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Paul Ludwig Landsberg, a Knight Errant of the Spirit *in* Barcelona

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abstract

Paul Ludwig Landsberg (Bonn, 1901–Oranienburg, 1944) was a prominent student of the German philosopher Max Scheler. Born into a Jewish family, Landsberg was a professor at the University of Bonn until 1933, when he left his country at the time of Hitler's rise to power. In spring 1934, Joaquim Xirau, dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Barcelona, invited him to give lectures and teach classes in the Seminar on Education. During the academic years 1934–35 and 1935–36, Landsberg led classes in Barcelona on St. Augustine, Maine de Biran, Nietzsche and Scheler. His personality and his teaching were to leave a lasting impression in the memory of an entire generation of young university students who joined in the intellectual climate fostered by university autonomy and by Joaquim Xirau's encouragement. Drawing closely on Phenomenology, Existentialism and Personalism, Landsberg was especially known for his reflections on the experience of death and the moral problem of suicide. His own tragic end in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, where he died of starvation and exhaustion, further underscores the unity of thought and life that typified his work.

keywords

Paul Ludwig Landsberg, University of Barcelona, experience, death, Nietzsche, Max Scheler.

1. Life and work of an itinerant philosopher

Paul Ludwig Landsberg (1901–1944), a German Jewish philosopher, professor at the University of Bonn and student and friend of Max Scheler, taught at the University of Barcelona in the academic years 1934–35 and 1935–36, during the brief period of university autonomy. Invited by Joaquim Xirau, who served as dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters from 1933 to 1939, Landsberg took part in the activities of the Seminar on Education, giving lectures and teaching classes on St. Augustine, Maine de Biran, Nietzsche, Max Scheler and others. As an outcome of his stay, he left an indelible mark

on many students both as an intellectual and as a human being, particularly among the students most closely allied with the figure and teaching of Joaquim Xirau. From the evocation of this brilliant, passionate, young philosopher written many years later in widely varied contexts by prominent intellectuals and academics, such as Jordi Maragall, Miquel Siguan and Francesc Gomà, it is clear that Landsberg's impact was surprisingly profound. All of them experienced a lasting effect from their contact with this exiled thinker who was pursued by a tragic fate that his own writings on the experience of death and the moral problem of suicide seemed almost to prophesy: "My image of Paul Ludwig Landsberg," wrote Francesc Gomà, by way of example, "is that of an authentic knight errant of the spirit. I can see him on the upper gallery of the Humanities Courtyard walking with his ever stylish wife Madeleine and with younger home-grown professors, who graciously accompanied the couple. A handsome couple, with him having been a student of Max Scheler persecuted as a Jew and carrying himself with the obvious air of a man of ideas, they made a striking impression".¹

Son of Ernst Landsberg and Anna Silverberg, Paul Ludwig Landsberg was born in Bonn on 3 December 1901. His father was a renowned professor of Roman law and criminal law at the University of Bonn. Although both of his parents were descendants of long-standing Jewish families that had been settled in the Rhine Valley for many generations, they decided to baptise and educate their son in the Evangelical Church. Landsberg, however, always considered himself much closer to Catholicism. His writings are notable for their profound and wide-ranging knowledge of the philosophy of the major Christian authors, most particularly St. Augustine. Indeed, he produced several studies and planned a far-reaching work on St. Augustine that was left unfinished, though numerous fragments were published.²

Landsberg studied for two semesters at Freiburg under Edmund Husserl. He not only recognised the enormous influence of Husserl on German philosophy in his time, but also credited him with the rebirth of genuine philosophy in the country. Many years later, he recalled their decisive meeting in a paper paying tribute to the father of phenomenology: "Many of us believed that we had experienced our first real contact with philosophy in Husserl's seminar, and it is still unforgettable even after one has set off down very dif-

1 Gomà 1988, p. 74. I have added the italics to highlight the expression borrowed for the title of this paper.

2 Pierre Klossowski, who introduced and translated the texts into French, offers a general outline of this work, *Augustin philosophe. Contribution à l'histoire de son esprit*. Of its projected three parts, we have two, which were published in the French journals *Dieu vivant*, II (1948), under the title "Les sens spirituels chez Saint Agustin", and *Deucalion*, 3 (1950), under the title "Du concept de vérité chez Saint Agustin". Cf. Klossowski 1948, p. 86. Cf. Cavarero 2013.

ferent paths in search of truth”.³ Indeed, Husserl’s philosophical greatness was not diminished in Landsberg’s eyes simply because he failed to share in Husserl’s idea of philosophy or his conception of truth. In Landsberg’s view, Husserl had made lasting contributions to thought, such as his critique of psychologism and its relativistic consequences or his work to free the notion of experience from empiricism. Landsberg also praised Husserl’s extraordinary teachings on the intentionality of consciousness, but he criticised the man’s Cartesianism, his conception of philosophy as a science and his desire to attain an ideal region governed by mathematical necessity based on a conception of truth as something suprapersonal. In his flight towards the eternal, Husserl showed no interest in the “specific accidents of a person’s life”⁴ nor did his approach lead to an “understanding of people in their actual totality”.⁵

Landsberg believed that it was possible to distinguish between at least two quite distinct types of philosophers: “One type [the author mentioned Scheler] strives to shine a narrow beam of light onto the concrete mysteries of the concrete reality of the lived life. The other type, such as Husserl, aspires to absolute clarity, a spiritual region that precedes or transcends human existence”.⁶ Landsberg, who defined his work as an “effort to reintroduce the problems of the concrete, of history, action, existence, life and death that are not reducible to ‘geometric reasoning’”,⁷ clearly must be put in the first of these two camps, that is, in the company of Max Scheler.

Over four semesters of university studies at Cologne, Landsberg soon became Scheler’s favourite student and then grew to be a close friend. Later on, in his classes and lectures, Landsberg was able to offer highly specific details of the style of working and thinking and even of the personality of the author of *Ordo amoris*. While still at Cologne, Landsberg published his first work, *Die Welt des Mittelalters und wir* (*The World of the Middle Ages and Us*) (1922), which he wrote over a few weeks of uninterrupted work with no thought to publication, but driven by a kind of internal need. The work, which he completed at barely twenty years of age and dedicated to his teacher Max Scheler, was extremely well-received by critics, who emphasised its liveliness and originality. The poet and writer Hermann Hesse, for instance, spoke of it as “a beautiful book written with the ingenuousness of love, which will soon be a banner gathering many followers”.⁸ A year later, Landsberg defended and published his

3 Landsberg 1939, p. 325. Unless otherwise indicated, any original texts were translated into Catalan from other languages by the author. (The English translation of this paper is based on the author’s Catalan text.)

4 Ibid, p. 321.

5 Ibid, p. 325.

6 Ibid, p. 321.

7 Ibid, p. 319.

8 H. Hesse, *Vivos voco*, III (1922), cited in Oesterreicher 1961, p. 293.

doctoral thesis *Wesen und Bedeutung des platonischen Akademie* [*The Essence and Meaning of the Platonic Academy*] (1923). This and his first work were promptly translated into Spanish as part of the “Nuevos hechos/Nuevas ideas” series of the *Revista de Occidente* under the baton of José Ortega y Gasset; they appeared in 1925 and 1926, respectively.⁹ Only months after the death of his teacher, Max Scheler, on 19 May 1928, Landsberg obtained his license from the University of Bonn to teach philosophy and history of philosophy, thanks to his thesis on the philosophy of St. Augustine. With the subsequent publication of his work *Pascals Berufung* [*The Vocation of Pascal*] (1929), he began to show a clear preference for authors of a more existential bent, such as St. Augustine, Kierkegaard, Maine de Biran, Nietzsche, Kafka and Unamuno.

