

## I. On Beginning

We may imagine the beginning as the origin—as the absolute point of departure. The beginning is an axiom: it *goes without saying, on its own*; nothing precedes it; it is set in the act that posits it. It finds the principle that makes it go in itself. It is immobile, the prime mover. Or else, for example, the biblical incipit that designates the pure initial start (the opening without preliminaries, the header: “In the beginning . . .”), the initiator without a cause (the one who begins: “God”), the first gesture (“created”—exactly this, to begin). Three times in the beginning, the beginning itself, alone, reiterated in its solitude.

But this beginning can only be grasped or put into words in a fictional discourse—a legend, fable, or parable. Thinking that intends to be theoretical never claims to reach this point of origin properly on its own (though it may dream of doing so). Scientific, philosophical, or literary beginnings spring from work, expelled after a period of gestation or a process. It takes long labor to beget the thought of the big bang. The axiom is built. The beginning finishes off: this is the second pre-hypothesis—and it is Hegel’s, for whom the beginning is the result. The science (of logic) presupposes the whole movement of phenomenology (of the spirit). The first gesture of science takes up again the last act of knowledge. The beginning is (at) the end.

Third prototype: the beginning in the middle. This is Gilles Deleuze’s supposition, and his manner. Reading him, one always has the impression of starting en route or getting there after the beginning. He recommends this formally: do not give thought to things at their origin, where they are not yet formed, but in the heart of their development, where their being asserts and shows itself. At its origin, the thing is still caught within that which precedes it; we should come aboard the process in the middle, as onto a moving train.<sup>1</sup> To think in motion, in becoming—inasmuch as becoming moves along, which is to say, not in its (supposed) initial impulsion,

but in the drive of its mobility. The beginning is median, as it were, yet not as a simple mean-time or inter-mediary—less than being. Or perhaps yes, precisely—it is there, within the mediation, movement, process, and non-immediate that one has to think.<sup>2</sup> Nonlogical mediation—it could be the middle of the world, the driven middle, of the world on the move.

Here, of course, we prefer to take this path, the one cutting across [*traverse*]. But to start elsewhere than at the beginning does not mean beginning just anywhere. Such an inception presupposes that *processes* exist, that one latches onto them, and that one sets out to think in their midst. The wish here is to think (within and about) development, (within and about) becoming. Becoming is a matter of thought. To think about becoming means thinking, quite simply. That which wants to be thought is nothing but that which is becoming. To think means to acknowledge as thought that which is becoming. That is why the thought of becoming has to be produced on the move, on the way. One has to think as it comes to be—as it comes. But “as it comes” is not just “in any way whatsoever.” One has to come aboard what is coming and not miss it by a misstep. This implies, first, that one should not think within the residence of dead zones, or not only or mainly there. One has to think starting from living zones. Dead zones are provenances reduced to the state of origins. Secondly, do not become immobilized in imaginary zones. And this is the most difficult; one should rather think in zones of effectiveness. This is a question of the real, of the true—the most difficult question, which one certainly should not bypass or flee. What is coming—where we must climb aboard while it is moving—is truth.

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Why Europe, then, to start with? So as to probe something. Europe is neither an origin nor an end. Europe is neither a foundation nor a grounding, nor a goal or a completion, but rather a median or intermediary object. A middle (in-between place [*mi-lieu*]). As a matter for thought, Europe is in progress, on the way—for moving across. I was not born there, as a matter of fact; I came to it, and took it along the way. Or rather Europe took me and carried me away. I was born in Africa, as were my father and my mother, my grandparents and their fathers and mothers, their grandparents, and so on, for all we know or may guess, for a long time, a very long time. Stemming, perhaps, from groups and families that had

