choses. Comment l'aurais-je su puisqu'en dehors de nos deux corps maintenant séparés, rien ne nous liait et ne nous rappelait l'un à l'autre. A partir de ce moment, d'ailleurs, le souvenir de Marie m'aurait été indifférent. Morte, elle ne m'intéressait plus. (*Théâtre, récits, ...*, pp. 1206–07)

Indifference begins where the possibility of a physical relationship ends. Where that possibility survives, Meursault is not indifferent. But it is in the very last paragraph of the book that a more significant indifference appears for the first time. After the abortive visit of the prison chaplain, Meursault retreats from even his low level of humanity, and opens himself up to the essentially *in*human material world:

> La merveilleuse paix de cet été endormi entrait en moi comme une marée. A ce moment, et à la limite de la nuit, les sirènes ont hurlé. Elles annonçaient des départs pour un monde qui maintenant m'était à jamais indifférent. Pour la première fois depuis bien longtemps, j'ai pensé à maman . . . Personne, personne n'avait le droit de pleurer sur elle. Et moi aussi, je me suis senti prêt à tout revivre. Comme si cette grande colère m'avait purgé du mal, vidé d'espoir, devant cette nuit chargée de signes et d'étoiles, je m'ouvrais pour la première fois à la tendre indifférence du monde. (*Théâtre, récits*, . . ., p. 1211)

In the lyrical essays, the indifference of the world is hard, forcing man into a consciousness of his own mortality and of his need to rebel, to assert his

humanity. Here, on the contrary, it is gentle and inviting, ready to welcome the refugee from humanity. This is the pre-conscious, womb-orientated indifference that is often connected with the evocation of the mother, but here presented as the culmination of a process of development rather than as something so basic that it is inadmissible as an actual attitude to existence.

Now it may seem that Meursault's final attitude is not far removed from that of the Taoist adept who, according to Maspero, 'a perdu toute activité propre et même toute conscience',[11] but there is in fact a fundamental distinction. Meursault has deliberately rejected any form of Absolute. Value has no meaning for him. In terms of the courageous attitude worked out by Camus in *L'Envers et l'endroit* and *Noces*, Meursault is simply a failure: tragic, certainly, and a victim, but a failure none the less. Grenier recognizes the *déchirement* that such a character provokes in the reader; in both *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Étranger*, he says,

> c'est la même mise en accusation de toutes les 'valeurs' et c'est un parfait manuel d'athéisme. L'impassibilité n'en est pas telle que l'on n'y sente un frémissement sans espoir devant 'la tendre indifférence du monde' et comme un déchirement.

He feels impelled to state, with greater boldness than is typical of him, his conviction that while human life is indeed absurd, 'pour que j'aie conscience de cette absurdité, c'est qu'il existe *un monde par rapport auquel* elle est absurde'.[12] Grenier's reaction is in itself an indication that in *L'Étranger* Camus is in no sense advocating indifference. Meursault slips back, or is driven back, into a pre-conscious attitude that Camus is continually encouraging us to leave behind. Ginestier comments that for Camus 'il n'y a qu'un péché, le renoncement, qu'une faute, l'inaction, qu'une erreur, l'acceptation', and he quotes from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: 'Dans le temps du raisonnement absurde, la création suit l'indifférence et la découverte.'[13]

The direct influence of Grenier is less evident in *Caligula* and *L'Étranger* than in *L'Envers et l'endroit* and *Noces*. The theatre was a medium with which Camus was thoroughly familiar, in a way that Grenier was not, and even in his choice of the novel form he was breaking away from the tradition of the Grenierian lyrical essay. There was a certain amount of influence, no doubt: for instance, the subject of *Caligula* was suggested by Grenier's lessons on Suetonius, given in 1932–33, and by his essay 'L'Île de Pâques' (1932) (see *LI*, 109–11 (106–07)). But there is certainly less similarity of tone and image, and therefore the originality of Camus's thought comes out more strongly. In the lyrical essays he sometimes seems to be saying the same thing as Grenier, although closer examination will often reveal that this is not the case. In *Caligula* and *L'Étranger*, and in general in the later works, the differences are much more clearly marked. For Camus, 'l'homme libre est celui qui choisit et le bon choix tient compte des tendances fondamentales de l'homme' (Gélinas,

op. cit., p. 73). For Grenier it is necessary to take into account the Absolute, which is primary; because of this different centre of gravity, the whole balance of his thought is different from that of his pupil's. Camus is concerned to uphold and to enhance the value of man: Grenier is only too conscious of the essential weakness and dependence of man, and of his lack of value in himself. For Grenier it is not a question of either sinking back into a pre-conscious torpor or else resisting that temptation and asserting his humanity. His is a more cerebral, less instinctive approach. If he allows himself to be attracted by the idea of 'le grand Tout' in which all differences are abolished, and in which his life becomes one with that of animals, trees and so on, it is because of his acute awareness of the incompleteness, impermanence and unjustifiable contingency of his human existence. The adoption of such an attitude of indifference suppresses the 'marge de l'humain': 'Je sors aussitôt de l'impermanence pour m'installer dans l'Être' (*IM*, 165 (168)). Grenier recognizes the ambiguity of this Being: in the same passage the 'absolu végétal' is taken as an image of the ineffable Absolute, value-itself, even 'le Dieu de vérité'. Even in his most intensely Indian period he did not see the Upanishadic tradition as primarily pantheistic. He makes it quite clear that despite appearances, despite 'une mélodie . . . discrète et continue qui enveloppe tous les êtres dans la même caresse, qui fait que du végétal à l'homme la gradation soit insensible et que la vie universelle à chaque instant se reflète dans chaque être comme dans un miroir' (*LI*, 126–27 (120)), yet it is the Absolute, *Cela*, not the world but the 'support du monde', that is the sole aim and focus of human existence.

Camus's *prise de conscience* is the realization that his two forms of indifference do not coincide. On the one hand there is the abolition of all distinctions, on the other there is the stark fact of human mortality, reflected by the indifference of the world. Grenier's *prise de conscience*, as described for instance at the beginning of *Le Choix*, is similarly of the contingency of man, but leading precisely to the possibility of what he calls, in 'Sur l'Inde', 'l'illumination' and 'la réalisation'. The abolition of distinctions in a union with the Absolute is the natural goal to which Grenier's 'pente' points him, so that Camus's progression is reversed.

CHAPTER 9

ORTHODOXY OR OPPORTUNITY?

Humanity is beset by the weakness of contingency. There is only a limited margin within which man can operate constructively, believing in his own values. One possibility, explored in an earlier chapter, is to adopt a living tradition, such as that of Mediterranean humanism, and see one's own individual contribution as a continuation of it, as a response rather than as an independent act of creation. In Grenier's case it is the physical elements of the Mediterranean landscape and population, just as much as the general cultural tradition, which provide the *cadre* within which he can be free to respond to an *appel*. Is it not possible, however, to generalize this solution, and to suggest the kind of *cadre* that the artist or the intellectual is justified in adopting? The question was of the greatest importance in the 1930s, and the role of the intellectual in society was debated from every conceivable angle. After the experimentation and the escapism of the 1920s, commitment was now the order of the day, especially in the face of the threat to civilization and culture posed by the rise of Fascism and National Socialism. Did the various systems of thought and belief that were being canvassed provide an acceptable *cadre*? In the essays collected in the *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie* (1938) Grenier seems to condemn such systems.

It is clearly the *cadre* of thought, of intellectual attitudes, which is under discussion in the *Essai*, not that of the material environment. However, the two cannot be rigorously differentiated, for the material, social and intellectual environments are all to some extent interdependent. They are all important influences on the general framework of existence which the individual subject acquires, and without which his contingent freedom is superfluous and sterile. All creative action involves the sacrifice of possibility, and the realm of thought is no exception. In an essay written in 1936 Grenier outlines his understanding of the exercise of creative thought.

L'intelligence se caractérise, disait un écrivain, par 'un refus indéfini d'être quoi ce soit'. Et en effet la vie de la pensée consiste dans un perpétuel va-et-vient entre des idées dont les unes paraissent vraies, les autres fausses, mais dont aucune ne paraît fixe. L'effort intellectuel ne consiste pas seulement à préciser la relation mouvante des idées entre elles, mais surtout à en consacrer certaines sous le nom de *principes*, dont on ne doutera pas, et dont on usera pour transformer les autres. Ces principes

constituent la *croyance* et sont le ressort de l'action aussi bien chez les peuples que chez les individus.[1]

The *principes*, then, constitute a *cadre* which is recognized to be provisional but which at least helps to see the world in perspective. That is the meaning of what Grenier here terms a *croyance* (cf. *IM*, 93 (96)). In *Le Choix* he actually uses the word *cadre*:

Il est vrai que l'esprit juge d'après certains types, qu'il retombe dans certaines ornières mais ce sont des cadres formels qui n'ont pas plus de signification que les chemins suivis par les caravanes entre deux oasis: simples commodités. (*C*, 25 (29))

Different civilizations possess different traditional frameworks of belief, and none is more self-evidently true than any other. All will be based on reasonable evidence or reasonable suppositions, and all will be satisfactory as far as they go, but none will provide answers to all the questions, and none will be free of errors, distortions and limitations. This applies to both religions and philosophies. Each one will contain some elements which are perceived as evident truth by its adherents — though quite possibly not by others — and some which, while not unreasonable, still have to be invented: 'Toute philosophie se ramène finalement à une hiérarchie: ce qui est essentiel et ce qui est accessoire, ce qui s'impose à l'esprit et ce que l'esprit invente' (*C*, 26 (3)). There is nothing wrong with having a framework of belief which includes elements that cannot be shown to be indisputably true: indeed, Grenier suggests that it is, on the contrary, admirable to make a creative contribution to such a framework.

L'idéal de trop de philosophes est de faire passer ce qu'ils inventent pour ce qu'on leur impose, alors qu'ils devraient être fiers de considérer ce qu'ils inventent comme leur œuvre personnelle. (*C*, 26 (30))

At least Renouvier and Lequier had been bold enough to construct their own systems, without claiming that they were inevitable or infallible.

In the past, man existed within a whole series of *cadres* which provided a structure for his world. The primary sense in which freedom was understood was that of the freedom to discover and to fulfil the role which each individual had received within that structure. Modern man has rejected the different *cadres* one by one. In the chapter of the *Entretiens* entitled 'L'Engagement', Grenier traces the rejection of traditional concepts of God, Society and Nature. In 'L'Existence contingente', in *L'Existence malheureuse*, it is from mechanical determinism, divine predestination, the weight of the past, and the direction of the future, that the liberation of man is traced: 'L'homme sort d'un autre cadre lorsqu'il échappe à la nécessité qu'un Dieu faisait peser sur tous ses actes, et à l'obligation où il était de lui en rendre compte' (*EM*, 149: cf. *EBL*, 48–52). In 'L'Âge des orthodoxies' Grenier shows how the trend of the previous ten years (approximately 1925–35) has been from a 'négation totale

des valeurs', through a period of 'inquiétude', to a search for 'des appuis plus proches' which is translated into an acceptance of 'des orthodoxies'.[2] From the isolation into which he had escaped, man has returned to the herd. But, as he had warned in 'L'Intellectuel dans la société' in 1935,

> il est très dangereux de sortir de son isolement pour la seule raison qu'on y étouffe . . . on peut se tromper aussi gravement en se décidant trop rapidement qu'en faisant bande à part. (*EO*, 132 (119))[3]

He makes his protes in the name of the 'droits de l'esprit' (*EO*, 139 (126)), the right of the human mind to operate freely and creatively, whatever the climate of society or opinion may be.

Throughout history, Grenier argues, it has been accepted that artists and men of learning must accommodate themselves in some degree to the 'catéchisme du pays' in order to have the right to think and create:

> à cette condition, mais à celle-là seulement, on les honore, on les vénère; et je comprends très bien qu'un romancier ou un musicien accepte ces honneurs conditionnels; car depuis le commencement du monde n'a-t-on pas vu que les artistes vraiment épris de leur art ne cherchaient que le climat moral sous lequel ils pourraient créer sans se préoccuper des idées régnantes; préférant s'il le fallait la Rome de Léon X à la Florence des Médicis ou au Paris de François I^er^. Nul ne leur en a fait grief, et avec raison. (*EO*, 36 (35))

In one sense, of course, he is making a false distinction between past and present, for there is no shortage of examples of intellectual tyranny, particularly in the field of religion, in every era. However, the orthodoxies with which he is concerned demand more than intellectual assent to a particular framework of belief; and at the same time they claim (or at least the Marxist orthodoxy which is his primary target claims) to offer a complete liberation. The demand is simply not acceptable, says Grenier, and the claim is not borne out by the facts.

An orthodoxy, in the sense in which Grenier understands it, is more than a *cadre*. 'Marx n'est pas l'auteur d'une bible, c'est entendu, mais l'auteur d'une méthode; seulement il se trouve que c'est une méthode qui rend compte de tout' (*EO*, 51 (48)). Accepting membership of the Party involves accepting a whole host of 'théories inégalement soutenables' (*EO*, 57 (54)) in the fields of psychology, sociology, etc., and not merely in that of economics. Each theory in itself may form the object of a perfectly legitimate *croyance*, but when they are incorporated into an orthodoxy they are elevated to the level of *connaissance*.

> Rien n'est plus naturel et légitime que d'être catholique ou révolutionnaire; rien n'est plus contestable que de vouloir faire concourir tout le savoir humain à la justification de sa foi. (*EO*, 41 (39))

Everything is explained by such a system, nothing is left to the domain of the irrational or the supra-rational. There has been a 'réduction de l'esprit' (*EO*, 136, 123)), whereas 'le socialisme au lieu d'être un rétrécissement de l'esprit devrait en être un élargissement'. Liberation, after all, is one of the claims of Marxism: let it be a true liberation, pleads Grenier, and not a mockery:

> je me permets de plaider en faveur de l'ouvrier qui n'a pu acquérir d'instruction ou seulement une demi-instruction, en faveur du paysan, en faveur du pauvre et de vous dire: si vous le libérez, libérez-le complètement. Ne lui enlevez pas ces contraintes matérielles qui l'étouffent pour imposer à son intelligence un autre fardeau. (*EO*, 30–31 (30))

Better than the blind acceptance of such a stifling orthodoxy is the admission that there may, after all, be aspects of existence which are unjustifiable, which resist all attempts to fit them into a system. The conclusion of 'L'Âge des orthodoxies' is reminiscent of Lequier's revolt against the deterministic universe:

> Il faudrait pouvoir arracher la page que nous venons de lire, ne pas chercher la suite, mais entrer délibérément dans un domaine où personne n'a de guide. La vie serait belle après une telle rature, et après tant de raisons inutiles, une foi sans système, et non pas sans folie. (*EO*, 42 (40): cf. *EM*, 140–41)

'Folie' is preferable to 'système', for in the sense in which Grenier understands it, madness is only the manward aspect of a passion for the Absolute. However, he recognizes that such an uncompromising passion is given to only a few, and so the *acte divergent* comes into its own. The ideal is not attained, but neither is a relative system exalted as a pseudo-ideal, which is essentially the significance of an orthodoxy.

A *cadre* is acceptable only if it allows for a reference beyond itself. In the novels and lyrical essays Grenier speaks of the need to be ready to respond to an *appel* either from beyond the self or from one's own inner nature: in either case, the *appel* is mediated through the *cadre* of existence and thought but itself transcends it. In 'L'Intellectuel dans la société' Grenier emphasizes the fundamental need of humanity to be open to such a creative *appel*: 'il y a une chose dont l'humanité a certainement plus besoin encore que de confort . . ., c'est d'un élan vers quelque chose qui la dépasse' (*EO*, 138 (125)). History has shown, he argues, that when societies have abandoned their creative spirit and turned to a rational exploitation of their resources, in a spirit of self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency, then their work has perished. The monastic communities of the Middle Ages provide a striking example, and present-day Communism, he fears, may provide another.[4] It is not, however, inevitable. At the very basis of the Russian enterprise there is 'une nouvelle foi, une nouvelle espérance', and Grenier quotes from Malraux, who 'voit dans le communisme beaucoup moins une réforme matérielle portant sur la répartition des richesses, qu'une

réforme spirituelle, un autre sens donné à la vie des individus' (*EO*, 139 (126)). Why stifle these signs of life, then, by imposing an absurd dogmatism?

Georges Friedmann, reviewing 'L'Âge des orthodoxies' in *Europe*, detected 'un refus de prendre parti, une antipathie pour l'action qui procéderait d'un tempérament inapte à la vie pratique',[5] whereas action, for him, was essential against the Fascist threat. As for Étiemble, who reacted violently against Grenier's article,

ce qu'il craignait surtout c'est que l'attitude de Jean Grenier, son scepticisme, son refus d'engagement, sa critique virulente de certains marxistes orthodoxes ne favorisent une scission au sein d'une gauche que lui, Étiemble, souhaitait fortement uni contre la menace fasciste.[6]

Grenier spells out his own position in reply to Friedmann's criticism, and also in the 'Réponse à un orthodoxe', a lengthy reply to an anonymous critic of his second article, 'L'Orthodoxie contre l'intelligence':

ceux qui possèdent un pareil tempérament sont tout prêts à reconnaître leurs limites s'ils sont de bonne foi; ils sont peut-être les premiers à en souffrir; ils s'engageront peut-être un jour dans l'action, dans la mesure où ils en seront capables, et pas du côté des privilégiés. Mais on ne leur facilite pas les choses en leur proposant pour première condition l'acceptation d'idées qui leur paraissent inacceptables. (*EO*, 62 (58–59))

Je suis convaincu qu'une action ne peut être efficace que dans la mesure où elle correspond à une pensée. C'est un grand malheur de notre société que la pensée soit à ce point séparée de l'action. Ceux qui pensent, les 'intellectuels', n'agissent pas; ceux qui agissent ne pensent pas. Et si l'on essaie de concilier les deux on n'y arrive pas non plus — parce que l'intellectuel occidental, quand il n'a pas une funeste complaisance dans ses idées (ce que vous me reprochez d'avoir) adopte pour agir n'importe quelle idée (ce que je reproche à mes adversaires). Il est fort bien d'agir et de ne penser que pour agir; une idée n'est rien si elle n'est pas vécue. Mais avez-vous jamais pensé qu'on puisse éprouver une répugnance invincible — *parce qu'intellectuelle* — pour certaines idées? (*EO*, 103, (94))

The urgency of the situation is not a sufficient reason, in Grenier's view, for blindly accepting one particular form of faith which has an inflexible orthodoxy attached to it.[7]

In the conclusion to 'L'Orthodoxie contre l'intelligence', Grenier claims that '*on ne peut aimer que ce que l'on croit vrai*' (*EO*, 62 (59)), and on that ground he refuses to accept the Marxist orthodoxy. It is a dangerous claim, for its logical consequence, as spelled out in *Le Choix*, is that the mind goes beyond 'le monde de l'intelligence' and takes refuge in 'la Pensée pure', identified with the Absolute, since 'nulle croyance et nulle évidence, disons nulle proposition, ne nous a paru digne d'être retenue' (*C*, 28 (32)). That does not mean, however, that all *cadres* of thought are rejected.

Assurément il est un moyen de tourner la difficulté: donner son adhésion à une doctrine en spécifiant que par cette doctrine on entend ceci ou cela. On sauvegarde ainsi sa liberté de pensée tout en essayant de se rendre utile. (*EO*, 62–63 (59))

That is to say, a *cadre* of thought and action is accepted as a provisional measure, but is not allowed to exercise any tyrannical control. A margin of error is permitted, and may indeed be fruitful, as Grenier points out in *Le Choix*: 'Il n'y a de fécondes que les erreurs systématiques, à condition qu'on les sache telles' (*C*, 57, n. 20 (33)). In the context of his discussion of contemporary orthodoxies, however, Grenier does not offer any constructive suggestion about how such a programme is to be put into action. Indeed, he almost seems to dismiss it by warning that 'il faut être très fort pour n'être pas la première victime de ces restrictions mentales' (*EO*, 63 (59)). It is this lack of practical application that is criticized by J.-G. Tricot in the *Journal des nations*: 'Une attitude purement métaphysique, si elle suffit à un homme, ne peut valoir pour une communauté sociale.'[8] Tricot and Friedmann both understood that Grenier's objection to Marxism as the only option for those concerned to defend human freedom and culture was not political or even philosophical but metaphysical.[9] The opposition between *croyance* and *raison* which he propounded in 'L'Âge des orthodoxies' and which Paulhan himself found unacceptable[10] is based on a particular view of the relativity of human existence and of the infinite gulf of undetermined possibility which separates it from the Absolute. Human reason itself constitutes a *cadre* which may at times require to be set aside in response to the Absolute, as indeed thinkers like Lequier, Dostoyevsky and Shestov attempted to set it aside by refusing the basic principles of logic.

What is the status, then, of any given political option? Grenier does not repudiate political options: he is perfectly honest when he writes that 'nous ne devrions jamais condamner *a priori* ceux qui adhèrent à un parti dont la discipline nous paraît odieuse' (*EM*, 94). Indeed, he encouraged the young Albert Camus to join the Communist Party.[11] The essential distinction, for him, is between the political (which is relative) and the metaphysical (which is a reflection of the Absolute).