From the outset, Landsberg opposed Hitler. He was never in any doubt about the fanatical and violent nature of the Nazis. In his essay *Rassen ideologie und Rassenwissenschaft* [*Racist Ideology and the Science of Races*] (1933),¹⁰ he set out a thorough analysis of the traits defining racist ideology and discredited its pseudo-philosophical biologism and naturalism from a personalist conception of the individual and human spirituality, which takes race to be an irrelevant fact. Unsurprisingly, the books that he had written since 1932, including *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie* [*Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*] (1934),¹¹ were banned and even burned.¹² On 1 March 1933, just four days before Hitler took office and a few months before the Nazi authorities revoked his teaching license, Landsberg left Germany and went into exile. This was the start of a long and event-filled journey that took him first to Switzerland (where he married Madeleine Hoffman) and Paris, and then onto Catalonia, particularly Tossa de Mar, where he took refuge with other Jewish intellectuals and artists,¹³ and Barcelona, where he was invited by Joaquim Xirau to teach for two years.

9 This explains why Landsberg, when he arrived in Barcelona in 1934, was already known to the public as the author of *The Middle Ages and Us*, and why the young philosophers in Xirau's circle had read his early works. Cf. Gomà 1988, p. 75.

10 In Paris, Landsberg came into contact with the local branch of the Institute for Social Research, whose director was Max Horkheimer, one of Landsberg's old friends. Horkheimer published his paper in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, the Institute's in-house journal. Benjamín Jarnés helped to publicize the piece in an article written for *La Vanguardia*: Jarnés 1934, p. 3.

11 A review written by Joaquim Xirau was to appear in the journal *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia*, II:8 (November 1934), pp. 450–452.

12 Cf. <http://verbrannte-und-verbannte.de/person/1429> (last consulted on 24-IX-2014).

13 In the summer of 1934, Landsberg completed his first essay on Unamuno in Tossa de Mar and it was published in the journal *Cruz y Raya* (run by his friend José Bergamín) in October 1935. Since the beginning of the twentieth century and especially after the outbreak of World War I and again in the nineteen-thirties, Tossa de Mar had become a stopping-off point and a haven for intellectuals and artists: Georges Bataille, Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse, Francis

Landsberg's academic activity in Barcelona consisted of giving seminars, thematic classes and public lectures as part of the Seminar on Education, which was created and first run by Xirau in the academic year 1930-1931.¹⁴ Specifically, during the academic year 1934-1935, Landsberg taught a seminar on Nietzsche and Scheler, to which we shall return later, and a course entitled "Philosophical Introduction to the Study of St. Augustine's *Confessions*". He also gave an extracurricular lecture (in French) on "The Meaning of Life and the Experience of Death",¹⁵ organised by the Conferentia Club at the Ritz Hotel in Barcelona on 8 May 1935. Throughout the academic year 1935-1936, he offered a seminar on "The Problem of Time in the History of Philosophy" and a specialised course on "Philosophical Anthropology: the Problem of the Unity of Man", introduced by an inaugural lecture entitled "Maïne de Biran et l'anthropologie philosophique" that he gave on 28 March 1936.

In keeping with the teaching style of Joaquim Xirau, who blended intellectual rigour and personal approachability, Landsberg became teacher and friend to a lively group of young students at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters with whom he taught seminars and engaged in conversations. Some were recent graduates, while others had just begun their degrees and were excited to discover and experience the philosophical attitude as a way of life. Though there are other, rather more disparate testimonies, the fullest and most moving account of Landsberg's intellectual and personal significance to the group appears in the text "Paul Ludwig Landsberg: Vida, obra i mort" ["Paul Ludwig Landsberg: Life, Work and Death"] (1966) by Jordi Maragall, who was always to treasure his memories of Landsberg. "At twenty-three years of age," Maragall writes, "meeting Landsberg came at a critical moment for us. True, when he arrived, we were favorably disposed because of the teachings that had shaped him: Max Scheler, for us, represented a kind of gigantic figure out of legend, even though he had died just when we were embarking on our first courses in philosophy (1928). To find ourselves suddenly with one of his most esteemed students produced in us a kind of innermost joy that pushed us to grow, instilling in us a more mature sense of responsibility for our studies. It cannot be forgotten that it was Joaquim Xirau who brought Landsberg

Picabia, Dora Maar, Fred Uhlman, Georges Kars, and many others stayed there. The writer Nancy Johnstone offers a portrait of this milieu in her memoirs *Hotel in Spain* (1937) and *Hotel in Flight* (1939).

14 The lecturers invited to take part in the Seminar on Education included philosophers and researchers such as Manuel G. Morente, Xavier Zubiri, José Ortega y Gasset, José Gaos, Joan Mascaró, Joan Zaragieta, Charlotte Büllher and Jean Piaget.

15 The lecture was introduced as early work on a book being prepared at the time, *Essai sur l'expérience de la mort*, which was published in Paris in 1936. However, a portion had already appeared in the journal *Cruz y Raya* in May-June 1935 under the title *Experiencia de la muerte*. A glowing review of Landsberg's lecture appears on page 11 of *La Vanguardia* on 9-V-1935.

to Barcelona. And it was Xirau who had first taught us to respect Philosophy not as abstract knowledge but as the determining factor of a way of life".¹⁶

Landsberg's documented presence in Barcelona does not extend beyond the early days of July 1936. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War caught him unawares in Santander, where he had been invited to give a summer course at the International University on his work *The Middle Ages and Us*. Two-and-a-half years later, with the civil war still raging, Landsberg wrote a letter to his friend José Bergamín in which he confessed the profound inner meaning of that dramatic time for him: "Those days of 1936 that I spent in Santander, as you know, constituted for my life the end of a period of relative unconcern and youthful restlessness, and also a new starting point. Maturity would have no meaning for us if we failed to understand the power of evil upon the earth and upon ourselves and if, at the same time, and even more so, we did not make our hope and ourselves stronger for the necessary struggle".¹⁷

After the outbreak of civil war in Spain, Landsberg had returned to Paris. With the help of his friend Pierre Klossowski, he wrote "*Essai sur l'expérience de la mort*" ["*Essay on the Experience of Death*"] (1936) directly in French and had it published in the series "Questions Disputées" edited by Desclée de Brouwer. The essay was an enormous success and quickly sold out. In 1937, at the behest of Léon Brunschvicg, Landsberg taught a course on existential philosophy at the Sorbonne. Though he published in other French journals as well, he became an important contributor to *Esprit*, writing articles on myth, marriage, war and peace, Kafka and more.¹⁸ Eventually Emmanuel Mounier came to see him as a genuine cornerstone of personalist-inspired thought. According to Mounier, Landsberg was the reason that *Esprit* ultimately rejected the temptations of utopian thinking and abstract language and instead seized on the many interesting elements of existential thought at a time before it became fashionable. In Mounier's view, the two essays "Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel" ["Thoughts on Personal Engagement"] (1937) and "Le sens de l'action" ["The Meaning of Action"] (1938),¹⁹ both appearing in *Esprit*, stand as "landmark dates in our history".²⁰

16 Maragall 1966, p. 10. Jordi Maragall provides a list of his classmates and other regular participants in the seminars: Josep Calsamiglia, Joan Rubert, Concepció Casanova, M. Lluïsa Caparà, Jordi Udina, Domènec Casanovas, Eduard Nicol, Joan Roura Parella, M. Aurèlia Capmany, Jaume Bofill, Ramon Sugranyes de Franc, Gabriel Tortella, Ferrater Mora, Josep Font i Trias, David Garcia Bacca, Amàlia Tineo, Fortuny and others. To this list, we should add Francesc Gomà and Miquel Siguan, who were younger; cf. *ibid.*, p. 17. Cf. Maragall 1986.