been crisscrossing the Mediterranean for centuries, many of them in Arab countries, some in the Iberian Peninsula, but coming from Arab countries, and returning after being expelled, crossing the Mediterranean or traveling along its shores, like Aeneas, like Paul, Jews like the latter, coming from Palestine long ago, they said, but living in Arab countries for centuries; coming from Arabized Jews or Judaized Berbers, or from departing Sephardic Jews, or others who left no traces. Every genealogy is an exclusion of thousands or hundreds of thousands of ancestors. I made the calculation. Let us imagine that my name is X. I can find and confirm the filiation of one of my ancestors named X—during the fifteenth century, for example. Let us call my generation  $g_1$ . My parents are  $g_2$ : there were two of them. Of my grandparents,  $g_3$ , there were four. Of my great-grandparents,  $g_4$ , eight. Let us assume there are three or four generations in each century.<sup>3</sup> Since the fifteenth century, this amounts to six centuries—twenty-one generations. How many ancestors did I have at the  $g_{21}$  level? My calculation yields 1,048,576, with the same ranking. In the fifteenth century, at a putative moment of history, I have (arithmetically speaking) one million, forty-eight thousand, five hundred, and seventy-six ancestors. And therefore, when I say that I stem from X, who during that time had the same name as I do, I am eliminating one million, forty-eight thousand, five hundred, and seventy-five members from my ancestry, and additionally all those from the subsequent generational layers (situated between the two moments in time, during these six centuries). Of course, I cannot claim to know where they all lived—all those, the ones before them and after them—even supposing a high rate of endogamy that would reduce their numbers. One would have to be unbearably obsessed to take for granted that they were all Jewish, or all from Oran, or all speakers of Arabic. But it is quite likely that a good number of them hung around the Mediterranean, between one monotheism and another, various ports and trading posts, certainly more numerous in the south, returned to the south after more than one mass expulsion. What were they speaking? Mostly Arabic, and a little Spanish, and for prayers a mixture based on Hebrew, which they barely understood. I was born in North Africa, by the sea, toward the middle of the twentieth century. The legendary memory of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and beyond them said this: we have been here *forever*.

Now, Europe took me away in the following circumstances. All Algerian Jews became naturalized French citizens by a decree issued in Tours

(France) in 1871.<sup>4</sup> Within four generations, my family changed languages, thinking, and lifestyle—and finally their continent. My great-grandfather Rabbi Chalom Djian, who lived in Oran and died in 1929, spoke only Arabic, dressed like an Arab, and ate sitting on the floor. My grandmother was a pious and observant village schoolteacher, but with a sense of humor. My father was a middle-school teacher and a member of the Communist Party, with Enlightenment ideas. Then I came. I have never known a word of Arabic. The French language is my native land. I think as an atheist, there's no going back. At the end of the Algerian war, we came to France, as did a million others.<sup>5</sup> Like them, we were “repatriated.” This is the paradox: we were “repatriated” to a fatherland from which we had never come, since my ancestors—so much at least is established—had been living in Algeria long before its conquest by the French. Europe took us and carried us away on the run—and we were happy. My father, who had supported its war of independence and had paid the price for it, no longer saw Algeria as his home, our future. He was hopelessly in love with France and with Europe the beautiful: Spain, England, Italy—and Germany; the Prado, the jovial, uncompromising Churchill, Michelangelo, Beethoven, and Marx. Worshipping France as the land of the rule of law and of equality, he joyfully let himself be torn away from his ancestral shores and never returned. He is buried in Marseille.

This is not perhaps the provenance of an authentic European. Maybe. And yet the hypothesis that came to light little by little in the course of this work might be that, unexpectedly (in a transferential, nonfounding mode), such a history dovetails with, or reiterates, Europe's primordial constitution—that Europe is not a patrimony of native people but of passengers, which it carries on board or on its deck; that every European is passing through, traversing it; and that Europe is not thinkable outside of this: crossed, which is to say, both covered or crisscrossed with roads, and as *a crossing* [*traversée*]*—Europe as a passage. And therefore, Europe the provisional, to be crossed, overstepped, freed from itself. Intermediary Europe, Europe-process. Mid-way* [*mi-lieu*].

On this (non-originary, noncompleted, an-archic) score, Europe may be a good object-of-thought—that is to say, a good vehicle—with which to begin. Let us see this as the initiatory and preliminary hypothesis—let's say, hypothesis zero (*bo*).