Discrimination de l'idéal et du parti.
Peut-on être convaincu de la nécessité et de la bienfaisance de ce qu'on appelle en gros 'le socialisme'? Oui. Est-on forcé pour cela d'être marxiste? Non. — Peut-on admettre une *politique* d'extrême gauche? Oui. Est-on forcé pour cela d'admettre la *métaphysique* de l'extrême gauche? Non. (*EO*, 47 (45))

It is conceivable that Communism might provide a possible *cadre* for the intellectual: but Grenier finds the Marxism of his day unacceptable because the *cadre* is exalted to the level of a metaphysic. His own political commitment went no further than his membership of Mounier's 'Amis d'*Esprit*'. Accepting Louis Foucher's argument that 'l'idéal ne peut se réaliser que par le truchement d'un réel', Grenier indicated that his humanism found expression increasingly within the *cadre* of certain artistic traditions:

Je ne crois pas, comme autrefois, que l'individu puisse et doive s'abstraire de la société. Je crois quand même qu'il a un certain droit à vivre à sa guise, à penser ce qu'il veut. Il peut même rendre service aux autres en approfondissant en lui-même ce fonds qui lui est commun avec tous les autres hommes. Pour ma part, ma reconnaissance la plus vive va à certains artistes qui n'ont cru vivre que pour eux-mêmes. (*ELF*, 58, 60)

Indeed, it is not without significance that the controversy with Friedmann should have been followed a year later by the appearance of Grenier's first writings on art and the artist, and in particular by the paper presented to the second Congrès International d'Esthétique et de Science de l'Art, under the title 'La Dépendance de l'artiste et l'indépendance de l'art'.

CHAPTER 10

ARTISTIC CREATION

La création artistique . . . me paraît au point de jonction de la liberté et de la fatalité (Jean Grenier).[1]

The discussion of Mediterranean humanism has raised the question of the small margin of creative initiative open to man; the chapter on orthodoxy has developed the idea of the *cadre* within which any such initiative must find expression. This chapter will take up the theme in the wider context of Grenier's aesthetics.

In 1962 Grenier was appointed to the chair of Aesthetics and the Science of Art in the University of Paris, in succession to Étienne Souriau, a post which he was to hold until his retirement in 1968. His interest in the subject had been lifelong. Many of his friends were artists themselves or at least lovers of art: Lemière, Dubuffet, Max Jacob, to mention only three.[2] His long association with Paulhan certainly stimulated his aesthetic interest. It was Paulhan's gifts as an art critic that Grenier particularly admired in him.[3] Nevertheless, it was not until 1944, when his former pupil Camus asked him to take over the art column of *Combat*, that Grenier began to write in any quantity on aesthetics. He had contributed to *Verve* for the first time in 1939;[4] in 1941 there appeared two tributes to the work of individual artists, one for an exhibition catalogue, the other to accompany a set of reproductions of paintings.[5] He then wrote regularly for *Combat* between September 1944 and January 1955. After his departure for Egypt he sent only the occasional further contribution, but he also wrote articles on Egyptian painting and on Braque for several newspapers and reviews.[6] By the time he returned to France at the end of 1950 he was already preparing for publication a collection of essays under the title *L'Esprit de la peinture contemporaine* (1951).[7] During the next five years Grenier wrote individual articles for several reviews: *Verve, Derrière le miroir, Arts, Preuves, L'Œil* and *L'Express*, before settling down in 1955 to a regular collaboration with the last two named. In 1957, after a brief dalliance with *La Nef*, he moved to *Preuves*, and contributed to most issues between 1958 and 1963. He wrote several articles for *XX^e Siècle*, and, later, for *La Galerie des Arts*. There were always exhibition catalogues; and in the 1960s he contributed texts of varying lengths to several books and book-length catalogues devoted to the work of individual artists: Lanskoy, Borès, Gillet, Marfaing, Music . . . He also spoke

regularly on contemporary art on the radio. In 1963 Calmann-Lévy published a series of radio interviews, under the title *Entretiens avec dix-sept peintres non-figuratifs*. In 1963 and 1965 his Sorbonne lectures were published in the series 'Les Cours de Sorbonne',[8] and 1970 saw the publication of *L'Art et ses problèmes*, based on his lectures and also on a series of articles written for the *NRF*.[9] By that time he had resigned his chair, but he went on writing about art, and even after his death texts of his continued to appear in exhibition catalogues.[10]

This large amount of writing on art and aesthetics belongs mainly to the years after the Second World War. Indeed, there is nothing specifically devoted to art criticism or aesthetics before 1937, when Grenier presented a paper to the Deuxième Congrès International d'Esthétique et de Science de l'Art. Some of the earlier essays, however, had touched on related areas. 'Interiora rerum' (1927), for instance, is concerned with the artistic tradition of Classical Greece, and its aesthetic is that of Greek humanism. Grenier's reflections on Athenian sculpture are not to be seen primarily as oblique comments on his own vocation, but they do provide a basis for what will become a more personal aesthetic. The observation that 'dans le regard humain s'entre-croisent deux mondes' (*IM*, 125 (130)) looks forward not only to a fuller expression of Mediterranean humanism but also to the hypothesis of the dual nature of the creative process which will be examined later. In 'Les Îles Fortunées' (1932) there is present, in a reference to Rembrandt, the idea that plays such a large part in Grenier's aesthetics, that of true creativity involving a self-emptying and a waiting for revelation, for inspiration, for that *appel* which comes either from outside oneself or from the depths of one's true self.

This idea is taken up and developed in 'La Rose sans épines' (1935), where it is poetry rather than painting that is in question. Here again Grenier's thought moves on two levels, that of the creative moment itself and that of its capture by the poet. He begins by asking how the 'pullulement de la vie universelle' can be grasped and preserved in a work of art. It is the gesture, captured in an instant and appreciated in an instant, that gives the poem the quality of an *appel* putting the reader in touch with eternity. The response evoked in the reader is comparable to the original response of the poet. Grenier is pointing out that poetry is based on a response which, while itself momentary, is the channel for a revelation of eternity. It is therefore important to be receptive at the critical moment, and that is where preparation and technique come in. Grenier notes that 'il n'est pas question dans ces pages de la *technique* qui est au moins la moitié de la poésie, mais seulement de ses *sources*'. He speaks only in the most general terms of the preparation that may be necessary in order to become what he calls the locus, the *lieu*, of revelation. It is not unlike the preparation of the mystic in that it may involve long periods of *acedia* in the attempt to move from the experience of 'se sentir déchiré entre l'éternité de nos désirs et la

fragilité de nos vies' to that of 'faire de cette union un mariage d'amour'. The world forgets, or never sees, all this preparation. 'On voit toujours le poète comme une feuille morte qui s'élève au *gré du vent*; on ne sait pas que lorsqu'il s'agit vraiment d'un poète, toute la grâce qu'il obtient il l'a méritée' (*IM*, 148–56 (153–60)).[11]

The work of preparation may be seen as the fashioning of oneself into a *cadre* suitable for the reception and channelling of the revelation when it comes. Man, however, as has been seen, remains at the sterile level of possibility until he opts for some attachment to a set of values. 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' (1936) presents the case for a geographical attachment. In that essay Grenier quotes Cézanne's appalled comment on another painter's work: 'Voilà un homme qui n'est né nulle part', and he adds: 'on pourrait en dire autant aujourd'hui de beaucoup de livres et d'œuvres d'art: ce sont des créations de gens qui ne sont nés nulle part' or who have otherwise 'perdu le sens de la terre'. Indeed, he claims that the greatest creative artists of the West have not created *ex nihilo* and in a vacuum, but have taken hold of their own heritage and have transformed it. Grenier is disturbed at the modern tendency to fix on some ideal which is situated not in the past but in the distant future, and then to try to reach it 'à travers une série ininterrompue de catastrophes'. Rather than imitate these followers of Prometheus (who, he suggests, is only Tantalus in disguise), he proposes the example of Orpheus, 'qui, les yeux fixés sur l'ordre du ciel, y conforma l'ordre de la terre'. That is to say, artistic creation is not to be absurdly ambitious and over-idealistic. Not that the ideal should be proscribed altogether, but the aim should rather be to 'exalter ce qui est' (*IM*, 104–08 (107–10)). Creation is not the product of a blind fatality, moving through history towards a predetermined goal, but the work of human beings, living at a given time and in a given place. That is the true meaning of humanism, which is able to renew mankind through contact with 'la sagesse populaire de la Méditerranée'.[12]

Before 1937, then, there are two clearly discernible ideas of the nature of artistic creation present in Grenier's writings. There is the emphasis on the revelation that must come to the individual, and to which he must respond; and there is the complementary emphasis on the part played by the individual himself in preparing and working. This double emphasis is only a transposition of the idea that was already present in 'Interiora rerum' (1927). It is the second aspect that forms the subject of a paper presented in 1937 to the Congress on Aesthetics, entitled 'La Dépendance de l'artiste et l'indépendance de l'art'.[13] In it, Grenier argues that the artist needs to accept his dependence on society, without which he would be only a dilettante, a parasite, an aesthete, 'prêt à sacrifier des sentiments humains à des conceptions artificielles, qu'il veut faire prendre pour de l'art', and his art, however brilliant, would be sterile, cut off from 'la sève populaire'. In other words, his *cadre* must be a vital one. On the

other hand, art itself must preserve its independence, for it is not simply a product of the artist as a social being, and hence of society. Inspiration is not merely a question of derivation. Grenier does not in fact stress explicitly the need of a revelation, but he points instead to the process of maturation and transformation which, in other passages, follows the moment of inspiration and makes the actual work of art possible through the artist's mastery of technique. This reflects Grenier's growing interest in the problem of composition, which also gives rise to the supposed correspondence between himself and 'Cornélius' in 1939. The starting-point of the 'Lettre à Cornélius' is the difficulty of translating an initial inspiration into words. The correspondence with 'Cornélius' becomes polarized into an opposition between a desire for transformation on the one hand, for metamorphosis into something that represents completeness and fulfilment in contrast to the metaphysical imperfection of man, and on the other, the unacceptably arrogant call for a decisive act of creation.[14] The subtitle of the 'Lettre', 'La Métamorphose', might have suggested a middle way, that of the transformation of the artist's own heritage to produce a work of art that is neither totally independent of his situation nor dictated by it; but in 1939 Grenier was working on *Le Choix* and once again finding himself unable to compromise with the demands of the Absolute. By the 1950s, however, Grenier again finds it possible to conceive of artistic creation in terms of the same two aspects to which attention has already been drawn. The relevant passages in *Les Grèves* (1957) will be noted in the context of possibility and its destruction, but there are some points which have particular relevance to the present discussion.

It is significant that the most important passage in which the problem of creation is treated in *Les Grèves* should come in the chapter entitled 'L'Exploration du passé'. The past, which constitutes the inescapable foundation of the artist's present situation, is also the source of his art:

> Dans ce mélange de souvenirs et de fictions . . . je trébuche à chaque fois que je passe d'une page à l'autre. Donnez-moi le premier mot, la première phrase, et je continuerai dans la ligne qui m'aura été tracée . . . Mais qui me donnera le début? (*G*, 248)

The creative act is indeed a launching out, but a launching out into a domain that immediately proves to be not strange at all, but already experienced. It is to that extent familiar, and only too ready to lend itself to expression, or rather transcription, by the artist. The act itself is an emotional response which, in that it effects a 'coupure' in 'ce monde qui, si incohérent qu'il soit, n'en est pas moins un univers', is bound to be felt as a 'faute'; but thereafter creation is to be understood more as a regular 'travail de composition', within certain voluntarily accepted rules and restrictions. This interpretation is akin to that of the argument of 'Sagesse de Lourmarin'. There, the deliberate choice of Lourma-

rin as a 'terre de patrie' opens the way for a limited, human work of creation, even though the initial act of choice inevitably destroys the infinity of potential and thus declares inaccessible a certain ideal which is based on the preservation of that potential. There are cases in which that kind of perfection is no longer appropriate, as Grenier recognizes in his essay on Braque in *L'Esprit de la peinture contemporaine* (1951). Creative art cannot be an expression of a quest for perfection, for it must take into account what he calls, in 'La Rose sans épines', 'notre fragilité'. In 'Portrait de Braque' he points out that 'l'humain se mesure à l'étendue du sacrifice qu'il faut consentir pour renoncer à une perfection à laquelle on ne peut s'empêcher de viser. L'humain c'est, après la révolte du désespoir, une défaillance acceptée' (*EPC*, 35). The sentiment expressed in *Les Grèves* is similar: 'En attendant, comme les jours succèdent aux jours et que, trop faible, la vue humaine ne peut porter au delà d'un horizon très limité, le mieux est d'accomplir une tâche dont l'aurore verra le début, et le crépuscule, la fin' (*G*, 254).

The emphasis, then, is removed from the initial act and transferred to the continuum of preparation and maturation. Indeed, the initial act itself is seen as being prepared to a large extent by a hidden but none the less important process that is going on all the time under the surface. Even the modern ideal of spontaneity in art does not formally exclude the preparation of the artist himself to receive and transmit in some appreciable form what may still be 'la résultante de contingences'. In Grenier's eyes it is evidently coloured, and made more acceptable, by its affinities with certain Oriental traditions, according to which the artist must prepare himself by a long period of disciplined training for the execution of a work of art. In a footnote in 'Hasard et création' he draws attention to an article by Pierre Boulez[15] which points to the possible solution adopted in Hindu music, where 'la réflexion ferait corps avec la spontanéité au lieu de se détacher d'elle'. This takes him back to the cycle of *karma* which he has already discussed elsewhere. Alternatively, he looks further East still, to China and Japan. 'Les Japonais ne commencent à dessiner une figure que lorsque, l'ayant longuement observée, ils peuvent la tracer d'un trait. De même dans la secte Zen, le satori. Tout est donné d'un coup.'[16] In the chapter entitled 'Peintures récentes de Georges Braque', in *L'Esprit de la peinture contemporaine* (pp. 77–94), he links Braque's painting specifically with 'la sagesse taoïste', in his stress on waiting, self-preparation, and receiving. Chagall, too, is a man of response rather than affirmation. 'L'artiste est d'abord et avant tout celui qui ne dirige pas sa vie, et que la vie dirige. Il cherche les chocs, il les provoque, ces chocs qui peuvent le débarrasser de sa gangue' (*EPC*, 48). Here, however, both the *choc* and the response involve precisely the kind of intervention by the artist that Grenier claims is rejected by his contemporaries. He himself clearly prefers not to discount the contribution of the artist, and prefers to maintain the continuity of preparation and

composition in the finished work of art. In his chapter on Chagall he speaks of the need for a 'rupture d'habitudes' but also for an 'organisation d'une autre habitude' that will offer an authentic framework within which the work of art may be created. Emphasis is laid not on the total freedom which the artist enjoys in the space between these two periods of obedience to a system, but on the limited freedom-for-creation that is obtained by the adoption of the new system.

What then is to be understood by 'creation'? The central section of *L'Art et ses problèmes* (1970) is entitled 'De la création', and in it Grenier takes up and develops the same basic ideas that have been important since the 1930s. As always, Grenier's discussion is less a strict analysis than a continuous, flexible meditation, in which his own preoccupations are all the time informing the theories and attitudes that he examines. It is not going too far to see his treatment of creation as itself essentially creative, just as, in 'Les Îles Fortunées', Rembrandt's portrayal of the creative moment is seen as being itself creative. His discussion of the modern 'volonté de rupture', which he sees as giving rise to a whole civilization, a whole aesthetic of 'rupture', shows up both differences and similarities with his own views. While he is clearly no adherent of the kind of Promethean faith in history as bringing about the realization of Spirit, and so lending itself to a perpetual recommencement and recreation in the interests of an ultimate total liberation, yet the dissatisfaction with traditions that all too easily become fossilized and so cease to be creative is equally clearly something that he feels (*AP*, 197). Like St John of the Cross, the modern artist is 'écartelé entre deux modes d'existence qui semblent n'avoir pas de contact entre eux', with on the one hand the apocalyptic vision, the absorption of the spirit in higher things, and on the other, the 'boue' of human life in its temporal, social reality. The latter is seen as no less necessary than the former, for the artist needs some attachment, something in society 'qui puisse l'accueillir, le réconforter . . . enfin tout simplement le comprendre' (*AP*, 198–200). This, then, is a move away from the earlier emphasis on the need to make a clean break with the past. The discontinuity, if discontinuity there is to be — and creation, on any understanding, must involve some element of discontinuity — is to be not arbitrary and sudden but rather, in the words of 'Hasard et création', 'prévisible et prévue' (*PC*, 199n.). The greatness of the artist is measured not by his boldness in doing something entirely new, but by his success in holding together the two terms of his existence. Grenier makes this point clearly in the case of Rembrandt, in the *Entretiens avec Louis Foucher:* 'Il a réalisé l'idéal de Pascal: "On ne montre pas sa grandeur pour être à une extrémité, mais bien en touchant les deux à la fois, et remplissant tout l'entre-deux"' (*ELF*, 88).

This uneasy tension is by now a familiar theme in Grenier's work, but it should not be allowed to obscure a second major theme which is more directly

relevant to the title of the chapter 'L'Acte créateur'. The creative artist not only seeks to achieve a *vide* in order to create; he not only experiences a conflict between the ideal at which he aims and the far from ideal situation in which he finds himself: but he is faced with the anguish of the actual creative moment itself. This is the moment described by Lequier in 'La Feuille de charmille', and by Valéry in his *Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci* (*AP*, 192–193). 'L'artiste créateur tremble': that single phrase sums up a whole sector of Grenier's sensibility. Grenier is tempted to concentrate all his attention on this infinitesimal point of time, destroying at a stroke his growing conviction that the emphasis should be placed much more on the continuum of preparation and maturation than on that single moment. Despite his willingness, already discussed, to forego perfection in the interest of an art that is truly human, he is now fascinated once again by a similar ideal of perfection. 'L'acte est plus important que la création. La création est une conséquence, une résultante . . . ce qui est beau, sublime, c'est l'acte, c'est l'*ictus*, c'est cette espèce de coup d'apoplexie, comme dit Empédocle, qui fait la génération' (*AP*, 193). There can be little doubt that he finds in the unique act of creation, considered on its own and apart from its consequences, something of that sublime perfection which is capable of revealing the Absolute.

Having allowed himself that nostalgic look, however, Grenier then concentrates in the remaining chapters of 'De la création' on creation as distinct from the creative act. The emphasis on the act is not thereby lessened, indeed its unique status is thrown more into relief. It is one of the central paradoxes of Grenier's work that in any given piece of writing, the crucial point may in fact be absent, or only hinted at, and the bulk of the piece may be given over to a discussion of themes that are really secondary. The themes of travel, of animals, of flowers and trees, and many others, are oblique facets of the principal theme of the Absolute which itself is often not explicitly present. It is impossible to say anything positive about the Absolute, as the Vedântists realized. It is similarly impossible to say anything positive about the actual moment of a creative act. The double sense of *angoisse* and *vertige* may be described, as may the practical experience of the work of creation in preparing and organizing, but the more one tries to pin down the moment at which the artist assumes the full responsibility of a voluntary creative act, the more it appears that other factors are involved, and the less the creative act can be grasped in itself. Indeed, while the existence of the Absolute is not called into question by the difficulty experienced in defining it, the very possibility of such a thing as a fully responsible creative act *is* called into question by the existence of the Absolute. The 'marge de l'humain' is small enough, and it disappears under close scrutiny. Rather than examine the supposed mode of operation of the human creative principle, then, Grenier turns to an extended exploration of the dual nature of creation, with the artist on the one hand, playing a

diminished role, and on the other, some form of revelation, stemming ultimately from the Absolute.

Chapters 6 and 7 for instance share the general title 'Les Modes positifs de la création'. The first begins with the question: 'Comment passer du mode *négatif* de la création à un mode positif?' This is a clear echo of the move from 'le Néant' to 'l'Être' in *Le Choix*, and all through the chapter there are similar echoes of passages from Grenier's other works. In many ways it is the most important chapter in 'De la création', although the others are needed to keep it in perspective. It is subtitled 'L'Instantané', and that provides an allusion to the central theme of the *instant* which runs right through Grenier's writing. The emphasis here, however, is not so much on the instant itself but on the context in which it occurs. In order for there to be an instant of revelation at all, there must be an appropriate preparation for it: 'Il faut une maturation avant qu'il y ait création, il faut une préparation personnelle' (*AP*, 260). Allusions to earlier works are particularly dense here, as Grenier comes to the kernel of his understanding of creation. It is not the agonizing responsibility of the free, creative act, with its corollary, the destruction of possibility: but rather the moment of response to 'l'appel de la création, quelle qu'elle soit'. 'C'est l'appel à quelque chose qui demande à se développer, et si je suis fidèle à ce rai de lumière qui passe par les interstices de la porte je pourrai arriver à faire quelque chose; sinon tout me sera d'avance interdit' (*AP*, 260).[17] The painful state of stagnation and creative impotence may be prolonged, but that is just the time when an 'élaboration intérieure' is taking place, a process of discipline which will ensure that the 'torrent créateur', when it comes, is channelled by a 'digue' (compare the 'filières' of *Les Grèves*) (*AP*, 263; *G*, 14, 302) and not simply wasted in ephemeral facility.