17 Landsberg 1956, p. 460.

18 A good number of these papers were collected and published posthumously by Jean Lacroix in Landsberg 2007.

19 This text was presented at the *Esprit* conference on 26 July 1938.

20 Mounier 1946, p. 156.

After Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939, Landsberg could no longer avoid some kind of engagement in the fight against the forces of destruction advancing implacably across Europe. He went to work at the French government's information center where he contributed to daily broadcasts made for Germany. In May 1940, however, German forces invaded France, unleashing panic, and Landsberg fell afoul of internment measures aimed at foreign nationals. Forcibly separated from his wife, he was sent to a concentration camp in Brittany, where suspicious elements mixed indiscriminately with foreign émigrés who were victims of the Nazis.

From then on, the philosopher's life acquired the cast of a tragic epic. With the German troops on the verge of entering the camp where he was held, Landsberg successfully scaled the walls and then crossed the occupied zone of France on bicycle for two months until he reached the so-called free zone, where he took refuge in the house of Jean Lacroix in Lyon for some weeks. Thanks to Lacroix's account, we know that the fugitive philosopher "since his fight against Nazism in the thirties in Germany, always carried poison on his person and was determined to take it if he fell into the hands of the Gestapo".²¹ This is an interesting fact to bear in mind if we wish to better grasp the meaning of his writings on the moral problem of suicide that were published posthumously, as they were a product not only of his thinking but also of his lived experience. After his time in Lyon, he moved to Pau in the foothills of the French Pyrenees, where his wife had been admitted to a sanatorium suffering from mental illness. Though he received offers from friends such as Jacques Maritain to accept a position as professor in the United States, he refused to leave his ill wife and the country that had taken him in. He remained in Pau under a false identity, pretending to be a doctor going by the name of Richert. Even though knowledge of his real identity began to spread in 1941, he seemed to enjoy the protection of a force that somehow kept him shielded from the eyes of his enemies.

During his stay in Pau, he was working on a study of Machiavelli in which he outlined his conception of the humanity of the Renaissance and, through this, his conception of man. To prevent its loss, he scattered three manuscript versions, which have not yet been found. Despite the circumstances, his intellectual activity was unceasing, but his suffering and his spiritual evolution are best reflected in his "Poèmes spirituels",²² which he wrote during this trying period. As he became more and more deeply Christian over the course of what he described as a genuine process of conversion, he definitively abandoned the idea of voluntary death. This is the backdrop of the well-known essay on suicide that he wrote in mid-1942 and sent to Jean Lacroix

21 Lacroix 1966, p. 34.

22 P. L. Landsberg, "Poèmes spirituels", *Esprit* (January 1952), pp. 49-57.

in autumn of that year. As Miquel Siguan has put it fittingly, the essay signified “more than a philosophical reflection” for Landsberg; it was “a personal decision on the meaning of existence. Once he had written the essay, his poison was useless”.²³ In December 1946, Lacroix published the piece in the journal *Esprit* under the title “Le problème morale du suicide” [“The Moral Problem of Suicide”].

Nevertheless, what had seemed inevitable did, in the end, happen. On a day in late February or early March 1943, Landsberg received a warning that the Gestapo were nearby and he hurried to the railway station to catch the last train, which he fatefully missed. Recklessly, he returned to his hotel to spend the night, planning to depart early the next morning. Instead, he was captured and sent to the Drancy transit camp, outside Paris, and then onto other camps (in Bordeaux, Lyon, Compiègne). In the autumn, he was finally deported to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Oranienburg, near Berlin. The testimonies of prisoners being held with Landsberg speak to his moral energy, to his hopefulness despite the circumstances, to his unwavering resolve. Sadly, though, his body was exhausted, battered and famished, it could not withstand the violence and abuse, and he died of starvation and exhaustion on 2 April 1944.

As in the cases of Edith Stein and Walter Benjamin, whose biographies share many points in common with his, Landsberg’s death resonates with as much meaning as his life does. Unsurprisingly, the news of his tragic end was deeply moving for the young students at the University of Barcelona who remembered him with admiration: “Landsberg’s meditations on the subject of death and suicide,” wrote Francesc Gomà, “have made him famous. For us, who know of his heroic death on 2 April 1944 in the concentration camp at Oranienburg, it represents a testimony to the greatness of a philosophy professor who defended human truth and dignity right to the end”.²⁴

2. “Study of Nietzsche and Max Scheler”: a seminar in the spring of 1935

Over the months of April, May and June 1935, Landsberg gave an inaugural lecture and a series of twelve classes in the Seminar on Education at the University of Barcelona. The offering went by the generic title of “Study of Nietzsche and Max Scheler” and it was attended by students in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, not only the younger ones taking core subjects, but also those in the recently created education department (or other depart-

23 Siguan 1967, p. 80.

24 Gomà 1988, p. 75.

ments) and still others who had finished their studies or were collaborating with lecturers in the teaching activities of the Faculty. In addition, those attending Landsberg's seminar included teachers who wanted to supplement and expand their training.²⁵ What remains of his seminar is the full text of the inaugural lecture, translated into Catalan under the title "Nietzsche and Scheler"²⁶ and published in the journal *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia*,²⁷ as well as a summary that an anonymous attendee wrote of each of the twelve classes.²⁸ If we add the notes taken by Jordi Maragall, who was also in attendance²⁹, and the fact that the content of some of the classes corresponds to the content of two published articles,³⁰ we can say that this is the course or seminar given by Landsberg during his stay for which we have, at least for the time being, the most comprehensive information. But the main reason why it seems appropriate to give careful consideration to the seminar is that the classes—and Landsberg's effort to understand the figures of Nietzsche and Scheler, whom he considered "the most authentic philosophers of our time"³¹—convey his conception of philosophy as a spiritual activity that he himself must have embodied in a fully rounded and exemplary manner in that memorable seminar.

2.1. The lecture

True to his clear instructional style, the lecture "Nietzsche and Scheler" expanded on and made explicit the ideas contained in an initial definition

25 In the words of the organisers of the Seminar on Education and its activities: "The purpose of these courses is the professional and spiritual development of teachers in accordance with universally recognised standards. (...) It is to bring teachers to the University and bring the University closer to teachers so that the University takes on the quality of a school and the school beats with the soul of the University." I am indebted to the generosity of Dr. Conrad Vilanou who has given me a facsimile copy of the original program for the Seminar on Education at the University of Barcelona for the academic year 1930-1931, the first year that it was held. The quoted text is from this program.

26 Landsberg 1935b. This text by Landsberg exists only in Catalan.

27 Quarterly publication, directed by Emili Mira and Joaquim Xirau and published jointly by the Psychotechnical Institute of the Catalan government and the Seminar on Education at the University of Barcelona from February 1933 to August 1937. The journal is noteworthy for the excellent scientific quality of its contributions and the openness of its editors to academics from abroad.

28 Anonymous 1935.

29 These notes are mentioned by Maragall 1966, especially pp. 22-30.

30 The articles include one on Nietzsche's poetry entitled "Los poemas de Nietzsche", published in the *Revista de Occidente* (1935), and one on Max Scheler's philosophy entitled "L'acte philosophique de Max Scheler", published in *Recherches Philosophiques* (1936-1937) and later collected in *Problèmes du personalisme* (1952). See bibliography.

31 Landsberg 1935b, p. 98.

to which Landsberg returned repeatedly throughout his presentation: “The philosopher is a man who, out of the love of truth, transforms his life into a series of experiences and dedicates himself through thought to the investigation of the meaning and unity of these experiences”.³²

First, it is necessary to look carefully at the notion of “experience”, which plays an absolutely fundamental role in his definition. Here we recall that Landsberg considered it one of the principal merits of Husserl’s philosophy that the man had freed the notion of experience from empiricism: “The possibility of conceiving of forms of experience other than those allowed for by the Sensualist hypothesis was enormously fruitful”.³³ An experience is distinct from a simple occurrence. Many things happen in our lives, but in most cases they happen without our stopping to grasp their profound meaning. For Landsberg, for example, the people who had fought in World War I came to experience its meaning only many years later. Following the examples proposed by the author himself, one of Proust’s characters who loses the person he most deeply loves comes to understand how great his loss is only when he is suddenly overwhelmed by a profound and intense sadness at the least expected moment; his beloved has already died, but he does not go through the real experience of the meaning of her death until his sadness reveals it to him. Similarly, a line by Goethe on love that we have learnt by heart in school acquires its real meaning only on the day that the love of our life appears, and so on.

Everyone, it could be said, is called to transform the events of his life into experiences. Though many events apparently slip away without ever becoming an experience, this transformation does not constitute an exclusive privilege of the philosophical life. Rather, it is a possibility immanent in humanity. In any event, the philosopher distinguishes himself by means of a special awareness, grasping what it is that he does when he scrutinises the content of life, and thus doing so more doggedly and more pervasively: “The philosopher, therefore, is he who insists, who neither lets events pass by nor flees from them without listening to what they tell him. In this sense, being a philosopher is also to remember, to search for lost time”.³⁴

To articulate thought and life, philosophy and existence, is one of the most characteristic traits of Landsberg’s style of thinking. It defines his specific philosophical act. Unsurprisingly, therefore, after proposing the above examples, he turns to his own biography to offer the principal illustration of his notion of experience: “My current life largely consists of the effort to transform exile into experience in order to pull from it the secret of its meaning, to read

32 Ibid, p. 98. The text appears in italics in the original.

33 Landsberg 1939, p. 321.

34 Landsberg 1935*b*, p. 100.

in its essence a page from the great book of life and truth”.³⁵ Forced into exile, Landsberg saw this specific event in his life as an essential trait of human life in general: as a wanderer and stranger on Earth, where no one remains forever because there is death.³⁶ Thus, while an event is a passing incident, an experience endures and has an unlimited depth that points towards a mystery: “In each experience, man transcends himself in the direction of a mystery. Experience has its layers which constitute the layers of its interpretation and ultimately interpretation always ends in mystery and words in silence”.³⁷

Following the general characterisation of the notion of experience, it is necessary to underscore that all experience for Landsberg is transcendent. That is, all experience points to something beyond itself. It does so in two directions, corresponding to the two facets of experience itself, which has a subjective pole (experience of ourselves) and an objective pole (experience of a thing that is not ourselves): “In all experience, we transcend ourselves in two directions: towards ourselves and towards the essence of things”.³⁸ When I see a blue sky—the example is once again Landsberg’s—the event contains an experience of myself in the correspondence between the colour of the physical sky and the affective hues of the soul itself.

Experience as act could be described by this movement of bilateral transcendence. Adapting the terminology of Jung,³⁹ Landsberg proposes a classification of philosophers as introverts/extraverts based on the direction of the movement of transcendence that predominates in their thought. St. Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Unamuno would be examples of a predominantly inward movement, while the opposite movement prevails in Thomas Aquinas, Goethe, Scheler⁴⁰ and Ortega. We might well include Lands-

35 Ibid.

36 Life in exile has an important place in Landsberg’s thought. For him, it contains a profound spiritual meaning tied to the transcendent eschatology of Christianity. See, for example, Landsberg 1938*b*, p. 266. Some of the pages in his personal diary clearly show his philosophical and moral style of confronting the experience of exile and being a refugee, seeking out the universal anthropological content in these personal circumstances. For his collected diary entries, see Oesterreicher 1961, pp. 308–309.

37 Landsberg 1935*b*, pp. 100–101. Gabriel Marcel is one of the philosophers with whom Landsberg was in contact in Paris. He is also a direct influence, which is apparent from Landsberg’s use of the notion of “mystery”.

38 Ibid, p. 101.

39 Cf. C. G. Jung, “Tipos psicológicos. (*Introvertidos y extravertidos*)”, *Revista de Occidente*, 29 (November 1935), pp. 161–183.

40 “Scheler, for example,” writes Landsberg, proposing a significant case that he knew personally, “loved human society with an unflagging love. Every human and nearly every book interested him, they constituted experiences that he devoured. Finding himself forced to be alone, even for a few days, caused him great annoyance. (...) Indeed, his spirit lived primarily from contact and his curiosity was as immense as Nietzsche’s, though it looked in the opposite direction”, Landsberg 1935*b*, p. 102.

berg himself in the first of the two groups, but that is not to say that he values one direction over and above the other: “The greatness of a man’s spirit does not depend on the dominant direction of his experience, but on the energy to follow it to its depths.⁴¹ At the same time, it was quite clear to Landsberg that there can be no personality of a pure type and that behind this antithesis there is the unity of the philosophical life: “He who seeks to understand himself, seeks also to understand the whole world; he who seeks to understand the whole world, also understands himself”.⁴²

Experiences are not isolated phenomena. Thought tends to “deepen our experiences by integrating them with other experiences.⁴³ To integrate and delve deeply are inseparable acts. This is why the philosopher seeks unity in the depth of all experiences. Attaining unity and understanding the meaning of all experiences is the final aim of philosophy. While it is not possible to forgo this aim, however, it can never be wholly attained. Landsberg saw in the closed systems of German idealism, for example, restless—and yet also splendid—anticipations of the ultimate aim of Philosophy: “At the foundation of every closed system there is a will to system and it is the will to latch onto and apprehend the illusion of having realised the unrealisable, of holding in one’s hands the philosopher’s stone or at least the magical key that can open all doors”.⁴⁴ For Landsberg, one of the characteristic traits of the state of philosophy in his time, represented by Nietzsche and by Scheler, is the relinquishment of a closed system or universal method. Unity and universality remain indispensable governing ideas, philosophy’s task and dream,⁴⁵ but the honest expression of the philosophical life leads both authors to an open system, a deliberately fragmentary one. To give a few examples of contemporary authors, Landsberg also saw the philosophy of Unamuno and Ortega, in Spain, and of Bergson and Marcel, in France, as similarly embarked on an indefinite search by means of open-ended and partial systematising, that is, led “by ever new experiences towards a felt unity that always becomes hidden again”.⁴⁶

The text of the lecture concludes with another expression that appeared in the initial definition: the “love of truth” in the philosophical sense of the word “truth”. This type of love must be distinguished from curiosity or eagerness for information. It must be also distinguished from the scientific interest in seeking certain truths about particular fields of knowledge. To explicate the authentic philosophical meaning of the love of truth, Landsberg turns to Plato.