At this point it is fair to ask whether such a hypothesis corresponds to the actual experience of creative artists, and in the first place to the experience of Grenier himself. When he began to write in the 1920s he evidently had a certain facility. In a letter of 1925 Lambert commented on some of Grenier's early attempts at novel-writing: 'Ces limites, ces résistances: bénissez-les. Elles vous sauveront et vous les vaincrez. Bien entendu, je ne parle pas de *victoires* (qu'en feriez-vous), il s'agit de vaincre continuellement' (10 October 1925). At that stage Grenier had evidently not yet begun to impose a regular discipline of writing on himself, but that was to become increasingly important for him. In *Les Grèves* he attributes to 'un de mes amis' what is clearly his own pattern of working: a regular starting-time early in the morning, and a fixed number of pages to be written each day, regardless of the ease or difficulty with which inspiration comes. The important thing is to be in regular training (*G*, 251–52). In the *Entretiens avec Louis Foucher* he combines that emphasis with a complementary reference to the need to spark off an idea that can then be expressed by the technique which has been acquired through long practice. He

draws attention to the value of physical movement 'pour mettre en branle une imagination lente à s'émouvoir', and of music for encouraging the flow of ideas (*ELF*, 97, 104), so that his practice corresponds to what he says of the artist in his essay on Chagall: 'Il cherche les chocs, il les provoque, ces chocs qui peuvent le débarrasser de sa gangue.' Furthermore he points to one advantage of obstacles that may be encountered by chance:

> Pour les essayistes il existe une ressource qui leur donne une impulsion: c'est la commande qui leur est faite ou l'enseignement qu'ils doivent donner. Le sujet qu'ils ont à traiter leur importe peu au fond. Mais ils y trouvent une occasion de parler de tout ce qui les touche. Comme ils ne peuvent avoir d'autres sujets qu'eux-mêmes, tous les prétextes leur sont bons . . . Pour leur égoïsme foncier, c'est une libération. (*ELF*, 98)

Here he is giving an important clue to the understanding and appreciation of his own criticism of art and literature. His lack of interest in his actual subject matter is of course grossly exaggerated, but it is certainly true that he is always writing about himself even when his subject is intrinsically interesting. He himself once admitted: 'En fin de compte j'ai écrit sur moi-même' (*ELF*, 91). In *L'Art et ses problèmes* the more personal section 'De la création' is sandwiched between the more objective studies 'L'Imitation et les principes de l'esthétique classique' and 'Du goût', and it is important to realize that Grenier is speaking from his own experience and not merely as a dilettante theorist.

He also appeals, in this sixth chapter of 'De la création', to the experience of other artists. The obvious objections to the rule of sheer hard work, such as the apparent instances of improvisation and of spontaneous creation, may be seen to represent only the final, visible stage of a similar process. Three painters from different traditions, Kuo Hi, Giotto and Ingres are cited in support of the principle of a long incubation within the artist of his work of art, however quickly it may appear to be executed. The artist, then, does have a responsibility to prepare himself — a very different kind of responsibility from that envisaged earlier, where the creator exercises a radical freedom in a total vacuum. The idea of responsibility that is now being developed, so far from overthrowing value, involves a double recognition of value. There is the value that lies behind the creative *appel*, and also the value of the artist himself, his past, his situation, his path, all of which together constitute the raw material which will, with preparation, form the *cadre* (although that term is not used here) for the 'torrent créateur' when it comes. Grenier sums up his understanding of creation on the human plane by saying: 'je ne crois pas que l'illumination soit incompatible avec la maturation, loin de là' (*AP*, 271).[18] Both aspects are affirmed, and the apparent incompatibility is denied. Any further comment can only be a re-emphasis of some facet of that duality, and not a serious modification of it.

It is perhaps significant that neither Chapter 6 nor Chapter 7 was published separately in the *Nouvelle Revue française* in the wake of the first five chapters. They are more personal, less easily able to be presented as objective and analytical studies of various theories of artistic creation. In fact Chapter 7 is really a continuation of the previous chapter, although its subtitle, 'Le Construit', gives it a misleading appearance of forming a contrast to 'L'Instantané'. It is true that Grenier begins by expounding Poe's theory that creation is entirely deliberate and cerebral, but he soon brings the two aspects together: 'Sous l'instantané il y a une structure, et sous le construit il y a quelque chose d'improvisé.' He goes on to develop an idea that complements what he has said in the previous chapter, namely that, without prejudice to the emphasis placed on the hard work of preparation, 'il y a des moments privilégiés dans la vie de tous les hommes, des lieux privilégiés dans lesquels la réussite est plus aisée' (*AP*, 276). In the terms of the previous chapter, these moments and places would be important elements among those that go to make up the basic framework which it is the artist's duty to prepare and bring to maturity for the reception of the creative revelation. In the present very short chapter, only five pages in length, Grenier refers explicitly only to 'l'enfance et ses paysages', which certainly provided privileged moments and places for the creation of *Les Grèves* just as much as for Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, but which do not exhaust the sources of his own inspiration. His *terre d'élection*, Provence, does not belong to his childhood at all. What he says about childhood, however, is equally applicable to later experiences: the idea of metamorphosis by 'le souvenir et . . . l'oubli' is not limited to the former. Grenier's point is a general one, and he ends his discussion of 'les modes positifs de la création' with a restatement of the importance, in human creation, of continuity and of the limited exploitation of a given body of material, thus underlining the links with his conception of Mediterranean humanism.

From 'De la création', then, there emerge two major views of creation. One is that of the 'acte créateur', the totally free and responsible human act that is a true creation. The other, much more fully developed though never totally ousting the first, is that of man's limited role over against his situation, on the one hand, and the Absolute, on the other. It is a role which consists in preparing and transforming his inheritance in such a way that he will be able to respond to the creative revelation when it comes and so be the agent of a limited but still valuable metamorphosis. The first view was familiar to Grenier not only from his study of Lequier but from his observation of Western thought during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while the second is indebted to traditions as diverse as Hinduism, Western Scholasticism and 'la sagesse populaire de la Méditerranée'. That elements of all these should figure in a treatise on aesthetic theory is typical of Grenier's refusal to keep different

intellectual disciplines separate from each other and from the business of living.

It has already been shown that there is no divorce between the theory of 'De la création' and Grenier's own practice as a creative artist. Similar preoccupations have also been found in his criticism of fellow-artists. Not only in the *Essais sur la peinture contemporaine*,[19] but also in his presentation of the Dalmatian painter Zoran Music (1970),[20] Grenier emphasizes the underlying continuity of the artist's inspiration. The initial spark comes from an emotion (just as for Grenier himself, according to his reply to Louis Foucher), and this gives way to a transposition, what he calls 'la stylisation et sa mise en œuvre' (*M*, 17). It is the artist's past, here described as 'la poussière impalpable des jours', that is the source of the work of art. Once it has been so absorbed by him that it truly exists within him he is free to recompose a world. It is his own world, and he is its creator, but yet 'il se garde de couper le cordon ombilical qui le relie à la Nature' (*M*, 21). There is an attachment which is vital, however great the independence of the artist's imagination may be. Similarly, in his earlier text for *Borès* (1961), Grenier says: 'Lorsque je prononce le mot d'arbitraire je ne dis pas tout à fait le mot juste. Il y a bien un élément de décision qui intervient, mais cette décision doit être prise de telle sorte qu'elle paraisse inéluctable.' Instinct is more than a random selection, and it is the right instinct that needs to be encouraged: 'Ce qu'il faut et qui ne comporte pas de règles, c'est saisir l'occasion qui se présente et transformer le pur hasard en chance' (*B*, 35–36). It is not a question of choosing between a philosophy of extreme determinism and one of equally extreme, radical freedom. In order to find a middle way it is not necessary to become a Hindu and subscribe to all the metaphysical hypotheses on which the concept of *karma* rests, although a familiarity with Hindu metaphysics may help the Westerner to escape from the too-rigid categories of thought in which he has been brought up. There is a 'point de jonction', and it is the point of artistic creation, known to all cultural traditions. This solution is not simply academic for Grenier: it is in the practice of his own vocation as a creative writer that he seeks to resolve the problem of freedom and choice.

CHAPTER 11

POSSIBILITY AND TRAVEL: *LES GRÈVES* AND *VOIR NAPLES*

In his youth, Grenier used to spend hours reading Baedeker's guide-books and planning journeys. Later in his life he had a special affection for the books in which Custine, Dumas, Stendhal, Gobineau, Toulet and others recounted their travels.[1] In several of his own writings he pays close attention to travel in all its aspects: its intention, its practice and its achievement.

Although he recognizes several possible intentions where travel is concerned, Grenier is predominantly concerned with two main areas: the desire to *escape from* something, and the desire to *attain* something. The need to escape is fundamental to human existence. It is expressed in terms of different constraints: at the most basic level, geographical or social environment; then, at a higher level, self, or destiny. In Grenier's writings, the typical geographical and social environment from which escape is desired is that of Brittany, with its drab climate and its provincial mentality.

> Je désirais voir ces pays de soleil qui me changeraient enfin de ce pays de brume dans lequel j'étais condamné jusqu'ici à vivre . . . Quant à moi, j'aspirais surtout à quitter en même temps que ces gens, ce climat dont je supposais qu'il les engendrait. (*G*, 296–97)

The need to escape from a given physical environment is both a pointer towards, and a reflection of, the need to escape from a certain metaphysical condition. At one level of consciousness, this is seen as a need to escape from oneself: 'Pourquoi voyager? On veut se fuir de cette manière' (*VN*, 346). But wherever that motive is mentioned, Grenier is forced to recognize immediately that it will never be satisfied: '— on n'y arrive pas' (*VN*, 346). 'On peut donc voyager non pour se fuir, chose impossible, mais pour se trouver' (*LI*, 81 (84)). The reason is that this motive of 'se fuir' is in fact not a true representation of the desire that is felt. It is an approximation, which in certain circumstances may appear to be accurate. The desire to escape from destiny is similar in this respect: 'nomade, j'espérais faire perdre ma piste à ce qu'on m'avait dit être inflexible et qui finirait par se lasser' (*VN*, 81). What is sought, however, is something more than is expressed by these concepts. Travel must be understood in terms of a *dépaysement*.

Pourquoi ai-je désiré d'aller en Inde? . . . C'est parce que c'est le pays du dépaysement . . . Ailleurs, on se retrouve toujours quelque part, avec des analogies, avec son chez soi. (*MIX*, 167–68)
J'ai aimé dans le voyage le dépaysement, donc de préférence les voyages à l'étranger et dans des pays lointains . . . L'oubli de soi, la curiosité pour ce qui n'est pas soi (et qui même est très éloigné de soi), voilà ce qui m'attirait. (*ELF*, 31–32)

What is left behind in a *dépaysement* is not, strictly speaking, the self, nor is it one's destiny. Rather, it is the *chez-soi*, the self-as-conditioned-by-its-environment, the encumbered self which gets in the way of a fresh and immediate apprehension of reality. Elsewhere Grenier speaks of 'un dépaysement provocateur de vérité' (*MIX*, 66). The truth that is thus provoked may indeed be greater than the self, as in the case of India where 'tu es cela', and the self is not distinct from the totality of 'la vie universelle', but it may also be the truth of the self. This had been an early revelation to Grenier, although the use of the term *dépaysement* was a later development. In 'Interiora rerum' he recalls the effect on his appreciation of classical sculpture of a visit to the British Museum. By 1941, when the text reappeared in an expanded form as 'Penser à la figure humaine' in *Inspirations méditerranéennes*, the concept of *dépaysement* had been introduced, making London only the representative catalyst for a transformation that might be much more general.

Les marbres du Louvre m'étaient trop familiers pour ne pas m'inspirer une simple admiration de commande. Et puis, je les trouvais trop *polis*, dans tous les sens du mot. Il me fallait un dépaysement. Or Londres excelle à dépayser. Le visage dur de cette ville ne permet pas les faux-fuyants. Vite, on s'y trouve isolé et mis en face de soi-même. (*IM*, 115 (119))

The truth that is provoked by *dépaysement* is first of all a consonance with the self, a reconciliation: it is 'se trouver'.

However, before this area is explored, it is necessary to consider another aspect of *dépaysement*. Travel is not undertaken lightly, and it does not offer a reconciliation with the self with no accompanying hazards. The *Petit Robert* defines *dépayser* as 'mettre mal à l'aise par changement de décor, de milieu, d'habitudes'. Even if *dépaysement* does lead to a new revelation of the self and of the world, it is not without a certain sense, sometimes very pronounced, of being 'mal à l'aise'. The passage quoted above which begins 'J'ai aimé dans le voyage le dépaysement . . .' continues:

. . . voilà ce qui m'attirait. J'éprouvais une sorte de joie à me sentir perdu dans un univers où je ne reconnaissais plus rien, où tout ce que j'avais cru assuré était remis en question. Mais ce n'était pas sans souffrance . . . (*ELF*, 32)

The imagery here is comparable with that of 'L'Attrait du vide' and of *Les Grèves* and *Voir Naples*.[2] There is a tension between the desire to avoid definition and limitation, to preserve possibility and to shun choice, on the one

hand, and the need for certainty and a sense of belonging on the other. In the early essay 'Childe Harold' (written in 1930 and published in *Le Mail*, 17 (Winter 1931)) Grenier wrote:

> Me voici depuis deux mois dans un pays qui me plaît et où j'ai choisi de vivre. Les quinze premiers jours, j'ai senti en moi un renouvellement . . . Qu'importent les occupations, les décors! Ils n'ont de valeur que parce qu'on en peut changer et qu'en en changeant on se renouvelle . . . Voici donc deux mois que je vis en pays étranger, et déjà la différence douloureuse mais féconde qui existait entre le monde et moi s'est atténuée — déjà elle a disparu.

'Douloureuse mais féconde': that phrase points to the creative role of a deliberate *dépaysement*, a cutting of the links that bind one to a too-familiar environment. *Dépaysement* means solitude and the rejection of certainties. It is a figure of death itself: 'Peut-être la vie du voyageur n'est-elle si féconde en émotions que parce que les départs dont elle se compose sont une répétition de la mort (Custine)' (*NL*, art. 'Départ'). The concept accentuates the metaphysical reference of travel, and it is no coincidence that the first paragraph of *Le Choix* closes with the word *dépayser*:

> *Du sentiment philosophique: celui d'écart. Nous ne sommes pas au monde*, telle est la première pensée qui donne le branle à la philosophie . . . C'est . . . un sentiment d'étrangeté. Poussé à bout ce sentiment devient même parfois non seulement le ressort mais le but de la philosophie: *dépayser*. (*C*, 3 (7))

It is true that the metaphysical reference of *le voyage* is not always expressed, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it should always be recognized in Grenier's writings. He quotes with approval a comment by Camus: 'Ce que nous apporte le voyage c'est le sens de notre éternité' (*ELF*, 33).[3] *Eternité* may, of course, have different meanings, and certainly Grenier sometimes thinks in non-transcendent terms, of an eternity co-extensive with the natural world. However, there are indications that he is also looking for something beyond that, some ultimate, transcendent reality, which he knows to be beyond his reach, but the quest for which he cannot abandon. Robert Campbell has pointed out the importance of this aspect.

> A quoi bon voyager? Les montagnes succèdent aux montagnes, les plaines aux plaines et les déserts aux déserts. Je n'en aurai jamais fini et ne trouverai jamais ma Dulcinée. (*APH*, 179; *LI* (3), 155)
>
> Posséder ce qui par definition ne peut l'être — voilà un des buts illusoires du voyage. On veut avoir ce qui vous coule entre les doigts. (*MIX*, 156)
>
> FIU. Mot usité à Tahiti: désir irrésistible d'aller ailleurs, n'importe où.
>
> C'est le 'anywhere out of the world'.
>
> Il n'y a donc pas de ports, il n'y a que des escales. (*NL*, art. 'Fiu')

It is this metaphysical ambiguity of the unfulfilled but inescapable quest that underlies the ambiguous response and sense of anguish provoked by actual, concrete journeys.

Anguish is born of the confrontation between an ideal and an obstacle to the attainment of that ideal, between the perfection that is glimpsed and the reality that falls so far short of that perfection.

> La perfection, je le sais, n'est pas de ce monde, mais dès qu'on entre dans ce monde, dès qu'on accepte d'y faire figure, on est tenté . . . puisque tu vis, pourquoi ne pas vivre? pourquoi ne pas obtenir le meilleur? Alors ce sont les courses, les voyages . . .
>
> Il n'est pas étrange que l'attrait du vide mène à une course, et que l'on saute pour ainsi dire à cloche-pied d'une chose à une autre. La peur et l'attrait se mêlent — on avance et on fuit à la fois; rester sur place est impossible. (*LI* (2), 15 (28–29))

Perfection is half perceived as a *vide* rather than as *plénitude*, as non-being rather than as being, and also as belonging to the domain of the unknown rather than the known. Its attraction is irresistible, because contingent existence naturally seeks an absolute point of reference, but it also inspires fear: fear of disappointment, fear of the practical inconveniences and obstacles encountered on any kind of journey. There is a wide gulf between the theoretical aim of a journey, the perfection that is glimpsed, on the one hand, and the petty practical details of the actual journey itself on the other (*G*, 211, 274). In this sense any project which aims at an ideal may be described as a journey (*VN*, 146). It is not the practical obstacles, however, that are the most effective counter to the attraction of *le voyage*. Behind all these reasons Grenier discerns an almost morbid fear of exposing the self to the unknown, in the form of new contacts, a new environment, and the accompanying possibilities of rejection and isolation (*G*, 298–99, 321 ff., 378; *ELF*, 32). From the point of view of human contact, travel may at first sight seem to be a way of escape, but it is bound to bring more problems of the same nature; and in addition there is the frightening possibility of achieving too great a measure of isolation. Hence the ambiguity presented by the islands that the traveller discovers in the course of his voyage. An island may offer apparent freedom, with endless possibilities of enjoying the expansiveness of a life lived in close contact with nature. But, as Grenier points out in a footnote to 'L'Île de Pâques', 'on y est "isolé" (n'est-ce pas l'étymologie?). Une île ou un homme *seul*. Des îles ou des hommes *seuls*' (*LI*, 112, n. (108, n.): cf. *MIX*, 50, 125). In 'Les Îles Kerguélen' he warns that in that remote, rocky archipelago, 'L'intérieur du pays est absolument désert et la vie y fait totalement défaut' (*LI*, 75 (79)). Travel may offer great rewards to those who are adventurous, but it also holds out the prospect of barrenness. It is no surprise, therefore, that the attraction of *le voyage* does not always lead to an actual *déplacement*.

Yet despite the anguish involved, and the sense that the metaphysical quest underlying all journeys is condemned to remain unsatisfied, there remains an important strand of Grenier's thought which recognizes that travel is both possible and capable of bringing a certain experience of fulfilment. This fulfilment is described as 'se trouver', 'se reconnaître', as a 'révélation', as an 'accord avec (soi-)même'.[4] When it is achieved, the journey proper is ended, for just as each particular journey is an image of the metaphysical journey of the contingent individual, so each particular fulfilment is an image of the ultimate reconciliation with the absolute ground of all contingent existence.

Le voyage a pour origine et pour fin une annulation. Son accomplissement a pour conséquence sa mort: comme le feu en consumant le bois finit par s'éteindre lui-même, comme le raisonnement de caractère discursif n'a plus de raison d'être lorsque apparaît une intuition. (*VQ*, 13)

The mention of 'une intuition' clearly links this experience of fulfilment with that of the *instant(s)* or *moment(s)* which Grenier describes elsewhere. The closing paragraphs of 'Les Îles Fortunées' provide a commentary on the relationship between the *instants*, *le voyage*, and the final goal.

Après ces moments que j'ai dits, peut-on vivre? On se survit, c'est tout, en attendant un nouveau moment imprévisible. Mais qu'importe, puisqu'il m'est arrivé de *gagner*? Sentez-vous bien la force de ce mot? de zéro vous passez à l'infini. J'ai gagné. Que me parlez-vous d'avenir? Mais après, direz-vous, l'on retombe au néant. — Sans doute, mais il reste ce fil ténu de lumière qui vous poursuit jusque dans votre sommeil et qui vous avertit qu'autrefois . . . Et pourquoi dans un millième de seconde ne serai-je pas précipité de nouveau au fond de cet être qui m'est plus intérieur que moi-même?