41 Ibid, p. 104.

42 Ibid, p. 103.

43 Ibid, p. 105.

44 Ibid, p. 108.

45 Landsberg gave a transcendent and eschatological meaning to the revelation of this total unity.

46 Ibid, p. 110.

In Plato, according to Landsberg's interpretation, knowledge is participation in and transformation of our mutable and temporal being into the essence of the object of knowledge. The knowledge of divine being makes the human being divine and gives him immortality: "Truth for Plato exists and to move towards it is to move towards existence. Love of truth is the love of our true existence, the love of divinisation and eternalisation, it is the movement of this adaptation towards God".⁴⁷ Thus, Landsberg proposes an existential conception of knowledge and of philosophy itself. The love of truth is the love of being, the love of our participation in being and, therefore, an affirmation of existence itself: "From dissolution in non-existence, it moves towards concentration in true existence, in the truth. It is the philosophical man who, in the fullness of experiences, seeks the unity of the mystery".⁴⁸

2.2. Seminar sessions

According to the "news" section of the Seminar on Education, the seminar led by Landsberg took place in the months of April, May and June 1935.⁴⁹ The seminar sessions began a few days after the inaugural lecture on Nietzsche and Scheler mentioned above. The anonymous author of the "news" item gives a brief overview of the twelve sessions⁵⁰ intended to contrast the philosophical act in Nietzsche and Scheler. The style of the seminars was based on dialogue, with input and questions from the participants. Indeed, the working method was twofold: on one hand, there was interpretation and commentary on the texts, led by Landsberg; and on the other hand, there were *referata* or summaries of some of the doctrinal points of the philosophies given at the start of some sessions by various participants who took turns.⁵¹

Landsberg's goal was not to give a systematic doctrinal presentation of the two authors' thinking, nor to provide a detailed account of their intellectual biography. Rather, his aim was to describe the specific nature of their philosophical act, their style of thinking, their way of living philosophy, of be-

47 Ibid, p. 114.

48 Ibid, p. 115.

49 Anonymous 1935.

50 The first session was introductory in nature. Some points were discussed in order to clarify the previous lecture. Sessions II, III, IV and V focused on Nietzsche's commentary and sessions VI-XII addressed Scheler.

51 As an example, Eduard Nicol was in charge of reading the first *referata* with information on the life, periods, influences and other general considerations on Nietzsche's work (session II, May 1935) and David Garcia Bacca read a *referata* on the concept of philosophy in Scheler, based on the essay *Vom Wesen der Philosophie* (session VI, May 1935). Other participants, such as Calsamiglia and Rubert, did likewise with other subjects. Cf. Anonymous 1935, pp. 164 and 169-170.

ing philosophers, both Nietzsche and Scheler. We know that Landsberg prepared a work based on this subject matter that never saw the light of day.⁵² Nietzsche and Scheler, for Landsberg, represented two opposite directions in the philosophical effort to delve deeply into experience and integrate it. While Nietzsche conducted his search along an inner road, penetrating his soul in a process of self-discovery and seeking out an unknown God that he never reached, Scheler is an ecstatic philosopher, an extravert intoxicated by the superabundance of a world that appeared to him to hold infinite riches.⁵³ These are the starting points or initial situations (*Ausgangssituation*) of their respective philosophies. However, the two situations must be overcome, because each is ultimately unsustainable: being unable, in Nietzsche's case, to reach out to that which is found within himself; and, in Scheler's case, finding a world of unsurpassable riches but not knowing the place of each thing, most particularly of oneself. In the first case, the peril is nihilism and in the second case, it is *chaosism*.⁵⁴

As Landsberg wrote in another study of Nietzsche published earlier, the important truth for this kind of philosophy, and the only one that matters, is hidden deep inside and not in the depths or relations of nature. The field of experience of a man like Nietzsche is, first and foremost, his own entirely individual inner life.⁵⁵ As a consequence, Landsberg found it easier to plumb Nietzsche's depths through his poems, because he hid his true face less in them: "Nietzsche, however, has been honest to himself. He has dressed others in guises, not himself. (...) To understand his philosophical life, therefore, you must read his unpublished papers (poems and notes) in which he did not conceal himself".⁵⁶ Accordingly, in the four seminar sessions on Nietzsche, Landsberg primarily addressed some of the poetic texts, beginning with "To the Unknown God",⁵⁷ a poem from Nietzsche's youth to which Landsberg attaches special importance because, according to the notes of one of the seminar participants: "This unknown, highly personal God, which is like an inner storm, appears in his youthful poems and leaves a mark on the entire Nietzschean quest".⁵⁸

Certainly, it is not my intention to offer an orderly and systematic account of the content of these seminar sessions, which unfolded with the freedom typical of this style of academic work. In any case, only relatively frag-

52 This is noted on the first page of Landsberg 1936-1937.

53 Anonymous 1935, p. 172.

54 Ibid, p. 173.

55 Landsberg 1934*b*.

56 Anonymous 1935, p. 166.

57 Landsberg also discussed other poems in this text: "The Wanderer", "Before Sunrise", "The Traveller and His Shadow", "The Poet's Vocation", "Drunken Song of Midnight" and more.

58 Maragall 1966, p. 22. The italics are Maragall's.

mentary references remain. However, by drawing on the review that appeared in the *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia*, the notes taken by Jordi Maragall and the article on Nietzsche's poems entitled "Los poemas de Nietzsche" that appeared in the same period in *Revista de Occidente*, we can mention at least the main lines of Landsberg's interpretation over the course of the seminar. In effect, from a perspective tinged with a certain Augustinianism, Landsberg sees Nietzsche as a pilgrim or wanderer, who delves deeply into his own soul in search of an inner divinity in order to free himself from traditional religion. The wayward or wandering style of Nietzsche's thought is related to states of solitude and suffering. In the three states of the soul, according to Landsberg, it is possible to find an antithetical or dialectical structure: the distance the traveller reaches from what he has abandoned gives him knowledge; solitude awakens the poetic creativity that makes communication possible; illness reveals health and the miracle of living.

For Landsberg, Nietzsche is one of those rare spirits who, through experience, have known the positive value of suffering in the fulfilment of the individual spirit. This is a creative suffering that leads to a more intense, more spiritual life.⁵⁹ As Landsberg sees it, Nietzsche's doctrine of suffering is the most Christian element in his thought. Indeed, he holds that Nietzsche does not really know the figure of Christ: "There is a misunderstanding of Nietzsche's here; in all of his blasphemies, he is closer to Christ than he believes. The Christ that he attacks is the Christ of Schopenhauer, the Christ of the philistines of culture, the Christ of a utilitarian period".⁶⁰ In Nietzsche, Landsberg sees a swinging back and forth between titanism and despair, between Luciferianism and Christianity, between pride and humility. According to Jordi Maragall in his seminar notes, however: "Zarathustra will not tell his disciples what he tells himself. Nietzsche's honesty lies in his confession of despair, not in his exaltation of the life that he wishes to give the disciple".⁶¹ Accordingly, Landsberg interprets Nietzsche primarily as an existential philosophy of despair: "All atheist and despairing existential philosophy will always be influenced by Nietzsche".⁶²

Landsberg attributes to Nietzsche the pride of the creative genius who has received a gift, but does not know its bounds, until he reaches the extreme of wanting to create the very gods themselves, when in reality he ends up creating mythical images (e.g. Zarathustra or Dionysus) from certain possibilities immanent within himself. Nietzsche represents the tragedy of the soul that tries vainly to find its spiritual essence apart from God. As an authentic phi-

59 Cf. Landsberg 1953c, pp. 263-265.

60 Anonymous 1935, p. 165.

61 Maragall 1966, p. 24.

62 Anonymous 1935, p. 166.

philosopher of wandering, solitude and suffering, what he sought in all the experiences of his life, in Landsberg's view, was simply truth. In short: "The great merit of Nietzsche is, without doubt, to have rediscovered the autonomy of life values though he was unable to see their connection to spiritual and religious values".⁶³ After Nietzsche, two paths remain open to philosophy: a path that leads from the unknown God to the sacrificed God and the adoration of nothingness, the path of a philosophy against existence that plunges the human being into the void; and another path that leads from the unknown God to the rediscovered God, the path of a philosophy of existence that transcends the human being. For Landsberg, the first is the way followed by Heidegger, while the second is the "way out of the labyrinth"⁶⁴ followed by Scheler.

From session VI through the final session of the seminar, session XII, the commentaries, discussions and *referata* focus on the work of Max Scheler.⁶⁵ The essential trait by which Landsberg characterises Scheler's style of thought, that is, the formal aspect of his philosophical act, consists in that it is a "hierarchizing way of thinking".⁶⁶ Faced with the extraordinary richness of the world, it is necessary to find order: not to create it, but to describe it. With his typical keenness for clarity, Landsberg offers three different examples from Scheler's work to show how his hierarchising way of thinking operates. The first example comes from Scheler's ethics, in which he carries out "an orderly integration of values discovered by man through history—values relating to pleasure, life, the spirit and the holy".⁶⁷ The second comes from Scheler's theories of the different forms of knowledge (categorized as scientific, "essential", and knowledge for salvation), and the third is drawn from Scheler's philosophy of history. In all of these quite different fields, Scheler starts from the recognition of a diversity, a plurality, that corresponds to the richness of the initial experience, but then, without rejecting any of the discovered elements, he goes on to put them in hierarchical order.

His hierarchising way of thinking entails a synthesis of richness and judgment⁶⁸ that is distinct from the zealot and the relativist. Where the zealot will not acknowledge more than one value, the relativist treats all values as

63 Ibid, p. 169.

64 Landsberg 1935c, p. 277.

65 The main focus of the study of Scheler's philosophical life, sessions IX and X, coincides with the essential elements of Landsberg's previously mentioned essay "L'acte filosòfic de Max Scheler". This enables us to follow the thread of his presentation in a more orderly and continuous manner than in the case of his commentaries on the poems of Nietzsche, which are necessarily more impressionistic and fragmentary. My focus is essentially on sessions IX and X.

66 Anonymous 1935, p. 173.

67 Ibid.

68 Landsberg 1936-1937, p. 217.

equal. As Landsberg sees it, however, Scheler neither denies nor levels values: “If the zealot has sacrificed all values for the sake of one and chooses it readily, the relativist equates all values and chooses none of them”.⁶⁹ In practical life, self-fulfilment—and here I follow the nearly parallel text of the published article—always demands choice and sacrifice. The only possibility is to pursue one’s own vocation: “Nobody would know how nor can wish to realise the entire universe of values”;⁷⁰ it is not possible to be Achilles, Goethe and St. Francis of Assisi simultaneously, though the world needs heroes, geniuses and saints all to exist at the same time⁷¹. The individual must find his place in the world according to his own specific vocation, that is, by discovering the values that he can realise, and then by grasping that “it is necessary to understand his situation in the overall hierarchy of values and respect their limits”.⁷² The individual must answer two questions: first, what is his vocation; and second, what is the place of his vocation in the universe of values.⁷³

Another trait that is characteristic of this hierarchising tendency in Scheler’s thought, according to Landsberg, is his search for authentic meaning. To reclaim the universe, the authentic essence of things must first be discovered. This is firstly intended to avoid theories that find at the heart of anything not the thing itself, but something else. These are the theories of “it is simply ...” Scheler also sought to avoid judging the authentic forms of human attitudes and emotions on the basis of their counterfeit or unhealthy guises. In several works, for example, on shame, on the virtues of reverence or humility, on remorse or contrition, Scheler seeks to distinguish between an essence and the sham forms that replace it through imitation. To achieve this aim, the phenomenological method is indispensable in the exploration of essences: “The phenomenological method, the exploration of essences abstracted from their reality, renders [the method] independent of the number of times that the essences are carried out and it thereby becomes an incomparable tool to restore to the idea its genuine content, finding it again even in its most imperfect expressions”.⁷⁴

Landsberg stresses the importance of love in the whole of Scheler’s philosophy: love of the essential, love of being. Only in this way can the truth of the universe be approached through the diversity of its structure. Contrary to the scientific tendency towards universal identification, the tendency of phi-

69 Anonymous 1935, p. 174.

70 Landsberg 1936-1937, p. 218.

71 Anonymous 1935, p. 173.

72 Ibid.

73 Landsberg 1936-1937, p. 218.

74 Ibid, p. 227.

losophy lies in “perceiving the essential diversity through love”.⁷⁵ According to the final words of the summary of seminar session X: “If that is Science, says Scheler, then Philosophy is the opposite, it diversifies. It never destroys, never identifies, but it sees each and every thing in its corresponding place”.⁷⁶

In the twelfth and final session of the seminar, Landsberg raises a critical point: the danger for Scheler lies in arriving at order too quickly and, therefore, arriving at an incomplete or falsified order. The crisis comes when a thing resists inclusion in the hierarchy, such as, for example, the blind, impulsive, daemonic force of life. Scheler always wanted to give the values of the spirit a higher place than the others, but the blind impulse of life, in Landsberg’s judgment, throws his scheme into disorder. His ultimate metaphysics was a last attempt to salvage the spirit and its superiority, while recognising the blind force of life. However, the Spirit-Life duality, which was intolerable to him, also becomes insurmountable: “But the miracle did not come,” Landsberg concludes, “that would extricate him from this metaphysics in which he vested all of his final concerns and in which we find not solutions, but only problems”.⁷⁷

3. Philosophical anthropology and the unity of the human being (Maine de Biran)

On 28 March 1936, approximately a year after his seminar on Nietzsche and Scheler, Landsberg gave a lecture in the Seminar on Education entitled “Maine de Biran et l’anthropologie philosophique”. It was delivered to open the course “Philosophical Anthropology: the Problem of the Unity of Man”⁷⁸ and his text, which is collected wholly in French,⁷⁹ also appeared in the *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia*.⁸⁰ Based on the title and the subject matter, the lecture may have been a portion of a work that Mounier mentioned as *Traité de l’unité de l’homme [Treatise on the Unity of Man]*,⁸¹ which remains lost. Nor is the text of the lecture accompanied by an overview of the sessions that presumably followed it. The lecture and the course on the unity of

75 Ibid, p. 230.

76 Anonymous 1935, p. 176.

77 Ibid, p. 178.

78 This course took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 5 pm to 6 pm. Cf. *La Vanguardia* (22-III-1936), p. 12.