Fleurs qui flottez sur la mer et qu'on aperçoit au moment où on y pense le moins, algues, cadavres, mouettes endormies, vous que l'on fend de l'étrave, ah mes îles fortunées! Surprises du matin, espérances du soir — vous reverrai-je encore quelques fois? Vous seules qui me délivrez de moi et en qui je puisse me reconnaître. Miroirs sans tain, cieux sans lumière, amours sans objet . . . (*LI*, 92–93 (92–93))

Earlier in the same essay Grenier has spelled out the tragic intensity of the *instants*:

Le soleil fait le vide et l'être se trouve face à face avec lui-même — sans aucun point d'appui . . . Il me semble que la suprême félicité pour certaines âmes (que je ne puis qu'admirer) ne se sépare pas du tragique: elle en est le sommet. (*LI*, 85–87 (87–88))

There is a profound *dépaysement* in which the individual is both delivered from himself and reconciled with himself, but is also suspended over the *vide* against which his contingent existence stands out. The experience is literally one of ecstasy, supremely blissful and supremely painful at the same time. This

ambiguity is reflected in the nature of *le voyage*, in which 'la peur et l'attrait se mêlent' (*LI* (2), 15 (29)).

Understood in this light, travel is closely connected with the important questions associated with freedom and possibility. Travel speaks of escape, of an attempt at liberation. Yet it also represents the limitation of freedom and not a total liberation, from the moment that the ideal aim begins to be translated into practical reality. The enjoyment of freedom is thus hindered by the very vehicle of freedom. To remain at home is to refuse to take hold of freedom, yet to take hold of it is to destroy it. That is the anguished situation of the contingent being who needs to belong but who shuns definition. Grenier is unwilling to accept the choice as it is presented here. He attempts to retain as much of the fullness of possibility as he can, even after the initial decision to launch out on a journey. Having taken hold of freedom, he will not accept its destruction. Hence the prevalence of the image of drifting, particularly in the novels. Drifting is a means of experiencing a *dépaysement* which may be 'provocateur de vérité', without the destruction of possibility involved in steering a set course or indeed defining the ultimate destination. However, there are two major drawbacks to such an attitude, apart from the *angoisse* that is its inevitable accompaniment. One is that all such experiences, such revelations of 'vérité' for which one remains *disponible*, are fleeting. The second drawback is that possibility, if preserved too long, hardens insensibly into *de facto* choice, in such a way as to limit the continued enjoyment of possibility to a greater degree than if a conscious, deliberate choice had been made earlier. One is the theme of many of the lyrical essays, the other is that of *Voir Naples*.

Possibility is not only a theme, it is also a mode of thinking and of writing. Many of Grenier's writings may be interpreted as voyages, meandering around the subject in the hope of provoking a glimpse of truth. His two novels lend themselves particularly well to such an interpretation.

Grenier admitted freely that both in reading and in writing novels he was interested only in himself. He was not inventive or a good story-teller, like Guilloux. Rather, in his writings as in his childhood reading, 'Les personnages romanesques étaient la projection de mes ambitions et de mes rêves, pas autre chose' (*VN*, 191). What, then, is the particular value of the novel form for Grenier? Does it fulfil a different function from his lyrical essays? Several answers might be given. In the first place, he was trying his hand at novels, or at least at *récits*, long before he discovered the lyrical essay, so that the two published novels are the fruit of a long development.[5] Secondly, he is free to speak from the authenticity of his own experience which provides him with a *cadre* while not limiting him to a rigorous historical exactitude. He has the freedom to trace developments and fluctuations in his thoughts and attitudes over a period of time, which is difficult in the limited context of an essay, and yet he can still follow the direction he chooses, altering the facts if need be.

Thirdly, and most important, he is able to appear in public, as it were, while at the same time preserving his secrecy. He shows aspects, glimpses, but never fully reveals the person behind the masks. He preserves the possibility of his existence by a partial exposure which is as effective as camouflage. In 'Les Îles Kerguélen' Grenier quotes the claim made by Descartes about his life in Amsterdam: 'Parmi la foule d'un grand peuple . . . j'ai pu vivre aussi solitaire et retiré que dans les déserts les plus écartés' (*LI*, 59 (58)). In his novels, Grenier lives as public and at the same time as private a life as Descartes.

In *Les Grèves* there is a certain chronological order to the narration, but no real development, no clear direction, no plot. It is impressions and meditations that constitute the bulk of the novel. There are frequent digressions, and the narrator will return to the same themes of self-knowledge, curiosity, truth, diversity, etc., time and again, starting perhaps from a different experience on each occasion. This is reminiscent of the pattern of Lequier's thought, in that what is said is not necessarily the most important thing: rather, it is the way the meditation is pursued that is important and revealing. In *Voir Naples* there is more of a plot, but even so the self-questionings and meditations that fill the second half of the novel share the qualities of *Les Grèves*. In both books, the narration is an important means of undermining the stability of existence and of revealing a consciousness that is aware of possibility.

Paradoxically, the world in which the narrator of *Les Grèves* moves is in one sense stable and unchanging. It is the world of 'la petite ville' and 'l'école' (the titles of Chapters 2 and 4), in which society conforms to a fixed pattern. In the first instance it is the natural environment that undermines the apparent stability of human society, by undermining that of the human condition itself. This theme is present in *Les Grèves* from the outset. It is first introduced in terms of the fundamental contradiction between nature and man. On the one hand nature is simply too powerful for mere humans to withstand: the tide may be out at a given moment, so that the water is several kilometres from the shore, making it possible to walk right across the bay of Saint-Brieuc, but soon the sea will sweep in irresistibly, making that trip once again impossible. On the other hand, man does not *belong* in nature. The empty bay is described as 'cet espace désert où je me sentais perdu' (*G*, 15), and on the next page sea and sky are likened to two mirrors reflecting one another, 'entre lesquels l'homme se sent heureusement superflu, éprouve son bonheur dans l'inutilité (*G*, 16). These two aspects of man's relationship to nature, then, evoke a response which is initially one of *effroi* but then gives way to a kind of pleasure at being weaker and, indeed, useless. Man is *de trop*, but his contingency is expressed in contemplation rather than in existential revolt or action. Indeed, Grenier is tempted to deny his humanity rather than to accept the full implications of his contingent existence. He feels himself involved in the continuous process of dissolution that is taking place in the landscape: 'Voilà ce que j'ai aimé et qui,

aggravant mes incertitudes, m'a dégôuté du reste: ce temps étale, cette musique sans instrument, cette harmonie avec rien' (*G*, 24).

The problems of human existence and artistic creation are regularly linked in this novel by the implied question: is it possible to do justice to the true nature of contingent existence? The fragility and destruction of possibility is often evoked in Grenier's writings by the image of a wild flower which fades and withers almost as soon as it is picked.[6] Is it then better never to make a start, never to break into the rhythm of existence, but rather to attempt to conform to 'la vie universelle'? That is a path which holds many attractions for Grenier, and he returns to it often. The exercise of freedom involves cutting across the self-sufficient continuity of the world, introducing a discontinuity which cannot but be felt as a wound. But that is not the only consideration. It is the calling of a contingent individual to be creative. 'L'appel de ce qui aspire à l'être est plus fort que l'invitation de ce qui est. L'on ne peut se dérober à la création.' It is this *appel* which gives the narrator of *Les Grèves* the strength to move away from 'un sentiment équitable de l'idée d'indifférence', from 'ce mortel esprit de neutralité qui est la négation de tout', which, however, retains a powerful attraction for him. Breaking out of the vicious circle of possibility and choice in a manner that is reminiscent of the *démarche* of Lequier plagued by the spectre of Necessity, Grenier, through his narrator, treats choice as a fact rather than as a problem, and proceeds from there: 'J'imposerai le choix que j'ai fait à l'intérieur du grand magma, je le rendrai indiscutable parce qu'il sera pour moi indiscuté' (*G*, 249). He places himself immediately 'au delà du choix': 'A partir de là l'écheveau peut se dérouler' (*G*, 251). But by deliberately underplaying the idea of a first beginning, Grenier is able to bring his discussion of literary creation round in a circle until he returns to a position according to which possibility is not, after all, sacrificed.[7]

There can be no fixed plan, for the task of the artist is seen as being to represent faithfully, and not to impose a pattern which would fail to respect 'la vie de mes personnages et celle de mes problèmes'. This at once raises the question of elimination necessary to the work of composition: 'Quel membre couper, lorsqu'on ne connaît pas l'ensemble de l'animal? Est-ce que ce ne sera pas un membre nécessaire à la création d'un être harmonieux?' (*G*, 251). From there it is a short step to the adoption of a deliberate pattern of work. The voluntary acceptance of constraint leads paradoxically to a greater freedom, for possibility is now no longer limited by the initiative of the artist. The narrator's attitude to creation is summed up in these terms:

> Je ne puis me mettre à accomplir une action quelconque, il me faut quelque chose qui m'y pousse, quelqu'un qui m'y précipite. Alors je fais par contrainte ce que j'aurais dû faire volontiers. Je n'aurais jamais, de sang froid, pu le faire. (*G*, 257)[8]

Indeed, by the end of the short section in which these ideas are developed, possibility is fully reinstated, *within* the work whose inception involved its

surrender. The pattern of constraints that is adopted is declared to be, ideally, the pattern of nature itself, and creation is described in terms of a *promenade*, a *flânerie*. 'Pour ma part, j'aimerais prendre avec un compagnon anonyme le chemin des écoliers, me laisser aller à ce penchant de la flânerie qui me conduit d'un endroit à un autre sans aucun guide' (*G*, 258). That is a helpful image of *Les Grèves* and indeed of many of Grenier's other works. Even when he pursues a train of thought to a logical conclusion, he does not allow himself to be bound by that conclusion, but returns to take up the problem again at an earlier stage, taking an alternative turning, and thus leaving the possibilities open.

In the next chapter the same issue is revived, but with a stronger emphasis on the place of freedom. The concept of the *cadre* reappears. In the context of the preoccupations of two young would-be writers, 'Michel' and the narrator, in whom it is not difficult to see Guilloux and Grenier, the difference is pointed out between the case of the 'vrais créateurs', whose work is 'le fruit d'une nécessité intérieure', and 'les autres'.

> Les autres, eh bien, mon Dieu, les autres sont libres, tristement et désespérément libres. Ils peuvent faire n'importe quoi, c'est qu'ils n'ont rien de particulier à dire. Suis-je de cette catégorie? Il me semble. (*G*, 300–01)

Complete freedom, undirected possibility, is seen as undesirable. Freedom must be freedom-*for*-something, and more precisely freedom-*to-receive*-something. The narrator describes himself as waiting for a *poussée* or an *appel* from outside. The analysis of the previous chapter is taken one stage further back, for there the *appel* was assumed to have come. Now even the structure or framework within which possibility can be creative is admitted to be lacking. All hope is not lost, however:

> Et pourtant dans ce magma, comme dans la grève, il y a des filières — des lits d'eau stagnante dans lesquels le flot, lorsqu'il montera, n'aura qu'à s'engouffrer.
> L'une de ces filières, c'est la nostalgie. (*G*, 302)

Nostalgia points either towards a homeland, understood here in Plotinian terms as the Absolute, or towards one's past. In an earlier chapter mention has been made of 'le passé qui vit en nous', our own personal past which is ours to manipulate and enjoy, and which is the source of our possibilities in the present. It provides, in fact, the necessary framework within which possibility can cease to be sterile and can become creative.

Does this past not, however, lead to oppression rather than freedom? Things, relationships, memories, all accumulate around us and threaten to stifle us. Beyond a certain point it becomes necessary to eliminate. The desire for purity supports this. References to the waste-paper basket, the dustbin and the fire suggest that it will be practical considerations that eventually dictate the initiative to be taken: 'Par cette méthode radicale on préserve l'avenir des

atteintes mortelles du passé' (*G*, 392–95). The theory is admirable: but it is precisely on the practical considerations that it breaks down. The two anecdotes with which the chapter ends illustrate the impossibility of choosing which comes from 'une trop grande capacité de choisir'. There is a genuine desire to preserve possibility for its own sake, and a genuine desire not to betray an absolute standard of value by opting for something that has only relative value, but there is also an acknowledged fear of assuming responsibility for choices that are irreparable and full of consequence. This is attributed to a natural weakness, which is also, in the final chapter, said to explain the quest for privileged moments, 'cette porte de sortie que chacun cherche suivant ses moyens'. Needless to say, the last few pages propound a different view of these *instants*, and the confessional tone of certain passages should not lead us to adopt the explanation of weakness and fear of responsibility as the only or even the most important factor. It is too easy an explanation, for one thing, and over-simplification may be a way of preserving a secret of much greater value. *Faiblesse* might appear to be used as a dismissive value-judgement, and yet it simply begs the question, for Grenier's world is not a world of stable values. Weakness says little more than contingency. If the 'vrai créateur' is one whose work is 'le fruit d'une nécessité intérieure', then is he expressing his contingency as fully as the supposedly 'weaker' brethren who are 'tristement et désespérément libres'? The significance of *Les Grèves* is in part that it presents a picture of the undefined character of contingent human existence, before definitions are imposed by the need to make decisions and choices. The title and setting of the novel correspond to this intention:

> Je me vois tel que ces grèves bretonnes de contour indéterminé où l'on ne sait pas si l'on a affaire à du sable, du rocher, de l'eau, de la vase, de la terre ferme, car tous les éléments y sont mêlés et instables. (*G*, 302)[9]

The sea itself is an image of infinite possibility: as early as 1924 Grenier had written of Lequier: 'le voilà qui se hâte à travers ce milieu mouvant, image de tous les possibles, vers la mort.'[10] However, the image of the sea is itself rich in possibilities, and its use in *Voir Naples* provides an indication of how Grenier develops the meditation on possibility that has been started, with a deliberate lack of definition or conclusive analysis, in *Les Grèves*.[11]

Despite the interval of sixteen years that elapsed between the publication of *Les Grèves* and that of *Voir Naples*, Grenier's two novels belong to the same period. *Voir Naples* was in fact begun in 1956, the year in which *Les Grèves* was completed. The same sentiments are portrayed, but in a new and wider field. This corresponds not only to a new geographical and social environment, but to a different stage of life. The narrator of *Les Grèves* is shown as a child and as an adolescent, still at school. The first narrator of *Voir Naples* is a young teacher, and Franz is of similar age. The immediate problems they face are therefore

different, although the underlying preoccupations are the same: questions of freedom, possibility and choice.

The concept of sea embraces both the grey, mysterious ocean of Armor and the bright, sharply-defined Mediterranean. The first offers the spectacle of instability, of possibility and constant change, of lack of differentiation. It is an invitation to dream, to contemplate the endless possibilities of existence, to be absorbed into the ebb and flow of the universe. On the other hand, it may also represent sterility, or again, the overwhelming completeness and self-sufficiency of a world which leaves no place for the human. The Mediterranean, similarly, may represent different ideas: it may be the cradle of a humanism which leaves man free to create his own cultural pattern and values, or it may stifle any creative possibility by its sheer inescapable presence. *Voir Naples* has the advantage of offering a wide range of sea-images, for the narrators are able to draw on their experience of both northern and southern coasts. It is not only the sea itself that is important as an image, but the associated concepts of navigation, shipwreck, etc., which speak of man's relationship to the sea.

Voir Naples is divided into four parts. In Part One (pp. 11–130), in which the scene is set and the characters introduced, the group of images associated with the sea is not yet prominent. The first signs of a break-through come in Part Two. The narrator is forced to start a new life after the crumbling of his friendship with Raffaël. Now, he says, 'j'allais me retrouver seul et démuni, comme la barque que le reflux a laissée sur la grève'. He will be free from ties, free to express his own individuality:

> Laissons dériver les hommes là où les entraîne leur destin; qu'ils suivent le courant qui les emporte vers le large ou celui qui les fait échouer sur la côte. Moi-même j'irai là où je devrai aller, sans avoir besoin de lier mon sort à celui de quiconque. (*VN*, 134–35)

At the same time, however, he recognizes that that is an ideal which hardly corresponds to reality. There will also be a continuing experience of *dénuement*, 'ce tourment' which results from a double emotion of *attirance* and *appréhension* in response to the presence of realizable possibilities. The particular possibility in view here is that of friendship, and it is precisely in the area of human relationships of friendship and love that *Voir Naples* goes further than *Les Grèves*. The narrator's decision 'd'avoir des relations aussi superficielles que possible, et qui par suite ne pourraient m'attirer de déconvenue' (*VN*, 137) is seen as a gesture of defiance after the failure of one particular friendship, rather than as an ideal. For some time he succeeds in his intention. Complete lack of involvement, however, is neither feasible nor entirely desirable. A drifting craft may have its attractions, but the navigator on the seas of life must be prepared to take action to keep his craft on an even keel and indeed to steer a course, for he is not alone on the water.

That is not to say that Franz, the young Vaudois encountered on a trip to Sicily, does not attempt to stave off the problem which faces him. Having launched out into the unknown and allowed himself to drift, he finds himself confronted by a hazard that he had not clearly foreseen.

Je n'étais pas résolu à me marier, je me trouvais porté par le courant qui m'entraînait, à envisager la possibilité d'un mariage. Je montrerais dans cette circonstance la même irrésolution que pour le choix d'une carrière précédemment. Seules avaient changé mes conditions d'existence, car j'étais arrivé à une autre étape de mon voyage. J'avais à doubler un nouveau cap sans pouvoir m'aider de la clarté du jour. (*VN*, 222)

Like the narrator of the first half of the novel, he is no longer satisfied by 'l'attrait du jour'. From his drifting craft he looks for some landmark, while recognizing that 'ce point fixe ne l'est qu'en apparence, que lui aussi s'en va au fil du courant; mais c'est d'un autre courant, plus lent et qui permet de respirer, de voir plus loin, d'échapper au tourbillon'. If there were a clearly-marked channel he would follow it, but there is none.

En réalité, j'aurais voulu ne coopérer qu'à une entreprise qui permît de dominer la vie, qui rendît claire et limpide l'étendue que j'avais à sillonner, qui me traçât une route, comme le sémaphore le fait aux navires. Cette obscurité inséparable du proche avenir, et encore plus du lointain, m'était insupportable . . . De la lumière! Il me fallait choisir en ignorance de cause, et je ne m'y résignais pas. (*VN*, 224)

The character of Franz, then, is very similar to that of the original narrator, and indeed to that of the narrator of *Les Grèves*. He recoils from the prospect of making choices, but he is not satisfied by an uncommitted existence in which all the possibilities are kept open, even though that holds a strong attraction for him. Indeed there comes a point after which it is no longer possible simply to go on drifting along, hoping that circumstances will solve every problem. The 'ressources inépuisables' of possibility dry up. Even if Franz escapes from the immediacy of the situation by returning to Switzerland, he has been changed by his experiences, and he cannot contemplate a return to his earlier life of drifting. His time in the Mediterranean has given him the desire for a 'point fixe', and he goes instead to Sicily. There the possibility of love recedes from him, and indeed he finds himself drawn away from the hazards and imperfections of human relationships to a certain ideal of perfection which he encounters in classical statues. They represent for him the right combination of eternity and fragility, the balance between the contingent and the absolute that is almost impossible to achieve. They provide a justification after the event, celebrating what has been and not compromised by what might have been, what should have been. Franz, as a contingent human being, finds himself always placed before the event, and his nature does not dictate to him the course he should take. There is no course that is so obviously right that it

silences the other possibilities. 'Si encore je savais où était ma nature. / C'est bien simple, pourtant, me direz-vous. Laissez-vous aller!' But he is either too young or too old for that:

Je ne puis empêcher toutes mes facultés de s'éveiller, d'agir, de se révolter. Il me faudrait réaliser au-dedans de moi un assouplissement qui me permettrait, en faisant taire mes passions, d'obéir à ce qui me pousse — *comme du dehors*. J'attendrais une poussée du vent sur la voile qui inclinerait la barque; alors au lieu de naviguer contre le vent, je me contenterais de seconder son action. (*VN*, 286)

That is the position at the end of Part Three. Franz's situation becomes less and less tolerable: a decision is urgently needed, and although he cannot bring himself to make it, his indecision increasingly takes on the nature of a decision by default.

The intensification of his anguish is expressed at the beginning of Part Four in the form of a recurrent dream. In it, the familiar image of a boat drifting on the water is strikingly modified. 'Je me promenais en barque, des mains sortaient de l'eau et saisissaient le bord de la barque. Je les frappais avec la rame; elles disparaissaient. / Je me réveillais avec une conscience de criminel' (*VN*, 303). That is to say, there comes a point where it is necessary, if the boat is to continue to drift, to take positive action to counteract those forces which would hold it or guide it. Indecision, the desire to remain free from the limitations of a definite choice, has in fact led to a decision, for one possibility has now been allowed to lapse.[12]

Franz's attitude now changes. If a decision can no longer be postponed, for it has to all intents and purposes already been made, he wants to get through the unsettled period as soon as possible and out into peaceful waters again.

Je me demandais s'il ne suffisait pas, pour être à l'abri des orages qui secouent la malheureuse humanité, de sortir d'une zone déterminée comme le navire qui sort de l'aire des moussons dans l'océan Indien et qui tout de suite retrouve le calme. Et, si le navigateur découvrait une route qui lui permît d'éviter cette aire, il perdrait jusqu'au souvenir de celle-ci et ses successeurs n'en auraient même pas l'idée s'ils avaient la sagesse de l'incuriosité.