79 Wartime hardships probably impeded any possibility of translating the text, as it did in the case of the lecture “Nietzsche and Scheler”.

80 Landsberg 1936a.

81 Mounier 1946, p. 156. As a consequence, the text collected in the *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia* may be the only surviving fragment of this work.

man are bound up with one of the predominant lines of work in Landsberg's thought: philosophical anthropology.⁸²

In a brief summary of the lecture that opens the course, Landsberg introduces Maine de Biran as someone who lives in constant touch with his inner reality, in the depths of that specific experience. Thus, Landsberg classifies him as an author who, in the line of Montaigne or Nietzsche, starts from introspection. Perpetual meditation on his life is what led him into the area of philosophical anthropology.⁸³ Maine de Biran wanted to study the human being in his totality, without isolating his physical or spiritual dimension as a separate reality. Accordingly, he developed a tripartite schema in his anthropological essays. The human being, as a whole, has three elements: a) "animal life" (which corresponds to the external man and our natural fate); b) "human life" (which corresponds to the inner man as a free and active being); and c) "life of the spirit" (which corresponds to the inner man, open to grace, endowed with a receptivity to the transcendent).⁸⁴ According to Landsberg, the greatest originality of Biran's anthropology lies in the second element and its doctrine of the effort of the will, which constitutes the core of the human person.⁸⁵ To grasp the unity of the human being, who is neither angel nor beast, it is necessary to start specifically with the middle level. Both animality and spirituality in the human being must be understood in relation to this intermediate level where the unity of the human composite resides. This anthropological schema, according to Landsberg, belongs to an ancient Christian tradition; the principle of trichotomy already exists in St. Paul and St. Augustine and it is further developed in Franciscan anthropology, particularly in St. Bonaventure.⁸⁶ In Landsberg's view, what distances Maine de Biran's philosophy from any rationalist construction is his strong, almost instinctive adherence to experience.⁸⁷ Given its stance, Maine de Biran's philosophical anthropology is part and parcel of the anthropocentrism and egocentrism of modern man, but it approaches ever more closely to a subjective depth in which the Creator still exists in man and philosophical anthropology must again find an

82 Joaquim Xirau had already offered to review the first, much admired publication of Landsberg in this discipline, entitled *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (1934), a work that had serious difficulties reaching the public due to its date of publication. Cf. J. Xirau, "Paul L. Landsberg: *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie*. Vittorio Klostermann. Frankfurt a/M. 1934" (review), *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia*, II:8 (November 1934), pp. 450-452. Cf. Zwierlein 1989.

83 Landsberg 1936a, pp. 344-345.

84 Ibid, pp. 351-352.

85 Ibid, p. 354.

86 Ibid, p. 358.

87 Ibid, p. 364.

existential philosophy like that of St. Augustine, which situates God within one's own interiority.⁸⁸

In April 1936, we can still follow Landsberg's trail. By then, he was in Tossa del Mar. This is apparent from references made by Jordi Maragall, who went with his wife shortly after their wedding to visit Landsberg in Tossa.⁸⁹ In July 1936, as noted earlier, the outbreak of the Spanish civil war caught the German professor by surprise while he was engaged in an academic activity in Santander. After his return to France, he would never again set foot in Catalonia. In the November 1936 issue of the *Revista de Psicologia i Pedagogia*, the scheduled activities of the Seminar on Education for the academic year 1936-1937 include no further reference to Joaquim Xirau's distinguished visiting professor. Many years later, in 1946, the French group at the journal *Esprit* received positive confirmation from Mounier of Landsberg's death ("We have long held back news that would have been cruel to confirm publicly while a glimmer of hope remained. We will never again see Paul-Louis Landsberg"),⁹⁰ and it must have been at roughly the same time that his former students in Barcelona—Maragall, Calsamiglia, Gomà, Siguan, Rubert, and many others—also heard the tragic news of the demise of a most deeply missed teacher, and in the same year, moreover, as the death of Joaquim Xirau in Mexico.

4. The experience of death and the temptation of suicide

We have to look two decades later, specifically to the year 1966, to identify a certain reverberation of Landsberg's work in Catalonia. In fact, two examples appear: first, in the Catalan publication of *Reflections on Suicide and Death*⁹¹ as part of the series "Llibres del Nopal", published by Edicions Ariel;⁹² and second, in the journal *Convivium* of the University of Barcelona, which

88 Ibid, p. 367.

89 J. Maragall, "Abriles", *La Vanguardia* (14-IV-1998), p. 23.

90 Mounier 1946, p. 155.

91 The text appeared in a Catalan translation entitled *Reflexions sobre el suïcidi i la mort* (translated by Ramon Rabassa i Riu) and it brings together both *Essai sur l'expérience de la mort* (1936) and *Le problème moral du suicide* (1946), which appeared in English as *The Experience of Death* and *The Moral Problem of Suicide*. The Catalan translation also featured an intense, heartfelt introduction by Jordi Maragall, which has already been quoted, and a foreword to the French edition written by Jean Lacroix. I am especially grateful to Dr. Josep Monserrat i Molas for his generosity in providing me with a copy of this prized edition. The Spanish translation appeared in 1995 and included a prologue by Paul Ricoeur.

92 Again, Jordi Maragall provides information about the circumstances in which his friend Josep Calsamiglia pushed forward with the publishing house Edicions Ariel and "the publication of difficult books for the period in which we find ourselves". J. Maragall, "Josep M. Calsamiglia, història d'una amistat", *La Vanguardia* (5-VII-1987), p. 43.

published a translation of an article by Landsberg on Marx,⁹³ with an eloquent note by Miquel Siguan, who also appended a bibliography on Landsberg containing all the works known to him at the time.⁹⁴

To follow the path laid out by Landsberg himself in his essay on death and his reflections on suicide, it is necessary by means of reflection to turn lived events into genuine experiences. In the first case, the death of his brother Erich in World War I at the age of nineteen (1916), the passing of his father (1927) and the subsequent death of his teacher and friend Max Scheler (1928), are most likely to have provided the experiential basis for his invaluable meditations on death. Unlike Heidegger, he drew close inspiration from book IV of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and gave particular emphasis in his meditations to the death of the other,⁹⁵ the death of a loved one. If the awareness of death per se is not merely as the vague terminus or ending of my life, but also as a real possibility that accompanies me at all times, it can be called an "absent presence",⁹⁶ and the death of a close relative, which takes from us the uniqueness of their presence, is a "present absence".⁹⁷ Existential participation, the creation of an us constituted by the community between two people, leads to the rupture of this mode of coexistence upon the loss of the other, and therefore, "to the knowledge of our having to die".⁹⁸ While the other is still alive, we can always reach out to him or her in one way or another: "[O]nly the experience of the death of the other teaches us qualitatively what absence and alienation are".⁹⁹

Bluntly in opposition to the Heideggerian *Sein zum Tode*, Landsberg holds that human existence aims at the realisation of itself and of eternity. Anxiety about death reveals to us death's extrinsic character and its opposition to the most profound and most inescapable tendency of our being: the affirmation of the oneness of our existence beyond the boundaries of time. From these postulates, Landsberg develops a philosophy of hope that he sees as a "structure of being that transcends the psychological subject"¹⁰⁰ and also points to the fullest realisation of the individual: "the future of hope is the future of my

93 P. L. Landsberg, "Marx y el problema del hombre", *Convivium*, 23 (1967), 83-95.

94 Siguan 1967, pp. 79-82. The bibliography provided by Siguan is excellent, but it is understandably incomplete because the German writer's works were so scattered over time and space: see bibliography.

95 According to Silvano Zucal: "The specifically Landsbergian merit, his really original quality (...) is his application of the dialogical method to an event that appears in essence anti-dialogical, which is to say, death". Cf. Zucal 2007, pp. 307-308.

96 Landsberg 1966, p. 83.

97 Ibid, p. 91.

98 Ibid, p. 93.

99 Ibid, p. 98.

100 Ibid, p. 105.

very person”.¹⁰¹ The essay concludes with a meditation on the Christian experience of death, particularly its mystical aspect. The mystic’s experience of God contains an experience of death that is unique to them: the anticipation of death in ecstasy.¹⁰² The love of death, a recurring theme of mystics like St. Teresa of Ávila and Meister Eckhart, comes out of lived experience, out of a state analogous to death, which at the same time is experienced as a birth into eternal life. It follows then that this death, which is in reality Life, supposes no annihilation of the person, but the affirmation and ultimate fulfilment of his being: “It is the fulfilment of ontological hope by that which, not originating in it, comes to complete it. Man as person, through the work of grace, finds himself becoming that which is in God. At last, he feels being and understands that until then he was only nothing, he was only a thing, save for a hope yet to be fulfilled. Spiritual joy is but a reflection of the movement towards being”.¹⁰³

In his final piece of writing, which addressed the moral problem of suicide and appeared in print posthumously, we once again find pages that were lived before they were written. The text is a philosophical meditation by a person who has experienced, at very close quarters, some sympathy for the idea of taking his own life when fate seems to present no other way out. Landsberg highlights the problematic character of suicide as a “temptation immanent in human nature”,¹⁰⁴ the temptation to gauge the ultimate bounds of freedom. Landsberg expresses admiration for the Stoic morals of virtue and inner freedom in the face of life and death: “The Stoic is a man who can die if reason so commands”.¹⁰⁵ In opposition to bourgeois morality, which condemns suicide out of its attachment to the empirical life, the Stoic attitude appears to stand on a higher moral ground. So then why does Christianity so radically oppose suicide? Landsberg examines the arguments against voluntary death from Christian philosophers such as St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, but he finds them inadequate. For Landsberg, the fundamental character of Christian life is an effort to imitate Christ and this entails a radical conversion, particularly on the subject of suffering: “Preferring martyrdom to suicide is a peculiar paradox of the Christian. (...) You must not kill yourself, because you must not cast off your own cross”.¹⁰⁶ Reassessing the idea of suicide based on this radical conversion, Landsberg holds that a man ultimately takes his own

101 Ibid. I briefly note that Landsberg’s distinction between “waiting” and “hope” is also found in Gabriel Marcel.

102 Ibid, p. 145.

103 Ibid, p. 148.

104 Ibid, p. 40.

105 Ibid, p. 46.

106 Ibid, pp. 62 and 64.

107 Ibid, pp. 61 and 69.

life to escape his suffering and move in the direction of an unknown happiness and peace. Suicide is a flight by which the human being seeks to regain paradise lost. It is a kind of regression to a pre-birth state: “the goddess of suicide hurls us down into the dark womb of the mother”.¹⁰⁷ As Roberto Garaventa wrote: “The peculiarity of Landsberg’s essay lies in the fact not only that it stands against the rightness of suicide (...), but also that it contains a glorification of Christian martyrdom as the authentic way to face an ineluctable fate of pain and death”,¹⁰⁸ and that therefore “for Landsberg, the only response to the temptation of suicide can come from a metaphysical-religious endowment of meaning”.¹⁰⁹

5. Coda

The young university students who first encountered Landsberg in Barcelona in the spring of 1934 were unaware that he had been carrying poison in his pocket for some time, ready to end his life should he fall into the hands of the Gestapo. Nor did they find out until many years later, thanks to the testimonies of friends and to the philosopher’s own writings, that his thinking on spirituality had evolved and that he had renounced suicide. “His memory and his death, in the wake of his writings on death and suicide,” recalls Jordi Maragall, “are still troubling to me”.¹¹⁰ They had shared seminars and lectures, long conversations and leisurely strolls, philosophical debates after dinner in the house of one or another member of the group that, in youthful enthusiasm, they had christened “Club Xirau”. Among the many extraordinary teachers they were lucky enough to have in those years of study before the outbreak of the Spanish civil war, Landsberg remained prominent in the memory of each of them: “His courses on Nietzsche and Scheler, on St. Augustine, on Maine de Biran, stay in my memory as my most intense hours of learning how to do philosophy”.¹¹¹ The journey of Landsberg’s life, which led him, among other things, to publish in various languages including Catalan, and also his tragic end support Francesc Gomà’s characterisation of the man as a “knight errant of the spirit”,¹¹² who in the course of his eventful wanderings left a permanent imprint on kindred spirits. His tragic fate may have left his work unfinished—though he defended the intrinsically fragmentary, open and unfinished nature of all philosophical work—but it did not leave his

108 Garaventa 2007, p. 331.

109 Ibid, p. 340.

110 Maragall 1986, p. 55.

111 Ibid.

112 Gomà 1988, p. 74.

life unfinished: “Because if his presence is so conspicuous and telling today in spite of his physical absence,” stated Maragall in 1966, “it is because his act of life was to find death’s place in it”.¹¹³

In conclusion, I turn to a few words by Miquel Siguan, written nearly fifty years ago, to which this paper would like to offer a modest response, while acknowledging in passing my debt to their impetus: “There is no point wondering what Landsberg’s work might have been under more favourable conditions. Such as he was able to do it, fragmentary and scattered to the beat of his harried existence, it yet awaits someone who wishes to collect it and present it and I am hopeful that it will be those in Barcelona who devoutly keep his memory alive who will one day accomplish this task”.¹¹⁴

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¹¹³Maragall 1966, p. 16.

¹¹⁴Siguan 1967, pp. 79-82.

¹¹⁵The bibliography has an alphabetical list of the works cited in this essay. An especially valuable bibliography appears in Nicholetti *et al.* 2007, pp. 385-395. It includes a very thorough list of the scattered works of Landsberg, including posthumous publications, biographical sources and secondary literature.

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