He finds himself envisaging a much more radical solution to the problem of suffering through relationships and decisions than that of drifting with the tide of society and circumstances:

J'avais bien de la chance dans mon cas . . . Et si j'avais été inaccessible au sentiment qui pousse les êtres les uns vers les autres j'aurais échappé à cette cascade de malheurs qui étaient tombés sur moi depuis un an. Là, il m'aurait fallu sortir, non plus d'une zone géographique mais de celle qu'occupait l'espèce humaine. (*VN*, 326)

The freedom that both Franz and Antoniella, in their different ways, try to preserve, is under constant threat. The radical solution envisaged here is to

escape from that threat completely by moving into a zone beyond that of humanity. It is the zone of the Taoist sages . . . It is not, however, a solution that is followed up in Grenier's novels, although he investigates it at length elsewhere. The characters in his novels are not independent of their Western heritage: they are Europeans, not Indians or Chinese, and they do not find a means of avoiding choice altogether. *Les Grèves* is about the discovery and exploration of possibility, *Voir Naples* about its destruction, but both are deliberately limited in scope. At the same time, they both open up perspectives on to the non-human 'zone'. It is significant in this respect that the rich imagery of the sea and navigation in *Voir Naples* becomes redundant towards the end of the novel. The story of Franz and Antoniella peters out. The storm is over, the sea becomes calm once more.

Right at the end, however, just as in *Les Grèves*, a more unsettled note is reintroduced. The boat on which Franz is a passenger is sailing out from under the protection of the hill of Posilipo (Pausilippe): he is leaving the zone of 'cessation de la peine'[13] and heading once more for the hazards of the open sea (see also *G*, 443), with which he will cope no better than before.

This last observation helps to link *Voir Naples* and *Les Grèves*. *Les Grèves* describes, for the most part, an earlier state of consciousness than that of the narrator of *Voir Naples*, or, *a fortiori*, than that of Franz. The narrator of *Voir Naples* claims to have come to Naples at the end of his travels. The narrator of *Les Grèves* has hardly begun to travel. But both, or rather all three, are torn between the desire to launch out and the desire to remain in a peaceful haven, or the desire to drift and the desire to have firm bearings. In *Voir Naples* there is no word of an *appel*, or of the possibility of some reconciliation with oneself or with the universe in terms of *instants*, such as is proffered in *Les Grèves*. Possibility has turned sour, unredeemed by the creativity that is glimpsed in *Les Grèves*. In that novel the imagery of the sea is always present but never dominant, for the recurrent theme of the *cadre* necessary for a true expression of contingent existence helps to provide the balance. In *Voir Naples* that theme is almost entirely absent, and the image of a boat drifting with the current dominates the story of a failure to achieve that true expression of contingent existence. The question of responsibility, of little importance for the adolescents of *Les Grèves*, of course plays a greater part in *Voir Naples*, where the decision with which Franz is faced is much weightier than anything in the other novel. The greater realism contributes to the greater sense of *désabusement*. The tone of the comment in the final paragraph on the firework display above the city of Naples is harder than that of other meditations on the withering of flowers found in Grenier's writings:

> Ces fleurs éphémères qui allaient mourir pour toujours, je n'en avais jamais senti autant la beauté, je n'avais jamais éprouvé à ce point la cruauté de celui qui ne les avait portées à l'existence que pour les y soustraire. (*VN*, 351)

The failure portrayed in *Voir Naples*, where *faiblesse* is mercilessly exposed, although deliberately not judged,[14] is a powerful incentive to seek a solution elsewhere, in terms either of a radical indifference or of a positive commitment. In both of them Grenier finds a greater faithfulness to the reality of contingent existence, for both attitudes ultimately take root in the Absolute, the only true 'point fixe'.

CONCLUSION

Grenier's thought cannot be separated from his life and his literary output. All are expressions of what may be described as a lived meditation in constant movement. Various levels of this meditation may be identified. At the deepest level lies the Absolute: intellectually necessary, never clearly perceived, far less apprehended, but influencing every other level by the attraction of its absence. To a second level, nearer the surface, may be assigned the intuitions and apprehensions that constitute Grenier's metaphysics, including the intuition of the contingency of human existence and the sense of overwhelming responsibility in the face of the possibility of conscious choice and creative action. To a third level belong those ready-made systems or traditions which offer a *cadre* for his vulnerable, half-formed thought. Such are the traditions of Mediterranean humanism, on the one hand, and Oriental detachment, on the other, each representing a different form of *sagesse*. Such, too, are the various 'orthodoxies' which seemed to Grenier to stifle the freedom of the human spirit, usurping the place of the Absolute; and the Western heritage of literary and philosophical themes, on which Grenier was constantly attempting to shed new light from unfamiliar sources. The material world, providing a not unimportant stimulus to his meditation, constitutes a fourth level. No level is autonomous, and all Grenier's writings reflect something of the fruitful tension that must exist between them, a tension that Paulhan was ready to call a dialectic.[1]

Tension is indeed the main characteristic of Grenier's work up to about 1950. Tension between the Brittany of his upbringing and the Mediterranean where he had chosen to live; between the Graeco-Latin heritage and that of India which appealed so strongly to his metaphysical sense; between the humanity of the Christian Mediator and the inhumanity of the distant, paralysing Absolute; between commitment and detachment; between belonging to society and remaining free to criticize and guide it; between academic scholarship and self-expression. His background, his chosen environment, his literary talent and his metaphysical awareness made these tensions all but inevitable: but at the same time they were freely chosen. His friends perceived the contradictions and tried to persuade him to open up and allow his natural talents to flow freely: 'Je te reproche de fermer trop souvent les portes de ton coeur et celles de ton riche esprit dont tu tires les rideaux comme avec coquetterie' (Max Jacob); 'renoncer à une prudence qui *vous lie*' (Lambert).[2] But his nature was precisely

not to give himself, not to commit himself irrevocably. In 1926 he wrote to Lambert that he had decided to live a life of 'perpétuel changement'. The tensions were not to be resolved, but that did not mean that they were not to be explored.

Exploration, however, carried with it the proviso that there should be no total commitment, and certainly no attempt to bring others to a commitment. Grenier described one of the reasons for travelling as a desire to 'se trouver', but it is significant that he defined this in terms of 'se reconnaître', something that may be only momentary. In the same way, the experiences of deliverance that he recognized were short-lived and could provide no true solution to the problem of existence. His exploration of Indian metaphysics did not lead him to try to escape permanently from the universal *samsâra*, nor did his study of Lequier lead him to cast himself upon God in a supreme act of freedom. He investigated the Marxist system, and even recommended that his pupil Camus should join the Communist Party, but he himself made a point of emphasizing the drawbacks of such an orthodoxy and indeed upheld the independence of the intellectual and the artist despite their participation in society.

Grenier's most positive discovery in this period was the real value of what he called the human. It is ironical that this should have come at the end of his time in those Mediterranean lands where the human is given such importance. However, it was linked with the end of a period of academic and often 'non-human' study, and also the fact of his exile from the Mediterranean brought home to him, as it did to Camus, the reality of the values that he had found there.

One particular feature of Grenier's thought in this period was its individuality. He was not completely isolated from the main streams of contemporary thinking, and indeed as a teacher of philosophy he had to keep abreast of new developments, but he showed a remarkable eclecticism. In this Bergsonian era he rarely mentioned Bergson, and when he did he pointed out how Lequier had anticipated him. He only had the slightest contact with Lavelle and Le Senne despite many similarities with them in their approach to *l'esprit*, value and the Absolute. Gabriel Marcel he did not meet until 1941. As for Mounier and Personalism, although Grenier was one of the 'Amis d'*Esprit*' as early as 1935 and was with Max-Pol Fouchet responsible for the affiliated group in Algiers, he was never deeply committed to the movement. Of course his frequent absence from Paris and indeed from France was an important factor in this lack of intellectual communion, but once again it must be seen more as a free choice than as an imposition.

He felt strongly that the modern world was in danger of being enslaved to the doctrine of the moment, and he liked to trace these doctrines back to their source, or to point out earlier thinkers who were precursors. In this way he could show how one-sided and often mistaken the present-day versions were. His familiarity with Eastern writers, with the pre-Socratics, with mystics of all

traditions, as well as with the great thinkers of the Western world, gave him the conviction that there were always other ways of viewing a problem, and so encouraged him in his scepticism. No one philosopher or school could count him as a disciple. In the realm of ideas, if not in that of practical daily living, he preserved his freedom by refusing to exercise his right of choice. During the war years and afterwards he sought to investigate the practical implications of his attitude. Two trends in his thought which emerged strongly in this new period were the importance of the aesthetic sense as he tried to understand the expression of freedom in creation, and the interest of the apparently trivial, the everyday, in view of the equivalence of all things.

An important characterization of the tension felt by Grenier at the end of this first period, together with a pointer to the direction that he was going to take, is afforded by the 'Cornélius' correspondence. Lambert objected strongly to the tone of the 'Lettre à Cornélius': he teased Grenier with still being at school, under the thumb of 'le magister Hegel'. He felt that Grenier knew his role, that of the author of *Santa-Cruz*, and that he was allowing himself to get tied up in meaningless words and ideas. He should let out the song that was there inside him, longing to be sung, and *give* himself. Lambert died in 1940, before the 'Réponse de Cornélius' appeared in French. He would have hailed the more positive approach of this supposed Dutch friend of Grenier's, who describes himself as having 'une propension inconsidérée à l'action'. His argument is that a paralysed abstention, which is what the author of the 'Lettre' ends up with, is neither profitable nor necessary. He appeals to the example of Lucretius, and to human achievement and creativity, instancing the building of St Petersburg: 'Si tout est égal, pourquoi pas une œuvre plutôt qu'une contemplation?' Even if the underlying order implied by art, indeed by living at all, is only a convention — which is all that the Grenier of the 'Lettre' could allow — why should that not be acceptable? But he comes up against the objection that 'la création humaine n'est au fond jamais qu'une procréation', dependent on an eternal truth, which in turn is unattainable.

In the 'Fragments d'une deuxième lettre à Cornélius' Grenier provides a synthesis that shows the value and also the limits of such a dialectical approach. He accepts Cornélius's point that 'si tout se vaut, c'est peut-être la meilleure façon de *créer* que de frapper sans scrupule' (*IM*, 184 (186)) (which is what human action seems to be). But he is unhappy about two things: the tyranny associated with creativity, and the equivalence of everything. This last was indeed his own principle: but he cannot get away from the presence of the Absolute, Value-itself. He takes up the suggestion of art as a way out of chaos: 'l'art, c'est la création sans l'arbitraire ni la violence'. It is the art of Greek statues with their hint of a smile:

ce sourire, c'est un entre-deux. J'aime cette reconnaissance courageuse d'une fragilité; cette intelligence d'un obstacle qui permet à l'esprit de saisir quelque

chose qui le dépasse et de transformer un Destin amorphe en une destinée personnelle.

Their eyes are fixed on a goal that is Elsewhere, or so we may think; their attitude amounts to this: 'c'est, par un désespoir raisonnable, approcher le plus qu'il est possible du divin' (*IM*, 188–89 (190)).

But even art and poetry have their limits. What can provide a lasting link with the Absolute? Unity is impossible, mystical union is short-lived; and could there be a union through a mediator?

Alors, la vie humaine devient grave malgré son caractère éphémère; l'homme peut travailler au-dedans du monde comme si ce dernier avait de l'importance et penser qu'il n'en a pas: une action sereine dont il n'escompte pas le fruit. Mais tout cela demande une fidélité . . . (*IM*, 191 (192))

— which he is not prepared to give with his whole self.

The word *liberté* has not been used in these 'Cornelius' passages, but it underlies them. The real question at issue is: In the face of the Absolute, what sort of freedom do I have? Is it a freedom of pure indifference, resulting in abstention? Or leading to an active freedom-to-create? Does the Absolute introduce an element of value, such that one can exercise a freedom-to-accept (the way of 'un désespoir raisonnable')? Or is there some way of mediation between the Absolute and the world such that the world is given value (though its rewards have none in eternal terms), and freedom is not indifferent?

It would be out of character for Grenier to give a straight answer. However, he does here sum up his explorations so far and suggest lines of further investigation. In one sense he returns to the sentiments expressed in 'Interiora rerum' with his admiration of Greek sculpture and the attitude expressed therein. But at the same time he commits himself more positively to the experiment of art, and to an exploration of the concepts of existence and value and their relationship to each other. The question: 'Freedom for what?' points to the *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté*. Grenier's fascination with the everyday is foreshadowed, and despite the references to the possibility of a Mediator, his later interest in Taoism comes as no surprise.

For Jean Grenier, freedom and choice belong to the very tissue of existence. They are indeed philosophical problems to be analysed, but they are also experiences to be lived. His practice of continually oscillating between different metaphysical systems and different approaches to the same problems is an expression of his intuition that the answer one gets depends upon the initial choices of viewpoint and framework of interpretation. Indeed, his whole literary output may be seen as such an expression, for the activity of creation is itself a response to the problems of freedom and choice. In *Le Choix* Grenier hints that his own contribution to the understanding of those areas has been not

to dominate them but to explore them and to express them, through metaphysics and through art.

L'art diffère de la métaphysique en ce qu'il tend à combler ce vide en y ajoutant ses constructions, tandis que la métaphysique tend à l'approfondir: là un chant, ici un silence — mais combien plus proches l'un de l'autre que les termes de la conversation la plus suivie. La connaissance proprement dite est au contraire fondée sur du plein, de là sa certitude et sa marche en avant. Cela est du ressort de *l'esprit conquérant*. Mais *l'esprit réfléchissant* ne sait où s'appuyer, il est seul et l'on peut dire que rien ne le porte. Il est au centre des possibles, et sa réalité consiste dans son ambiguïté. (*C*, 13–14 (20))

This is the thread that runs through his large and apparently disparate corpus of writings, linking the *Lexiques*, the novels, the essays and the art criticism together. Their value is not primarily as a source for the study of the intellectual and literary history of a generation, nor as background material for the study of Camus, although both of these are possible uses to which they may be put; rather, they are to be seen as the product of a highly individual *esprit réfléchissant*, situated at one and the same time 'au centre des possibles' and yet 'en marge'.

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Cahiers du Sud: six reviews and short commentaries between July 1936 and February 1945.
Comœdia: thirty-six reviews and articles between 27 June 1942 and 22 July 1944.
Esprit: ten reviews and short commentaries between December 1935 and June 1941.
NRF: 145, 162, 164, 169, 172, 198, 203, 217, 230, 231, 233, 235, 236, 237, 239, 241, 242, 246, 247, 250, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 258, 262, 263, 265, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 284, 287, 295, 298, 299, 302, 305, 306, 308, 310, 312, 313; new series, nos. 13, 20, 26, 56, 61, 63, 64, 77, 79, 84, 110, 131, 132, 138, 200, 218 (1925–71).
NRF: other minor contributions, including 'L'air du mois', in nos. 246, 248, 249, 250, 253, 255, 260, 261, 263, 265, 280, 283, 284, 288, 291, 293, 295, 296, 297, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307; new series, nos. 6, 21, 51, 62, 70, 99, 191 (1934–68).
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1924 *Philosophies*, 3 and 4.
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1930 *Europe* (June).
1931 *Europe* (October).
1933 *Études philosophiques* (December).
1936 *L'Assaut*, 17 November.
1937 *L'Algérie*, 29 May; *Echo d'Alger*, 27 May; *Radio-Alger* (May).
1938 *Combat* (April); *Hermès*, 11 (October); *Aguedal*, 5–6 (November-December); *Revue philosophique* (November-December).
1939 *Volontés* (June).
1941 *Revue philosophique* (January-February); *Le Figaro*, 23 September; *Études philosophiques* (December).
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1946 *Journal d'Egypte*, 7 March; *La Réforme* (Alexandria), 14 May; *Combat*, 8 November.
1948 *Bourse égyptienne*, 17 June; *Cahiers de la Pléiade*, 6 (Autumn-Winter).
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1952 *Le Soleil noir*, 1, 'Positions'.
1953 *Arts*, 3–9 July; *Disque vert*, 3.
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1955 *Âge nouveau* (January); *Arts*, 4–10 May and 11–17 May; *Revue philosophique* (July-September); *Club* (du Meilleur Livre) (October); *Actualité littéraire*, 19–20.
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1960 *Le Monde*, 19 October.
1962 *Revue des études grecques*, 354–55 (January-June); *Figaro littéraire*, 17 March; *Bulletin de la NRF*, 169.
1963 *Figaro littéraire*, 2 February.
1965 *Nouvel Observateur*, 10–16 November.
1967 *Bref* (Journal of the T.N.P.), 105.
1968 *Recueil de thèmes* (Paris, Colin, 'U2'); *Combat*, 14 November; *Gazette de Lausanne*, 16–17 November; *Le Monde (des livres)*, 16 November; *Nouvel Observateur*, 9–15 December.
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C. *Published interviews*

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XXX, 'M. Jean Grenier', *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, January-March 1963, pp. 83–85.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

1. André Chamson recalls that 'Louis Guilloux, pour moi, c'est le groupe amical des écrivains qui s'est formé dès la fin de la première guerre mondiale au Quartier Latin: Jean Prévost, Salacrou, Dubuffet, Henri Petit, Jean Grenier, Duveau, Louis Guilloux et moi-même' (in 'Hommage: Cripure a 30 ans', *Nouvel Observateur*, 10–16 November 1965, pp. 30–31). Chamson's wife, Lucie Mazauric, claims that this group, which also included André Malraux, called itself 'le Vortex' (in *Avec André Chamson*, vol. I, *Ah Dieu! Que la paix est jolie!* (Paris, 1972)), but Louis Guilloux has strongly denied that there was ever such a 'group' (conversation with the author, 1974). It may at least be stated confidently that most of these aspiring writers and artists knew each other. In a prefatory note to the second edition of *Les Îles* (*LI* (2), 8), Grenier 'rappelle ici tout ce qu'il doit à l'amitié de Jean Guéhenno, Louis Guilloux, André Malraux, Jean Paulhan, Henri Petit, à l'intention de qui ces pages avaient été écrites'. In the first edition 'Le Chat' was dedicated to Malraux, 'Les Îles Kerguélen' to Guilloux (also 'Les Îles Fortunées' when it first appeared in the *NRF*), 'L'Île de Pâques' to Guéhenno, and 'L'Inde' to Paulhan.

   Edmond Lambert (1878–1940) was a tax inspector, a Contrôleur Général des Contributions Directes. While in Saint-Brieuc he was associated with Jules de Gaultier, also a tax inspector, and with the philosopher Georges Palante. He made the acquaintance of Grenier in 1922 and of Guilloux in the following year. Through them he came to know Henri Petit and André Chamson. Although without literary aspirations himself, Lambert was a man of deep and broad culture, and he was able to encourage and guide his three young *protégés* as they began to write. He kept up a regular correspondence with them all, in which his watchword was 'Osez!' 'Vous les prophètes, vous ne savez pas oser, et vous n'êtes pas prophètes à cause de ça' (communicated by Alain Lemière: see also Lambert's letters to Grenier dated 11 February 1927, 24 February 1929, 27 January 1930, 19 March 1930, etc.). They in turn regarded him with near-veneration: 'Lambert était pour nous un très grand monsieur . . . Il voyait les choses de très haut' (Henri Petit, in conversation with the author); 'un grand homme, en parlant de qui il faut employer le mot *culture*, si insuffisant qu'il soit' (Louis Guilloux, in conversation with the author); 'presque un dieu pour Grenier . . .; une personnalité de premier plan' (Alain Lemière, in conversation with the author). According to Lucie Mazauric, Julien Benda called him 'le Socrate de ces jeunes gens'. She writes: 'Un Dieu lare veillait de loin sur le Vortex. Il s'appelait Lambert. Beaucoup plus âgé que tous nos amis . . . Son prestige était immense' (op. cit., p. 42). Henri Petit acknowledged that he used to gain far more from a visit to Lambert than from his encounters with Gide, Romain Rolland, etc. (conversation with the author). Lambert's correspondence is entirely unpublished, but his letters to Grenier will be referred to frequently in the course of this study. Grenier's first published lyrical essay, 'Interiora rerum' (1927), was dedicated to Lambert.

   For Max Jacob's correspondence with Grenier, see *Lettres à un ami* (Lausanne-Bâle-Paris, 1951).
2. Grenier was closely associated with Pierre Morhange in the founding of this important early review. See Max Jacob's letters dated 14 March 1923 and 4 October 1923, in *Lettres à un ami*, in which he replies to Grenier's request for suggestions of writers who might contribute copy for it.
3. G. Picon, 'Une Distraction obstinée, *NRF*, 221 (May 1971), pp. 44–45.
4. J. Lacroix, in *L'Encyclopédie française*, vol. XIX, *Philosophie et religion* (Paris, 1957), Chapter 4, p. 4.
5. See A. Lazareff, 'L'Entreprise philosophique de Jules Lequier', *Revue philosophique*, 126 (1938), pp. 161–82; J. Wahl, *Jules Lequier* (Geneva, 1948), pp. 14–15, 113.
6. In *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Farouk I University* (Alexandria, 1948), p. 4.
7. A. Weber & D. Huisman, *Histoire de la philosophie européenne*, vol II, *Tableau de la philosophie contemporaine*, 15th edition (Paris, 1957), p. 113.

Notes for Introduction, continued

8. See 'La Philosophie de Brunschvicg', *Logos*, 3 (1925), pp. 178–96.
9. J. Guitton, *Regards sur la pensée française 1870–1940* (Paris, 1968), p. 15.
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11. Art. cit., p. 343; see also *Traité des valeurs*, vol. I, pp. 423–24 and n.
12. 'Le Sentiment d'indifférence', *Études philosophiques* (Marseille, 1943–44), pp. 6–7.
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14. Picon (1960, 1973), Quesnoy (1961), Bott (1968), Nourrissier (1968), Rohou (1958), Chapelan (1970), Andrianne (1971), 'J.-P. D.' (1971).
15. *Nouvelles littéraires*, 9 September 1933; see also ibid., 13 May 1933; *Excelsior*, 10 August 1933.
16. R. Guérin, *Un Romancier dit son mot* (Paris, 1948), pp. 15–39.
17. J. Howlett, 'Une Tendre Lucidité, la philosophie de Jean Grenier', *Lettres nouvelles*, 36 (1956), pp. 433–37.
18. P.-H. Simon, 'L'Humanisme de Jean Grenier', *Revue de Paris*, 6 (1958), pp. 155–56.
19. R. Campbell, 'L'Indifférence selon Jean Grenier', *NRF*, 64 (April 1958), pp. 691–701, and 65 (May 1958), pp. 879–90.
20. 'Sur Jean Grenier', art. cit.
21. *Figaro littéraire*, 22–28 April 1968, pp. 19–20 and 2–8 December 1968, p. 22.
22. R. Andrianne, 'Jean Grenier, écrivain méconnu', *Revue nouvelle* (Brussels), May–June 1971, pp. 546–49.
23. S.-S. Juka, 'Jean Grenier romancier', *French Review*, 49 (1976), pp. 570–73; 'L'Humain et l'Absolu dans *Les Îles* de Jean Grenier', *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 82 (1977), pp. 528–49.
24. The present work was the only full thesis on Grenier until 1981, when a *thèse de troisième cycle* by C. Tarot entitled 'Problèmes du sujet dans l'œuvre et la pensée de Jean Grenier' was accepted by the University of Caen. Tarot finds that I, too, am guilty of concentrating on the philosophy at the expense of the literary aspect of Grenier's work.
25. G. Barrière, 'Jean Grenier, l'exil et le royaume' (unpublished *mémoire de maîtrise*, University of Paris (Sorbonne), 1973).
26. *NRF*, 119 (November 1962), p. 909.
27. F. Bott, 'Jean Grenier, philosophe de "la Vie quotidienne" ', *Le Monde* (*des livres*), 16 March 1968, p. 1.

CHAPTER 1

1. Unpublished dissertation in the possession of Mme Grenier: 228 MS pages, in the handwriting of Jean Grenier and of one other, probably his mother. No date, but probably 1919 or 1920. Grenier obtained his *licence* in 1917 and his *agrégation* in 1922. In the bibliography of his dissertation there figures a book whose publication date is given as 1919, but in the *Catalogue de la librairie française* it is listed as 1920 (Lasbax, *Le Problème du mal* (Paris)). However, Grenier may have had access to it as a thesis, before it was published. The title is 'Le Problème du mal chez Renouvier'. The table of contents on p. 223 lists:

   Introduction
   Première partie: postulats et hypothèses néo-criticistes
   - I L'immortalité
   - II L'origine du mal physique
   - III L'origine du mal moral
   - IV L'extension du mal moral
   - V Critique

   Deuxième partie: hypothèse suprême en théodicée
   - I Evolution de la pensée de Renouvier
   - II La Théodicée
   - III Critique de l'hypothèse — sa légitimité
   - IV _____ sa vraisemblance
   - V _____ conclusion

   Troisième partie:

Notes for Chapter 1, continued

I Les dernières idées de Renouvier
II Conclusion générale: le Personnalisme

This table omits the fifth chapter of Part I, 'Optimisme ou pessimisme: Le pari moral': in the text both that chapter and the Conclusion are numbered V. The chapter headings in the text sometimes differ considerably from those in the table: thus I.1, 'Le mal. Sa réparation par l'immortalité'; I.2, 'De l'origine du mal physique. Examen des cosmogonies religieuses'; I.4, 'De l'extension du mal moral et de ses conséquences'; I.5, 'Critique des idées de Renouvier sur le problème du mal'; II.3, 'L'hypothèse suprême est-elle d'accord avec les principes du néo-criticisme?'; II.4, 'Critique de la Théodicée'.

2. *MIX*, p. 97. After his *baccalauréat* in 1914 he composed some pages entitled, somewhat pretentiously, 'De malo meditationes' (ibid.; see also *ELF*, 90), and began to explore the theological concept of original sin.
3. Ch. Renouvier, *Derniers Entretiens*, recueillis par . . . L. Prat (Paris, 1904), p. 61 (*Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 12 (1904), p. 170).
4. See below, pp. 16–17, and also J.-C. Grenier, 'Un philosophe breton: Jules Lequier', *Bretagne touristique*, 15 October 1925, p. 226.
5. These two paragraphs are omitted in *IM* (2), but restored in (3).
6. Jules Lequier, Lequyer or Lécuyer (for the spelling see *PL*, p. 258) was born at Quintin (Côtes-du-Nord, 19 km inland from Saint-Brieuc) on 29 January 1814 and was found drowned near Plérin on 11 February 1862. For biographical details see *PL*, pp. 9–15, pp. 251–324; also *LOC*, pp. xv-xviii. Apart from Grenier's theses, the most significant studies of Lequier are L. Foucher, *La Jeunesse de Renouvier et sa première philosophie* (Paris, 1927); J. Wahl, *Jules Lequier* (Geneva–Paris, 1948); E. Callot, *Propos sur Jules Lequier* (Paris, 1962); X. Tilliette, *Jules Lequier ou le tourment de la liberté* (Paris, 1964).
7. Saint-Cloud, 1865.
8. In *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, March 1914, January 1922, July 1922; *Revue bleue*, 2 October 1920.
9. Grenier's article in *Bretagne touristique* was accompanied by several photographs, among them one of Lequier's house.
10. Published in *Annales de l'Université de Grenoble*, n.s., 2 (1925). The Institut Français de Naples, where Grenier taught from 1924 to 1926, was administered by the University of Grenoble.
11. Lambert referred to 'cette vieille putain (l'université)' (4 May 1925) and to 'dix ans d'intoxication universitaire' (10 October 1925). He called Grenier a 'sale Sorbonnard' (Lemière), and encouraged him to shake off 'ce démon de l'Analogie, le mot, le mot avant la chose' (4 May 1925).
12. His original intention had been to undertake research on 'l'histoire de l'imprégnation de la pensée européenne par l'indienne' (quoted by G. d'Aubarède in *Nouvelles littéraires*, 12 September 1957, p. 4). Lemière maintains that he was dissuaded by the difficulty of mastering Sanskrit (see also *ELF*, 73). According to Henri Petit, Grenier's professors were keen for him to follow up his interest in Oriental thought, and were disappointed by his decision to study an unknown Breton philospher (conversation with the author, 1974).
13. A. Lazareff, 'L'Entreprise philosophique de Jules Lequier', *Revue philosophique*, 126 (1938), pp. 161–82 (reprinted in the same author's *Vie et connaissance* (Paris, 1948), pp. 21–40). This is a review article based on Grenier's thesis.
14. Art. cit., pp. 181–82.
15. See Tilliette, op. cit., especially ch. 4, 'Lequier philosophe: la rencontre avec Fichte'. Tilliette confirms Grenier's observations on Lequier's contact with the thought of Fichte, but underlines the fact that this contact was more a passing dalliance with a method of approach that closely paralleled his own, rather than a real link of dependence. There are close similarities between the two, but Tilliette's conclusion is that ultimately Lequier retains complete independence of thought: 'Le parallèle avec Fichte n'aura servi, somme toute, que de prétexte à dégager la ligne originale du penseur infortuné.' (p. 181)
16. Wahl, op. cit., pp. 32–35.
17. For which see Bréhier, op. cit., pp. 839–42.
18. Jules Lequier, *La Dernière Page*, préface de Jean Grenier (Veilhes, Tarn, 1968).

CHAPTER 2

1. 'Portrait de Mouloud' first appeared in the *NRF* in 1929. This quotation is on p. 769. The following quotation comes from one of the chapters that were added in 1933 for the first edition of *Les Îles*.
2. See also this passage from 'Fragments d'une deuxième lettre à Cornélius' (*IM*, 185 (187)): 'As-tu éprouvé . . . le sentiment du *vide*? . . . Tu n'as jamais couché sur la terre et les yeux tournés vers le ciel, vu celui-ci basculer comme une cuvette qu'on retourne. Tu n'as pas, au milieu de la mer, senti que tu étais perdu, englouti dans une chose sans nom qui ne pouvait te comprendre ni te supporter?' See also *Jacques*, pp. 30–31.
3. R. Campbell, 'L'Indifférence selon Jean Grenier', *NRF*, 68 (April 1958), pp. 692–95. The second half of this article appeared in the following month.
4. The two characters may be combined in one person: see for instance *VN*, 88–90, where an attitude of 'héroïsme épicurien' is said to be a 'chef d'œuvre de volonté', but is also described as 'la sagesse de ce grand homme qui avait si bien compris, accepté et voulu la vie qui nous était proposée à notre naissance à chacun'. Similarly in *EM*, p. 53, the 'voie héroïque', which 'dit *oui* à la vie et accepte à cause de cela, sans récrimination, ce qui paraît inacceptable', is said to be that of the heirs of the Mediterranean civilizations.
5. Grenier may have encountered Schopenhauer first of all in the library of his school philosophy teacher Le Sage, who used to invite the best pupils to browse there (according to Alain Lemière). Louis Guilloux recalls how Grenier later used to sit under a palm tree in his garden in Saint-Brieuc, correcting school essays for his old teacher, and from time to time pointing to some object with the words 'Tat tvam asi' ('That thou art', a basic theme of the *Chandogya-Upanishad* and other Indian Scriptures). Lambert also testifies to an early interest in Indian metaphysics on Grenier's part: 'je me rappelle . . . ce que vous me dîtes un jour, Rue du Port [Lambert's home in Saint-Brieuc], "Pour réussir il faut se spécialiser, exploiter une veine, la philosophie hindoue me tente" ' (letter of 10 October 1925); 'A Saint-Brieuc, un soir, vous m'avez dit: "L'Inde me passionne, et puis il faut choisir une spécialité" ' (4 May 1930). In 1924, in an article in *La Vie des lettres et des arts*, 15, entitled 'L'État actuel de la philosophie', Grenier showed that he was aware of the growing interest in Oriental thought that was in evidence among European youth. See also 'Le Nihilisme européen et les appels de l'Orient', and his review of Masson-Oursel's *La Philosophie comparée* (Paris, 1923), in *Philosophies*, 2. At the end of 1924 *Les Cahiers du mois* announced a special number on 'Le Mouvement orientaliste en France', and *Philosophies* claimed (in 'Les Revues', *Philosophies*, 3) that 'c'est *Philosophies* qui a attaché le grelot', instancing in particular the articles by 'Jean Caves' (Grenier). Grenier was in the field earlier than most, but he preserved a critical distance, deploring the wishy-washy 'Theosophism' that was becoming popular ('La Crise de l'esprit européen', *La Vie des lettres et des arts*, 17 (1925) and maintaining an academic approach ('Schopenhauer et l'Inde', *Annales de l'Université de Grenoble*, n.s., 2, (1925)). He neither accepted nor rejected the offer of new light from the East, but he broadened his horizons to take elements of Eastern thought into account in the development of his own personal, eclectic, meditation.
6. Three articles, in *NRF*, 202, 203, 204 (1930), pp. 55–69, 170–85, 338–55.
7. See *EO* (first edition only), p. 4.
8. *Revue philosophique*, 132 (1942), p. 185.
9. *Histoire de la philosophie*, edited by B. Parain, vol. I (Paris, 1969), p. 98.
10. See, for instance, S. Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. I (Cambridge, 1922); W. S. Urquhart, *The Vedanta and Modern Thought* (Oxford, 1928); M. H. Harrison, *Hindu Monism and Pluralism* (Oxford, 1932); P. Masson-Oursel, *La Philosophie comparée* (Paris, 1923); R. Grousset, *Histoire de la philosophie orientale* (Paris, 1923).
11. This determination to take one particular line of thought to its logical conclusion represents an important aspect of Grenier's intellectual method. He will do it again in his investigation of Taoism. It is not only in these major areas of philosophical enquiry, however, that Grenier adopts such a procedure. It may also be seen, for instance, in the positive encouragement he gave to Camus to join the Communist Party in 1935 despite the obvious drawbacks. There are two possible interpretations of Grenier's attitude. One is that it is an expression of his general reluctance to be bound by one set of accepted values. The other is that it is an expression of his instinctive desire to achieve perfection by going beyond the possibility of compromise. Both these interpretations are consonant with Grenier's preference for the Absolute over what is merely relative. Compromise and a limited faith have their place, however.
12. 'Du "Cogito" au "Credo" ', in *Travaux du IX^e Congrès international de philosophie* (1937), §III, pp. 94–98.

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13. Grousset, op. cit., p. 66, on Śaṅkara's *Commentary on the Vedânta Sûtras*.
14. See Harrison, op. cit., p. 84, and Chapter 5, pp. 143 ff.
15. 'Du "Cogito" au "Credo"', art. cit., and 'La Certitude de l'unité et le problème des croyances', *Recherches philosophiques*, 6 (1936–1937), §V, "Positions philosophiques", pp. 248–53, reproduced in *Le Choix* as 'Appendice', pp. 141–47 (first edition only).
16. In 'La Certitude de l'unité . . .' Grenier describes the man who allows his thought the freedom to recognize the Absolute. He lives 'dans une solitude écrasante, entre un monde qu'il peut connaître et qui ne lui est de rien, et un Dieu qui pourrait lui tenir lieu de tout et qu'il ne peut saisir' (§7°). The recognition of the Absolute is here said to be intellectual and almost inevitable: 'la pensée . . . se sent intuitivement une et éternelle. Dans certaines occasions privilégiées, l'étreinte de la pensée avec elle-même est si forte que, toute relation cessant, pendant parfois la seule durée d'un battement de cœur, l'homme croit entrer vivant dans l'éternité . . . On objectera que notre pensée n'est constituée que par des relations et pour des relations. Nous répondrons . . . que ce fait, parfaitement exact, prouve que nous avons une connaissance de l'Absolu; car comment prendre conscience d'une relation sinon par l'existence de quelque chose qui n'est pas relatif' (§4°). In the first part of *Le Choix*, 'L'Absolu et la pensée', Grenier works out in more detail the process by which the individual thinking mind comes to glimpse the Absolute. The idea of *realization* is found explicitly on p. 27 (31), and again in Part II, 'L'Absolu et le monde', on pp. 86–87 (68–69); but it also underlies much of the argument of both the first two parts.
17. See Lalande, loc. cit., and H. B. Acton, 'The Absolute' in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by P. Edwards (New York and London, 1967).
18. 'La Certitude de l'unité . . .', art. cit., §5, n; *C*, 144, n. (92, n.).
19. 'It is of the essence of Bergson's theory of intuition that it attempts to establish a means of knowledge free of the distortions imposed by the intellect in the name of successful action . . . Intuition requires active effort; but that does not mean that it is action . . . It is intellectual effort — something quite different.' (A. E. Pilkington, *Bergson and His Influence, a Reassessment* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 188)
20. See also Harrison, op. cit., Chapter 5, 'The Philosophy of Non-Dualism in Śaṅkara'.
21. 'Réflexions sur la pensée indienne', *NRF*, 317 (February 1940), pp. 247–54. Grenier refers specifically (p. 254) to the love of truth displayed by both Śaṅkara and Râmânuja, and he welcomes the publication of two books by Oliver Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedânta* (Paris, 1937), and *La Doctrine morale et métaphysique de Râmânuja* (Paris, 1938). See also Grenier's article 'Réflexions sur la mentalité indienne dans ses rapports avec la nôtre', *Cahiers du Sud*, 236 (1941), pp. 329–51, in which he concludes (p. 351): 'en souhaitant que la lecteur prenne en considération cette pensée, et que, au cas où il ne pourrait se référer aux sources, il consulte au moins les esprits qui en Europe ou en Inde ont, eux, la compétence et l'autorité nécessaires pour les guider dans une voie qui est nouvelle, qui est aussi éternelle'; see also 'Sur l'Inde', art. cit., p. 352.
22. See also 'La Certitude de l'unité . . .', §10°.
23. Harrison, op. cit., p. 165.
24. 'La Certitude de l'unité . . .', §5° (*C*, 144); see also *C*, 81 (64): 'Partant de Dieu nous ne pouvons arriver qu'à Dieu', and 'Sur l'Inde', art cit., p. 62 (*LI*, 146 (135)): 'On ne peut aller au monde que par le monde et à Dieu [que] par Dieu.'
25. For instance Masson-Oursel, art. cit.; A. Rolland de Renéville, in *NRF*, 338 (April 1942), pp. 491–93; the critic of the wartime *Études de métaphysique et de morale*, 49 (1944), pp. 309–10; J. Pirlot, in *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 60 (1962), pp. 127–28 (review of *Absolu et choix*).

CHAPTER 3

1. 'Le Choix réfléchi' in 1946. The third chapter, 'L'Engagement', was entitled 'L'Engagement arbitraire' in 1946: the adjectives 'réfléchi' and 'arbitraire' were evidently intended to point up the contrast. See 'Existence et liberté', *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Farouk I University, Alexandria*, 3 (1946). This text consists of a detailed plan, very similar to that contained in *EBL*, 9–11.
2. See J. Cruickshank, *Montherlant* (Edinburgh and London, 1964), e.g. p. 26; L. Barjon, 'Le monde de l'alternance', in *Mondes d'écrivains, destinées d'hommes* (Paris, 1960), pp. 165–94; G. Laffley, 'Montherlant au delà de l'alternance', *Écrits de Paris*, 320 (December, 1972), pp. 82–89.

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3. Between 1924 and 1942 Grenier devoted reviews or articles to the works of Montherlant in *Philosophies*, 3 (1924), *Il Baretti* (December 1925), *NRF*, 233, 239, 242 (1933); 258, 263 (1935); *Cahiers du Sud* (October 1936); *Comœdia* (12 September 1942).
4. His own background predisposed him to see life in terms of a tension between opposites, as an extract from one of his unpublished notebooks suggests: 'J'ai deux prénoms. Mon père voulait m'appeler Camille, ma mère Jean. Mon père m'a déclaré Camille à l'état civil, et ma mère m'a inscrit à l'école sous le nom de Jean. Quand ma cousine paternelle m'envoie un homard de Trebeurden, celui-ci est adressé à Camille. Quand ma tante maternelle m'envoie ses vœux de Saint-Malo, c'est à Jean. Mes les circonstances ont créé une inégalité: je ne fais que me souvenir de Camille et Jean me fait tressaillir.'
5. Possession, coming at a moment of finite time, destroys indefinite enjoyment, which may be purely mental. Note also the recurrent imagery of clocks in *Les Grèves* (pp. 35, 138, 150).
6. In *NRF*, 221 (May 1971), pp. 7–8 ('Jean Grenier ou l'homme vrai').
7. See also *C*, 98 (81). The quotation, from *Les Nourritures terrestres*, is approximate.
8. Grenier combines the image of the 'magma initial' with that of the 'cadre' in *G*, 249 and also 302.
9. 'Pro-créateur' is understood here in a very different sense from the 'procréation' of the 'Réponse de Cornélius': 'Tu crois que la création humaine n'est au fond jamais qu'une procréation' (*IM*, 181 (184)), where it is the dependence of man on the Absolute that is emphasized. Here, by contrast, it is man's independence. See also *EM*, 146 ff.
10. *C*, 53 (n. 10, not in subsequent editions), 116–19 (96–98); *EM*, 127–35.
11. Grenier maintains an ambiguous attitude towards such traditions. On the one hand they may be regarded as useful *cadres* within which the thinking person may be free to exercise his creative imagination; but on the other hand they may be regarded as dangerous 'orthodoxies': 'L'Âge des orthodoxies' attacks both Marxism and Thomism from that point of view.
12. Slightly different punctuation in art. cit., p. 95, and with one clause added: '. . . je ne savais pas *quelle tu étais, et* que, par définition . . .'. Also reproduced in *Hommage à Nietzsche 1900–1950*, edited by G. Henein (Cairo, 1950), p. 5.
13. Grenier is himself exemplifying the *acte divergent* in that he admires one attitude while acknowledging his own inability to adopt it. This tension between an extreme which he admires and a compromise which he adopts because of the weakness of his humanity is central to Grenier's thought.
14. In the 1946 outline, Grenier declared at this point in the argument: 'Or il est impossible d'échapper à la reconnaissance ou à la création d'une valeur', and he concluded: 'Je ne suis libre que lorsque j'ai fini de me dégager et n'ai pas encore commencé à m'engager. Cette attitude ambiguë ne peut être tenue longtemps, et il faut en revenir à la réflexion pour choisir, réflexion que nous avons déclarée au début être insuffisante, quoique nécessaire.' That is certainly one possible corollary of the demonstration that even Sartre derives his values from somewhere, but it is not the only one. The attitude of the 'saints du désespoir' may be taken even further, to an extreme point where value disappears altogether. Between 1946 and 1948 Grenier had been studying Taoism more closely, and finding in it a historical example of just such an attitude. In the *Entretiens*, then, the passage quoted above is changed completely. Only the first sentence is similar, and it now reads: 'Est-il possible d'échapper à la reconnaissance ou à la création d'une valeur? Réponse: c'est difficile, mais c'est possible.' In the text, as distinct from the 'plan', Grenier affirms his intention of no longer returning to 'le choix réfléchi': 'Nous nous arrêtons donc à cette solution.' Significantly, however, the wording in 'La Liberté contre les valeurs' is '. . . à cette solution provisoire . . .', so that Grenier's commitment to this extreme position is immediately called into question again.
15. The last sentence provides the justification that Grenier accuses the Existentialists of failing to produce. The supreme value is in fact not freedom itself but nature, as an avatar of the Absolute. In 'La Liberté contre les valeurs' the reference to freedom at this point is absent. Instead of 'l'absolue soumission à la proposition de l'instant est le plus haut degré de la liberté' (*EBL*, 74), the text reads: 'l'absolue soumission . . . tient lieu de délibération'.
16. In a radical sense, that of 'Cornélius', and not in the modest and limited sense of Grenier's Mediterranean humanism.
17. Note the similarity of this theme to that of *Les Îles*, e.g. 'Les Îles Kerguélen'. In 'L'Île de Pâques', Grenier draws attention in a footnote to the etymological connection between *île* and *isolé* (*LI*, 112–13 (108)). Elsewhere he quotes Rousseau's similar observation, (*RQE*, 59), and he also acknowledges his debt to Pascal: 'Les *îles* (c'est-à-dire les Isolements) ne

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faisaient que reprendre le motif de l'île déserte dans laquelle se trouve l'homme selon Pascal' (*AC*, 23).

18. Grenier appeals to Hegel in support of the idea of 'ce pouvoir de destruction de la conscience qui suit son pouvoir d'édification' (*EBL*, 113); and he disagrees with Raymond Polin's claim in *Création des valeurs* (Paris, 1944) that 'la structure d'un acte de transcendance est essentiellement subjective'. Rather, he argues, 'l'homme ne peut accomplir d'acte de transcendance que parce qu'il est habité par un être transcendant' (*EBL*, 114).
19. Interview included in 'Jean Grenier, poète des lieux', programme devised by Oliver Germain-Thomas, a former pupil of Grenier's, and produced by Georges Gravier; broadcast on France-Culture, 24 March 1976.

CHAPTER 4

1. G. Sebbag, 'L'Indifférence', *Revue d'esthétique*, n.s., 19 (1966) pp. 344–63. In the first part of his article, entitled 'Paysages' (pp. 344–53), Sebbag's claim that 'l'espace de l'indifférence est souvent le calque des paysages naturels. L'indifférent . . . n'habite nulle part et se fixe cependant en certains lieux' is supported by quotations from *Les Îles* and *Inspirations méditerranéennes*, as well as from the works of Cioran, Blanchot and Cayrol.
2. Several of the chapters of *La Vie quotidienne* were subtitled 'Étude phénoménologique' when they first appeared in *NRF*: 'Le Voyage', 'La Promenade', 'Le Tabac'.
3. A footnote making explicit the reference to the Upanishads is absent from the earliest version (*NRF*, 189 (June 1929), p. 770) but is found in all editions of *Les Îles* (*LI*, 18 (38)).
4. *NRF*, 202 (July 1930), pp. 58–59 (*LI*, 141 (131–132)); 203 (1930), p. 173 (*LI*, 142 (132)).
5. 'Les Pèlerins d'Emmaüs' (1935), 'Depuis des années . . . (1935), 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' (1936), 'Santa-Cruz' (1937), 'La Villa d'Hadrien' (1937).
6. Cornélius recalls a visit to Zaandam, and then quotes 'une parole de Napoléon traduite dans ma langue: "Niets is den grooten Man te Kleein"' (*IM*, 177 (179–180)). His name, too, is typically Dutch, though latinized.
7. The letter to Cornélius and the reply to it first appeared in translation in Victoria Ocampo's review *Sur*, 55 (April 1939), pp. 22–35 ('La metamorforsis y la creación: Carta a Cornelis, Respuesta de Cornelis'); 'Lettre à Cornélius ou la métamorphose' was published on its own in *NRF*, 308 (May 1939), pp. 811–17. The first edition of *IM* (1941) includes 'Lettre à Cornélius ou la métamorphose', 'Réponse de Cornélius ou la création' (the only French version, differing in important respects from the Spanish text, most notably at the end), and 'Fragments d'une deuxième lettre à Cornélius'.
8. The argument still stands even if it can be shown that, as Mme Grenier suspects, 'L'Attrait du vide' was written as early as 1937, since what is being claimed is that a group of texts published between 1946 and 1950 take up and intensify a theme that has been present since 1930.
9. *EBL*, 15–28; *EM*, 77–98.
10. The chapter in question was first published in *Empédocle*, 6 (1949).
11. See Jeannine Kohn-Étiemble, *226 Lettres inédites de Jean Paulhan: contribution à l'étude du mouvement littéraire en France 1933–1967* (Paris, 1975), p. 122 (Lettre 51), p. 123 n. 1; also pp. 31 ff. Grenier acknowledges his debt in the matter of Taoism in *ET*, 11 n., but without mentioning dates. A letter to Camus of October 1942 would seem to indicate no first-hand knowledge of Taoist writings before 1941: 'J'ai lu l'an dernier les livres de Lao-Tseu (trad. R. P. Wieger) — Le Tao est une grande chose. Je m'en inspirerai en écrivant la suite du *Choix*: le *non-agir*' (*Albert Camus — Jean Grenier: Correspondance 1932–1960*, p. 81).
12. In 'Le Sentiment d'indifférence', *Études philosophiques* (Bulletin de la Société d'Études Philosophiques du Sud-Est) (1943–44), pp. 6–7, which is a summary of a paper given by Grenier in December 1941, there is one explicit reference to Taoism. This paper evidently represents a bridge in Grenier's thinking between *Le Choix* and 'L'Indifférence' (in *L'Existence* (1945), reprinted in *APH*).
13. This does not mean that his approach is lightweight or unsatisfactory, as Jean Cazeneuve recognizes in his review of *L'Esprit du Tao* (*Revue philosophique*, 149 (1959), pp. 240–42).
14. See M. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise* (Paris, 1934, 2nd edition 1950), pp. 525, 532 and n.; H. Maspero, art. cit., and also his collected works on Taoism, *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises* (Paris, 1971), pp. 316, 457–60.

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15. This does not imply total immobility, or even necessarily a lack of volition. In *Le Choix*, p. 130 (111), Grenier comments: 'ce qui est mauvais, ce n'est pas d'agir, c'est de s'attacher aux fruits de l'action'.
16. See Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, p. 506; H. Maspero, *La Chine antique* (Paris, 1927), p. 497 (with explicit mention of Masson-Oursel).
17. Granet, *La Pensée chinoise*, pp. 508, 516; Granet, *La Religion des Chinois*, p. 149.
18. *Sic*: Grenier usually employs the word *efficace* as if it were masculine.
19. Grenier's own use of water as a theme has little in common with that of the Taoist writers: he is too strongly influenced by his experience of the Breton ocean and of the Mediterranean. The Taoist understanding of water is, however, not altogether foreign to him. See, in particular, his comments on Rousseau in *RQE*, 62 ff.
20. A possibility not ruled out, it has been noted, by his strictures on Sartre.
21. In which case, however, his own argument would seem to fall under the same condemnation as that of Sartre, with Nature taking the place of History or of circumstances.
22. Grenier uses the word 'Tao' in the sense of 'Taoism' or even 'Taoists' (as in *EBL*, 135: 'Le Tao . . . franchit le pas décisif'), rather than in the sense of 'the Absolute Principle'. After speaking of 'le Principe' (*EBL* 124, 128) he reverts to a consideration of the Way rather than of the Principle itself. In *ET* he considers both, pointing out, for instance, that 'le Tao . . . correspond au Brahma indifférencié des Hindous' (Chapter 5).
23. Chapter 7 ('La Sagesse. Le non-agir') has fifteen pages of text by Grenier and fourteen pages of extracts from the major Taoist writings: this is considerably more, in both cases, than any other chapter.
24. In 'Le Non-sens taoïste, l'action occidentale et la poésie: Jean Grenier', *Critique*, 48 (1951), pp. 412–20.
25. It is only the posthumous *TL* that does not have such a heading. There is, however, one entry under 'Indifférence', but interestingly enough it is concerned with St François de Sales. The entry under 'Eau' refers both to Fénelon and to Lao Tzu. This apparent shift towards a more explicitly Christian rather than Taoist form of indifference may be significant, although the content of the 'Wou-wei' entries in the earlier *Lexiques* had been eclectic, including Christian and neutral elements as well as those drawn from Taoism.
26. Grenier did, however, retain some interest in Taoism to the end: see Étiemble, 'Jean Grenier ou l'homme vrai', *NRF*, 221 (May 1971), p. 11.
27. Art. cit., p. 6. See also Grenier's account of the totally silent 'lecture' given by a Hindu monk, *VQ*, 111–13 and *MIX*, 171.

CHAPTER 5

1. M. Laski, *Ecstasy, A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences* (London, 1961).
2. R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: an Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (Oxford, 1957).
3. See Grenier's comment after his discussion of Taoism in an interview: 'Il faut autre chose, non plus un je ne sais *quoi*, dont il a éte question, mais un je ne sais *qui*' (*ELF*, 78).
4. A. Piny, *L'État du pur amour ou conduite pour bientôt arriver à la perfection par le seul Fiat, dit et réitéré en toute sorte d'occasions* (1676), quoted in H. Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux*, VIII, *La Métaphysique des saints*, vol. II (Paris, 1930): *EBL*, 148 ff.; Fénelon, *Explications des maximes des saints* (1697): *EBL*, 150–52.
5. Review of Maître Eckhart, *Traités et sermons* (Paris, 1942), and *Choix de textes* (Paris, 1942), in *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie et d'histoire générale de la civilisation*, n.s., 34 (1943), pp. 172–75.
6. The same text appeared in 1958 as 'Molinos, le fondateur du Quiétisme et son "Guide spirituel"', *Revue philosophique*, 3 (1958), pp. 338–47.
7. Grenier always found personal relationships difficult. He was an only child, with a possessive mother (see the caricatural portrait of her as 'Madame Goudre' in Henri Bosco's novel *Irénée* (Paris, 1928), based on her visit to her son in Naples) and an inadequate step-father. As a child he had few friends: 'Mes camarades n'étaient pourtant jamais mes amis, et je n'avais pas d'amis' (*G*, 188). He often commented that he felt closer to animals, plants and inanimate things than to people (see, for instance, *ELF*, 35; *MIX*, 50–51). Man's basic need of others as *témoins* (*IM*, 56 (57); *CM*, 46), as mirrors in which to discover his own personality, as sources of sympathy, was met in Grenier's case partly by substitutes, in particular by animals such as Mouloud the cat and Taïaut the dog: according to Brice

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Parain, Grenier's first published book according to his contract with Gallimard was to have been *Les Mémoires d'un chat* (*NRF*, 221 (May 1971), p. 2). Animals had the advantage of not displaying the kind of sensitivity that made human relationships so difficult (for the complexity of human relationships, see *MIX*, 197–98): they were dependable without expecting too much in return. They helped to release his mind from human preoccupations, with the result that his thought is often surprisingly impersonal and abstract. Even his 'autobiography', *MIX*, was said by a friend to give the impression of having been written 'par quelqu'un qui vit dans une complète solitude', without a single allusion to family, friends, or anyone else (*MIX*, 215). However, it would be wrong to exaggerate his misanthropy. He was, after all, happily married, with two children, and he never opted out of society.

8. Note the reference in *Le Choix* to such writers as Garrigou-Lagrange, Guitton and Chevalier.
9. *G*, 87. Further information supplied, in a conversation with the author, by M. Alain Lemière, himself a former pupil of the school.
10. Undated pages, and letters of October 1925 (undated, but internal evidence gives a firm date) and of 25 February 1926.
11. Letter dated 29 (i.e. December 1926), in Max Jacob, *Choix de lettres à Jean Cocteau*, edited by A. Fraigneau and J. Denoël (Paris, n.d.), no. 35. This is the so-called 'note policière' which contains one of the most acute and unsparing commentaries on Grenier's personality.
12. In *Messages*, 1 (March 1942), pp. 11–12.
13. *Table ronde*, 26 (1950), pp. 48–49; reprinted in *APH* as 'La Religion peut-elle se passer de la philosophie?' (*APH*, 59–80).
14. 'Glimpse' is the right word: Grenier never allows himself to do more than allude to the possibility in passing, or at the very end of an essay and almost as an afterthought, as in *EM*, 212–13. In 'Fragments d'une deuxième lettre à Cornélius' he goes so far as to say: 'Voici plutôt le sujet de ma lettre: une union possible seulement par un médiateur . . . Mais tout cela demande une fidélité . . .' (*IM*, 190–91 (192)).
15. See also *L*, art. 'Foi' ('Lexique' (1951), art. 'Nu'): 'La foi nue: . . . Entre la croyance établie et l'incroyance, c'est la position dramatique de Montaigne et de ceux qui lui ressemblent.' Contrast the more positive statements of *NL*, art. 'Incrédule': '"Je suis trop sceptique pour être incrédule" — Je pourrais en dire autant que Benjamin Constant', and *L*, art. 'Nuit': 'B. Constant: "Ma surprise n'est pas que l'homme ait besoin d'une religion; ce qui m'étonne, c'est qu'il se croie jamais assez fort . . . pour en rejeter une . . . Dans la nuit épaisse qui nous entoure, est-il une lueur que nous puissions repousser?"' See also *SMC*, 55.
16. See *C*, (3), 113: 'un choix qui ne demande pas d'initiative'.
17. Mass broadcast on France-Culture, 28 March 1971; leaflet of eight pages duplicated and published by P. Lelong, Dominicain, 222 rue du Faubourg St-Honoré, Paris VIII[e].
18. Of these four, the first and fourth appear in *P* (1965), the second in *SMC*, 62, the third in *QP* (1970), and the fourth also in *NNRF*, 19 (July 1954), p. 164 (with a note that it had been published originally in *Troisième Convoi* 'vers septembre 1943').
19. Although these have never been published as 'prières', echoes of them are found in Grenier's published works. See, for instance, *L*, arts 'Peu', 'Espoir'; 'Lexique' (1949), art. 'Espoir'; *AP*, 200.
20. See *IM*, 154 (158) ('La Rose sans épines'); *LI*, 90–92, (91–92) ('Les Îles Fortunées'); 'Actes de foi' (art. cit.).
21. This attitude stems both from a recognition of his own weakness and from that of his dependence on one stronger than himself. Compare this entry in an unpublished *Journal de voyage*: 'Naples, 18 avril 1928. Je n'avais jamais compris ce que signifiait le mot: grâce. Mais je le comprends depuis que je comprends la puissance de ma faiblesse.'
22. Letter dated 19 September 1968, in R. Quesnoy, 'L'Effacement', *NRF*, 221 (May 1971), p. 35.

CHAPTER 6

1. The four chapters which constitute the first part, 'Les Corrélations naturelles', all appeared originally as articles in 1949–50: Chapter 1, 'La Corrélation du bien et du mal', as 'Le Mal et sa nécessité', *Empédocle*, 3 (June–July 1949), pp. 3–13; Chapter 2, 'La Corrélation du

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bonheur et du malheur', as 'La Souffrance et son anéantissement', *Empédocle*, 6 (December 1949), pp. 9–18; Chapter 3, 'La Corrélation du bon et du méchant', as 'Le Mal et la liberté', *Cahiers de la Pléiade*, 8 (Autumn 1949), pp. 32–41; Chapter 4, 'La Corrélation du meilleur et du pire', as 'Les Incompatibles, ou Le Mieux est l'ennemi du bien', *Empédocle*, 11 (July–August 1950), pp. 24–39. Part of the stimulus to write them came from the publication, in 1948, of two important books concerned with the problem of evil: V. Jankélévitch, *Le Mal*, to which Grenier refers, *EM*, 66–68, and R. Polin, *Du laid, du mal, du faux*, to which he refers, *EM*, 64–65. The fourth article was also provoked by René Char's question in *Empédocle*, 10: 'Y a-t-il des Incompatibles?'

2. See also *LI*, 131 (123–24) and 39 (53), both concerned with India; and *MIX*, 168.
3. The aesthetic justification is one which Grenier, as a creative artist and art critic himself, found attractive. In the *Entretiens* he considers it at some length (37–40), citing Epictetus and Sufi writers in support. There is an echo of it in Grenier's many references to terraces and other high places from which a detached and total view may be obtained. See, for instance, *LI*, 88–89 (89–90); *IM*, 14–17 (18–20), 49 (49–50), 81 (81), 102 (104–05); *G*, 185–86; *VN*, 3, 15, 21, 38–39, 154, 228, 263, etc.
4. P. Claudel, *Traité de la co-naissance au monde et de soi-même* (1904), in *Art poétique*, (Paris, 1907).
5. See *EM*, 13. Consciousness and contingency go together, in that the interval which separates the contingent individual from the necessary world is that of consciousness, elsewhere called by Grenier 'la marge de l'humain'.
6. This passage is absent from the 1949 text, but cf. *EBL*, 20, 41.
7. Art. cit., in *Empédocle*, 6, p. 12. The text in *EM* is reworked, but in the passage quoted only the last sentence is different: 'C'est ce malaise qui menace la sérénité de l'être que je dis mien, comme pourrait le faire le soupçon non formulé de la jalousie ou la muette amertume de l'exil.' In *EM* Grenier also appends a note at this point, referring the reader to Kant's 'opuscule capital', *Le Concept de grandeur négative* (*Versuch, den Begriff der negativen Grössen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen* (1763)).
8. This approach is similar to that suggested in *C*, 82–88 (65–71), where pure subjectivity is seen as 'la seule dénomination intrinsèque de la pensée et de l'Absolu'. The world is 'une maladie dont on guérit'. That is an Indian concept, far removed from modern European existentialism. Compare (but also contrast) *EBL*, 115, where it is an 'annulation de l'homme' that is envisaged.
9. Even the Taoist does not remain completely motionless. Grenier is therefore not ruling out the Taoist solution here.
10. See *EBL*, 25 ff, 44 ff, 71 ff.
11. This conception of the mediatory role of places and objects is important for Grenier's understanding of creation, and will be considered in greater detail later (see below, pp. 90, 101, 121, 138).
12. Human weakness or imperfection serves to underline the existence of some absolute standard of perfection, namely the Absolute. Grenier's humanism lasts only so long as he does not take that argument to its logical conclusion (as of course he does in *Le Choix*).
13. In one sense this chapter is most unsatisfactory, in that the burning questions of the existentialists are raised but not answered: rather, they are dismissed somewhat perfunctorily. However, Grenier quickly points out the narrowness of the existentialists' presuppositions and the untenability of their conclusions, and indicates alternative paths along which a solution may lie. He is both undermining and liberating the faculty of thought, and the result is a fresh understanding of freedom.
14. This section of the chapter (173–84, twelve pages out of nineteen) is largely made up of an extract from the preface which Grenier wrote for Dostoyevsky's *Mémoires écrits dans un souterrain* (Paris, 1955), hence the emphasis on Dostoyevsky throughout.
15. Grenier argues that 'on a eu tort de présenter la pensée de Dostoïevski comme une apologie du malheur' (*EM*, 182).
16. The reading *dur* is clearly due to a printer's error: *pur* is the reading in *RQE*.
17. This is ultimately the same as the conflict between the truth and happiness, although the content of the particular truth is different.
18. Grenier gives the reference simply as '*La Peste*, fin'. The passage is found in *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles* (Paris, 1962), p. 1467. Grenier's interpretation is far more positive and optimistic than what Camus wrote, in that silence for him may be understood as a victory, whereas for Camus it is clearly a defeat.

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19. '. . . Et ceci sort du cadre de cet *Essai*' (*EM*, 213, n.). Grenier is continually drawn back to this solution despite himself, when both his ideal 'absolutism' and his provisional humanism are undermined by the honest recognition of the weakness of contingent humanity.
20. 'Les choses' are important to Grenier for several reasons. They represent the near-at-hand, and hence the accessible, as here; they also represent non-contingent existence, displaying a perfect coincidence with their essence, and hence point to the Absolute (as in *LI*, 19 (38–39)); they provide a *cadre* which reconciles the contingent human observer to the world (as in *IM*, 163–64 (167)) or to a human tradition stretching back into the past (as in *ELF*, 34), or to humanity in general quite apart from such a heritage (as in *APH*, 95–96) (and with all these, compare *APH*, 173); or they simply offer a certain basic sense of security in the face of change and death (as in *LI*, 109 (105)); *APH*, 83–84; *G*, 184; *ELF*, 35–36). They can also express one's personality (as in *APH*, 86).
21. The subtitle of 'L'Île de Pâques' in *LI* (1) is 'l'Homme et la mort'. For the sense of uneasiness, see for example *LI*, 98 (98), 105–08 (104–05).
22. Note the verbal similarity to the end of 'Existence et destinée': 'l'homme était surtout (je ne dis pas uniquement) fait pour se donner parce que, tout compte fait, il n'avait presque rien (je ne dis pas rien) à perdre' (*EBL*, 116: cf. *C*, 66 (50)).
23. See also *VN*, 274: 'Plus modeste dans mes prétentions, je me contente de penser: il ne faut pas *d'avance* nier ce dont on ne sait rien. Si par hasard il y a une main qui se tend vers nous, il ne faut pas refuser de la prendre.'
24. The 'liberté de spécification' and even the 'liberté d'exercice' may be deliberately sacrificed in the interests not of a 'liberté du sage', but of a 'liberté *du croyant*'.

CHAPTER 7

1. See *IM*, 128 (132), 136–37 (140).
2. *Bulletin de l'Académie Méditerranéenne*, 1936; see also reports in *Réveil d'Antibes*, 27 November 1935, and in *Progrès d'Antibes*, 30 November 1935.
3. Unpublished letters dated 3 May 1926 and 15 November 1926.
4. The text was later remodelled and extended, and appeared in *IM* as 'Penser à la figure humaine'.
5. The middle clause, 'je veux dire l'équilibre humain', is found in the *Écrits* text but not that of *IM*.
6. This recognition of the importance of the negative background against which a work of art stands out will play an increasingly significant part in Grenier's thought.
7. See *EBL*, 103; *APH*, 197: 'Tous les hommes échouent, y compris ceux qui réussissent.'
8. *LI*, 85 (87); *IM*, 43–44 (32). See also *G*, 441 (on the revelatory quality of the sunlight); and the account in A. Camus, *L'Étranger*, of the effect of the sun on Meursault.
9. See, for instance, *C*, 63 (47). The word is Masson-Oursel's.
10. For an early intuition of the danger, see 'L'Île de Pâques'.
11. On the difficulty of such a *fidélité*, see *IM*, 191 (192).
12. Not that this constitutes a final, definitive break with Brittany. The comment in *ELF*, 27, that 'J'ai voulu exorciser les fantômes du passé en écrivant . . . *Les Grèves*' does not do justice to the continuing loyalty to Brittany which that novel also conveys. Grenier's grave, by his own wish, combines rough Breton granite with Mediterranean rosemary.
13. See 'J. V.' (Jean Varille), 'Mort de Jean Grenier', in Fondation de Lourmarin Laurent-Vibert, *Comptes rendus annuels*, 1970, p. 13.

CHAPTER 8

1. See also *Albert Camus—Jean Grenier: Correspondance 1932–1960*, and J. S. T. Garfitt, 'Grenier and Camus: from *Les Îles* to *La Chute*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 17 (1981), pp. 217–29.
2. See *AC*, 9 ff. The 'Biographie' by Roger Quilliot in A. Camus, *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles* (Paris, 1962), is misleading in its suggestion that Camus did not meet Grenier until his first post-*baccalauréat* year (*lettres supérieures*), 1932 (pp. xxviii-xxix). The same scholar corrects the record, however, in the companion volume, *Essais* (Paris, 1965), p. 1169.

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3. 'Rencontres avec André Gide', *NRF*, special number (November 1951), 'Hommage à André Gide': reprinted in *Essais*, op. cit., p. 1117.
4. On Grenier's teaching methods there is not only the testimony of Étiemble but also that of Jean Clair ('Jean Grenier professeur'), in *NRF*, 221 (May 1971), pp. 25–28. The reports of the official Inspectors are also illuminating. In 1936–37 Parodi wrote: 'M. Grenier est un esprit curieux et complexe, avec quelque chose d'un peu nonchalant dans l'allure . . . sans aucune prétention à la rigueur systématique . . . mais qui a de la finesse, de la pénétration, un sentiment sincère des problèmes et une certaine naïveté élégante dans la manière de les aborder. Il semble avoir une grande action sur les élèves, qu'il intéresse et éveille aux curiosités intellectuelles.' In 1939, when Grenier had returned to France and was teaching at the Lycée Michelet, Davy commented: 'Cette méthode de conversation pleine de simplicité a sans doute son charme. Mais il faudrait que cette conversation fût sans cesse soutenue par l'invisible et efficace armature et soigneusement orientée et dirigée . . . Mais ces réserves faites je me plais à reconnaître que l'atmosphère de la classe est sympathique et que si la manière est familière elle n'en est pas moins distinguée et personnelle.'
5. Jean Daniel, some seven years younger than Camus and present editor of the *Nouvel Observateur*, recalls that in the mid-1930s 'Grenier c'était la *NRF* à Alger. L'esthétisme, le doute complaisant, l'éclectisme désabusé. L'oscillation permanente entre Paulhan et Valéry' (*NRF*, 221 (May 1971), p. 18, 'Le Consentement ironique').
6. These were: 'A Tipasa' which is about Djémila, 'Poésie et prose d'Alger', 'Boulevard de l'abîme' and 'Corps et âme'. In addition, 'La Lumière d'Oran' was published in *Alger-Étudiant* in 1933 but not reprinted in *Santa-Cruz*. Both writers devoted pages to these places. Grenier's are not inferior to his other pieces, and the most plausible reason for their suppression is Grenier's desire not to compete with his *protégé*.
7. See also J. S. T. Garfitt, art. cit.
8. *Caligula* underwent several important revisions, in which Camus's evolving attitude to his protagonist can be traced. See, for instance, J. Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (London, 1959); G. Brée, *Camus* (New Brunswick, 1959); J. C. A. Gadourek-Backer, *Les Innocents et les coupables* (The Hague, 1963); J.-Cl. Brisville, *Camus* (Paris, 1959); P. Dunwoodie, '*Caligula*: l'univers dostoïevskien et l'évolution de Scipion', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 53 (1979), pp. 220–30. My references are to the earliest (manuscript) version of the play dating from 1938–39, as collated by R. Quilliot in *Théâtre, récits* . . ., except where otherwise indicated.
9. G.-P. Gélinas, *La Liberté dans la pensée d'Albert Camus* (Fribourg, Switzerland, 1965), p. 45.
10. Cf. *LI*, 89 (90): 'je m'acceptais par la seule adhésion de mes pieds au sol . . .'
11. *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises* (Paris, 1971), p. 314.
12. 'Une Œuvre, un homme', *Cahiers du Sud*, 253 (February 1943), pp. 224–28: reprinted in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Camus*, edited by J. Lévi-Valensi (Paris, 1970), pp. 36–40. Grenier underlines the fundamental opposition between his own metaphysical framework and that of Camus. The first extract quoted is followed by the disclaimer: 'Je ne partage pas cette conception.' In his Preface to *Théâtre, récits*, . . ., Grenier further emphasizes Camus's rejection of a supernatural dimension to existence (§ 'Le Non au surnaturel', pp. xi-xii). See also *AC*, 137–39.
13. P. Ginestier, *Pour connaître la pensée de Camus* (Paris, 1964), p. 47, quoting from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, in *Essais*, p. 175.

CHAPTER 9

1. 'La Certitude de l'unité et le problème des croyances', §1, in *Recherches philosophiques*, 6 (1936–37); reprinted in *C* (1), 141 (but not in later editions).
2. This kind of self-analysis by members of the young intelligentsia was common at the time. See B. Crémieux, *Inquiétude et reconstruction* (Paris, 1931); H. Daniel-Rops, *Notre Inquiétude* (Paris, 1927); and the series of 'Examens de conscience', for instance in *Cahiers du mois*, 21–22 (1926); and see also D. Nasaw, 'From Inquiétude to Revolution', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), pp. 149–72, and J. L. Loubet del Bayle, *Les Non-conformistes des années* 30 (Paris, 1969).
3. *EO* contains the following chapters: 'Qu'est-ce qu'une orthodoxie?' (1937), 'L'Âge des orthodoxies' (1936), 'L'Orthodoxie contre l'intelligence' (1936), 'Réponse à un orthodoxe' (?1936), 'L'Intellectuel dans la société' (1935), 'Pour la défense de la culture' (1937), 'Notes

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sur les "précurseurs" du matérialisme marxiste' (1937), 'Remarques sur l'idée de progrès' (1936), 'Lettre à André Malraux' (1938).

4. See also Grenier's review of B. Parain, *Retour à la France* (Paris, 1936) in *NRF*, 277 (October, 1936), pp. 724–26.
5. *Europe*, 15 June 1936: see *EO*, 62 (58), where Grenier comments on Friedmann's criticisms.
6. J. Kohn-Étiemble, *226 Lettres inédites de Jean Paulhan* . . . (Paris, 1975), p. 105, n. 1. She points out that this attitude was shared also by non-Communist supporters of the anti-Fascist cause such as Chamson and Benda. There is an interesting document reproduced on pp. 428–35 of the same book, in which Étiemble takes up some of the points made in 'L'Âge des orthodoxies', and Grenier's replies are given in the margin. Étiemble's opinions were later to change significantly: in *Hygiène des lettres*, vol. II, *Littérature dégagée: l'écrivain et le stalinisme* (Paris, 1955), p. 119, he endorses many of Grenier's reservations about Marxism.
7. Grenier gives a strong warning against an over-hasty commitment. In 1935 he foresees Gide's forthcoming disillusionment with the U.S.S.R. and the Communist International: *EO*, 131–32 (119).
8. *Journal des nations* (Geneva), 15 June 1938, 'L'Horizon des livres: l'homme et la politique'. This is essentially the same criticism as that made by Lambert in an unpublished letter dated 21 April 1936: 'La liberté consiste à n'employer les mots qu' après les avoir recréés, forgés.' That was what irritated him in 'L'Âge des orthodoxies'. Grenier denounced Marxism for taking away the freedom of the spirit, yet he himself was not being free. He had not yet thrown off the shackles of other men's thoughts and words. Lambert insisted that liberation should be followed by a truly personal commitment, and frequently avowed himself disappointed by Grenier's reluctance to express such a commitment in his writing.
9. The first major critic to attack Grenier's original article, Georges Sadoul ('Un Pourfendeur du marxisme', *Commune*, 33 (May 1936), pp. 1131–38), employed a less subtle approach. He simply attacked the *NRF* for daring to publish such a treacherous piece of writing. It is important to note that Grenier's argument against Marxism is applicable, and is indeed applied at some length by him, to other 'orthodoxies' including Thomism: 'Ce que nous disons du communisme nous pouvons le dire d'une doctrine adverse mais également à la mode: le thomisme' (*EO*, 37 (36)). See also *C*, 22–25 (26–29), and 54, n. 13 (not in later editions); and Grenier's review of Thierry Maulnier's *Mythes socialistes* (Paris, 1936), *NRF*, 276 (September 1936), pp. 551–52. Paulhan recognized this clearly, and had to point it out to Étiemble: see J. Kohn-Étiemble, op. cit., p. 103 (letter 42) and p. 106, n. 4.
10. J. Kohn-Étiemble, op. cit., pp. 104, 107, n. 6.
11. See *AC*, 41–46, and compare *EBL*, 89–90 ('2^{e} examen de conscience'). Their recently published correspondence sheds much light on this hitherto rather obscure episode, not only validating the chronology suggested by H. Lottman in his biography of Camus but also, more importantly, showing how similar their views of commitment were at this period, at a deep level, despite the differences in practice.

CHAPTER 10

1. Quoted in G. LeClec'h, 'Lequier', *Figaro littéraire*, 26 May 1962.
2. Lemière recalls that when he first met Grenier at the Bibliothèque Municipale of Saint-Brieuc in about 1918 their conversation was about painting. Lemière, who was intending at the time to go to the École des Arts Décoratifs, and who later specialized in the arts of the Far East, used to go to the library to read reviews devoted to the decorative arts (conversation with the author). Dubuffet was a member of the group of friends who used to meet in Paris at the lodgings of Chamson or Guilloux. Max Jacob and Grenier met at a literary *salon* in Paris in 1922 (see Grenier's articles 'Un Poète breton, Max Jacob', *Bretagne touristique*, 15 January 1925, p. 6; 'Hommage à Max Jacob', *Aguedal*, 2 (May 1939), p. 131; and also the footnote in Max Jacob, *Lettres à un ami* (Lausanne-Bâle-Paris, 1951), p. 9 n.), and the older poet and artist acted as an aesthetic mentor to the aspiring young writer.
3. See Grenier's articles, 'Jean Paulhan, critique d'art', in Jean Paulhan, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V (Paris, 1970), pp. 259–66; 'C'est en disparaissant qu'il apparaissait', *Figaro littéraire*, 21–27 October 1968, pp. 16–17 ('Les lettres françaises en deuil de Jean Paulhan'); 'L'Émerveillement', *NRF*, 197 (May 1969) ('Hommage à Jean Paulhan'), pp. 836–40; 'Vers l'exactitude', *Cahiers des (quatre) saisons*, 10 (April-May 1957), pp. 289–91. Grenier's

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friendship with Paulhan lasted over forty years, from their first meeting in 1925 to Paulhan's death in 1968.

4. 'Devant les portraits: la figure humaine', *Verve*, 5–6 (April 1939).
5. *Plaquette* for exhibition of paintings by Jean Launois, Galerie Colline (Oran, 1941); *Recueil de reproductions des toiles de Richard Maguet*, (Paris, 1941). Grenier's text for the latter was reproduced as 'En souvenir de Richard Maguet', *Fontaine*, 15 (September 1941), pp. 75–77.
6. Texts on Braque in *Combat*, 3 March 1945; *Variété*, 3 (1946), pp. 12–21; *Braque. Peintures 1909–1947* (Paris, 1948): English edition, translated by D. Cooper (London, 1948); *Derrière le miroir*, 48–49 (June-July 1952); *L'Esprit de la peinture contemporaine* (Lausanne-Bâle-Paris, 1951).
7. The colume contains: 'Le Divorce' (originally in *Combat*, 17 November 1944); 'La Peinture contemporaine' (*L'Arche*, 27–28 (May 1947), pp. 3–20), including 'Portrait de Picasso' and 'Portrait de Braque'; 'La Poésie de l'espace'; 'Chagall ou le peintre-poète'; 'André Lhote, théoricien, suivi de: Avec André Lhote'; and 'Peintures récentes de Georges Braque'. Most of these were later reprinted in *Essais sur la peinture contemporaine* (1959).
8. *L'Imitation et les principes de l'esthétique classique* (1963); *Vicissitudes de l'esthétique et révolutions du goût* (1965).
9. Part One, entitled 'L'Imitation et les principes de l'esthétique', and consisting of two sections, 'L'Imitation' and 'L'Esthétique classique', is clearly based on the first series of Sorbonne lectures; Part Three, entitled 'Du goût', with an introductory section 'Vicissitudes de l'esthétique', is equally clearly based on the second series. Part Two, 'De la création', which is partly based on a series of articles in the *NRF*, is discussed below.
10. For example, texts on L. Zack and J. Kerbour in 1972 and 1974 respectively.
11. Compare the use of the term *grâce* in 'Actes de foi' (1942).
12. Poetry indeed grows organically out of human work, as Grenier recognizes in another essay of the same year ('Dans la campagne romaine'): 'Les métiers supportables ne sont-ils pas aussi ceux où l'on peut fredonner en travaillant, mêler intimement la poésie à l'ouvrage, créer volontairement un ouvrage imposé?' (*IM*, 54 (56)). The popular song, growing in the same way out of ordinary daily work, was particularly important to Grenier: see '¡Ay, ay, ay!', *Aguedal*, 1–2 (March 1938), p. 40; 'Depuis des années', *Lirica*, 7 (June 1935), 10; *IM*, 17 (20), 21 (23–24), 61 (62), 152 (157); *VN*, 140. According to Mme Grenier, her husband used to play records of Spanish popular songs while writing.
13. *Travaux du Deuxième Congrès International d'Esthétique et de Science de l'Art* (Paris, 1937). Grenier's paper is in vol. I, pp. 254-56.
14. This arrogance is sufficiently tempered by the human warmth and also the sense of human weakness that belong to the Mediterranean tradition. 'Cornélius' is a northerner, and his examples are drawn from Amsterdam and St Petersburg.
15. P. Boulez, 'Aléa', *NRF*, 59 (November 1957), pp. 839–57.
16. In the first *Lexique* (1949), art. 'Illumination'. The same entry appears, with the omission of the penultimate sentence on Zen, in *L*. See also *NL*, art. 'Instant'; *TL*, art. 'Création'.
17. 'Les Pèlerins d'Emmaüs', *Lirica*, 7 (June 1935), p. 11: 'Une surprise, si j'y suis docile, peut me révéler — à moi-même — ma vérité, mon bonheur, ma justice et ma loi.'
18 See also *LI*, 139 f. (130 f.): one section of the essay on India is entitled 'L'Illumination'.
19. See *PC*, 73, 101, 113–14, 129.
20. This is a text which deserves to rank alongside the lyrical essays of the 1930s in its limpidity of expression and its subtle espousal of the subject.

CHAPTER 11

1. See, for instance, *G*, 114, 211; *NL*, arts 'Départ', 'Horloge', 'Ou'; *MIX*, 165–66; *C*, 144 (92); *L*, arts 'Esprit', 'Force', 'Mon'; *TL*, art. 'Prophétie'; and Grenier's articles 'Voyageurs français du XIX^{e} siècle', *Voyage en Grèce*, 8 (Spring 1938), pp. 12–14; 'Barrès et Gide au Liban', *Combat*, 8 November 1946; 'Le voyage', *NRF*, 138 (June 1964), pp. 1000–10 (reprinted in *VQ*); and his review of Toulet's *Journal et voyages* in *NRF*, 252 (September 1934), pp. 449–50.
2. See *LI* (2), 13 (26); *G*, 302; *VN*, 223.
3. See also *VN*, 81; *IM*; 70 (71): 'Poussés comme dans un cul-de-sac par la pauvreté, la maladie, la solitude, le dépaysement, notre éternité se révèle à nous sans équivoque.' The passage which Grenier quotes in *ELF* does not figure as such in the text of Camus's *L'Envers et l'endroit*, the only work which corresponds to Grenier's remark that it was

Notes for Chapter 11, continued

written when Camus was 21. 'La Mort dans l'âme' does, however, contain a passage from Camus's diary which is about 'le voyage' and which has a similar ring; and according to Roger Quilliot that passage was followed in the typescript (but not in the final version) by the additional sentence 'Ce qui fait le prix du voyage, c'est la peur' (A. Camus, *Essais*, pp. 34 and 1191). Now that is the sentence which introduces the quotation in *ELF*, loc. cit. Grenier evidently had access to another version of *L'Envers et l'endroit*, not available to Quilliot when he edited the text.

4. *LI*, 81 (84–85), 93 (93); *MIX*, 66; *VN*, 274.
5. *Jacques*, completed in 1925 but not published until 1979, is one of these early *récits*. It shows a less well digested influence of Nietzsche, Gide and Constant than his more mature works, but many of the themes (e.g. scruples, silence, the Absolute, the sea, travelling) will persist with little modification, and the fragmented narrative mode points both to *Les Grèves* and to the *Mémoires intimes de X*.
6. *IM*, 63 (64), 99 (102), 103 (105), 154–55 (159–60). Compare the image of the scattered beads of a broken rosary or necklace, *IM*, 82 (83); *G*, 187, 266.
7. As in 'De la création', the entirely free act of creation holds an undeniable fascination for Grenier, but he can only contemplate it from a distance. Like the Absolute in *Le Choix*, it sterilizes action, and some other starting-point must be found.
8. See also *IM*, 54 (56): 'créer volontairement un ouvrage imposé'.
9. See also *ELF*, 28, where in reply to Louis Foucher's question: 'Pourquoi ce titre: *Les Grèves*? Que signifie-t-il?', Grenier says: 'Pour moi, c'est un symbole de l'indétermination . . . Aussi l'Océan est-il en perpétuel mouvement, impossible à fixer.'
10. In *Bretagne touristique*, 15 October 1924, p. 227 ('Un Philosophe breton, Jules Lequier').
11. *Voir Naples* could of course lend itself to a fuller analysis, in which the prominence of many of Grenier's major themes could be demonstrated. This study is deliberately restricted, the sea-imagery being of particular importance for the representation of the central problems of freedom and choice.
12. This is the point at which the liberating effect of a maturely-decided commitment may be acknowledged. In the case of Franz it is not, but the argument of 'Sagesse de Lourmarin' is at least plausible.
13. See *G*, 250; *NL*, art. 'Souci'.
14. The narrator offers himself (p. 333) as a *témoin* rather than as a judge, thus fulfilling what Grenier elsewhere claims to be one of the basic needs of a human being.

CONCLUSION

1. See J. Kohn-Étiemble, *226 Lettres inédites de Jean Paulhan*, p. 111.
2. Letters of 28 August 1924 (in *Lettres à un ami*) and 10 October 1925 (unpublished) respectively.

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